



Corporate Parenting Committee

Wednesday 19 October 2022 at 5.00 pm

Conference Hall - Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way,
Wembley, HA9 0FJ

The meeting will be held as an in person physical meeting with all members of the Committee required to attend in person.

The press and public will be excluded from this meeting.

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

Grahl (Chair)
Collymore
Dixon
Gbajumo
Hirani

Substitute Members

Councillors:

Chappell, Conneely, Kennelly
and Rubin

Councillor: Mistry and Maurice

For further information contact: Hannah O'Brien, Governance Officer
020 8937 1339, hannah.o'brien@brent.gov.uk

For electronic copies of minutes, reports and agendas, and to be alerted when the minutes of this meeting have been published visit: **www.brent.gov.uk/democracy**

Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:

If a Member is aware they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest* in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent and must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If a Member is aware they have a Personal Interest** in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent.

If the Personal Interest is also a Prejudicial Interest (i.e. it affects a financial position or relates to determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission, or registration) then (unless an exception at 14(2) of the Members Code applies), after disclosing the interest to the meeting the Member must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item, except that they may first make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to the matter, provided that the public are allowed to attend the meeting for those purposes.

*Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:

- (a) **Employment, etc.** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit gain.
- (b) **Sponsorship** - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of election; including from a trade union.
- (c) **Contracts** - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between the Councillors or their partner (or a body in which one has a beneficial interest) and the council.
- (d) **Land** - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.
- (e) **Licences**- Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.
- (f) **Corporate tenancies** - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which the Councillor or their partner have a beneficial interest.
- (g) **Securities** - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

**Personal Interests:

The business relates to or affects:

(a) Anybody of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management, and:

- To which you are appointed by the council;
- which exercises functions of a public nature;
- which is directed is to charitable purposes;
- whose principal purposes include the influence of public opinion or policy (including a political party of trade union).

(b) The interests a of a person from whom you have received gifts or hospitality of at least £50 as a member in the municipal year;

or

A decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting, to a greater extent than the majority of other council tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the electoral ward affected by the decision, the well-being or financial position of:

- You yourself;
- a member of your family or your friend or any person with whom you have a close association or any person or body who employs or has appointed any of these or in whom they have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000, or any firm in which they are a partner, or any company of which they are a director
- any body of a type described in (a) above.

Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Item	Page
1 Exclusion of the Press and Public	
<p>The committee is advised that the public may be excluded from meetings whenever it is likely in view of the nature of the proceedings that exempt information would be disclosed. Meetings of the Corporate Parenting Committee are attended by representatives of Care In Action (CIA), the council's Children in Care Council. The committee is therefore recommended to exclude the press and public for the duration of the meeting, as the attendance of CIA representatives necessitates the disclosure of the following category of exempt information, set out in the Local Government Act 1972: - information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.</p>	
2 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members	
3 Declarations of interests	
<p>Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, any relevant disclosable pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interests in the items on this agenda.</p>	
4 Deputations (if any)	
<p>To hear any deputations received from members of the public in accordance with Standing Order 67.</p>	
5 Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 6
<p>To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.</p>	
6 Matters arising (if any)	
<p>To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.</p>	
7 Update from Care In Action / Care Leavers in Action Representatives	
<p>This is an opportunity for members of Care In Action (CIA) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) to feedback on recent activity.</p>	
8 Placement Stability Report 2021-22	7 - 14

To provide information to the Corporate Parenting Committee regarding the current position for placement stability. The report explains the reasons for the increase in multiple placement moves and articulates the work undertaken to minimise unplanned moves for Looked After Children.

9 Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report Quarter 2 (1 July 2022 - 30 September 2022) 15 - 24

To provide information to the Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children, in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

10 Brent Adoption Report - 6 Monthly Update (1 April 2022 - 30 September 2022) 25 - 54

To provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to adoption performance, progress and activity of Adopt London West, and good outcomes being achieved for children.

11 Any other urgent business

Notice of items to be raised under this heading must be given in writing to the Head of Executive and Member Services or her representative before the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 60.

Date of the next meeting: Wednesday 1 February 2023



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Wednesday 20 July 2022 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Grahl (Chair), Collymore, Dixon, Gbajumo, and Hirani

1. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

RESOLVED: that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the duration of the meeting, on the grounds that the attendance of representatives from the council's Children in Care council, necessitated the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Act, namely: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

2. **Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

None.

3. **Declarations of interests**

None.

4. **Deputations (if any)**

None received.

5. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting, held on 19 April 2022, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

6. **Matters arising (if any)**

None.

7. **Update from Care In Action and Care Leavers in Action Representatives**

A member of Care in Action (CIA) highlighted what the group had done at the most recent CIA sessions. They had ice breaker games to welcome new members following a recruitment day, focusing on team building. One of the games was a cookie decorating competition, where each member of CIA decorated a cookie to best reflect their personality. Each member then had to explain how the cookie reflected their personality and answer questions from the rest of the group.

Another member of Care in Action (CIA) updated the Committee on the work CIA had been focused on since the last Corporate Parenting Committee. This was work following the most recent Bright Spots Survey on helping children in care understand why they are in care and relationships with carers, which had been selected as priorities by the group. The member of CIA had also contributed to a poster to be given to children in care when they

first entered their home, to ensure it included information on how to communicate dietary requirements.

Care in Action had also been planning a residential trip for October half term.

Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) had took part in the interview panel for the Corporate Director Children and Young People. They felt it went really well and had enjoyed being part of that process. CLIA had also had a joint session with all age groups where young people had performed poems and dances. CLIA members had enjoyed this as they did not often get to interact with the other aged groups. CLIA were also planning a residential for that weekend at the Gordon Brown Centre doing events such as night walks, laser tag and high ropes. Members had been planning work to advance recruitment campaigns for the group and were hoping to create a video during the residential weekend to be shared across children and young people. This member of CLIA had been attending the Voice and Influence Subgroup meetings which took place every month, planning participation events throughout the year. They had also discussed opportunities to give young people the skills to co-facilitate sessions which had been raised at the last Corporate Parenting Committee meeting.

Another member of CLIA had chaired the interview panel for the Corporate Director Children and Young People role. He had helped with the planning session including the ordering of questions and who would ask each question. He had also taken part in co-facilitating interview panel training, and those skills were then used for the interview panel. CLIA had recently had a graduation dinner which had been arranged to thank all care leavers who had turned 25 years old for their work and contributions which the Operational Director had attended.

The Chair thanked those present for their contributions and invited members of the Committee to ask questions to the CIA/CLIA representatives. The following questions were raised:

Members highlighted how busy CIA and CLIA had been and felt they had been doing an incredible job. Members asked how CIA / CLIA approached portraying the benefits of joining the groups to other potential group members. The CIA / CLIA representatives felt that benefits included the opportunity to be around others with similar life experiences. Being able to voice opinions to very senior officers was a big benefit, as was being able to see change being made as a result of the input given. CIA and CLIA members agreed that being able to make things better for future generations was another big benefit of being part of CIA / CLIA.

In terms of the barriers faced by the CIA and CLIA groups, representatives felt that things could take a long time to get done due to the processes that needed to be followed. The Committee queried how members stayed motivated when things took time. They responded that they reminded themselves that there was always a way to solve a problem and progress something and reminded themselves to recognise when things were moving in a positive direction.

The Committee asked about the experience of participating in the Corporate Parenting Committee and the more formal aspect of the Council. CLIA agreed that participating could be scary, particularly having to speak in front of senior officers and councillors. However, they understood that the meeting was a formal Committee and should remain so, and it gave an opportunity for young people to blossom into themselves and come out of their shells. They highlighted that the Committee was a good place for young people attending to find their feet professionally. CIA members added that they could feed back to other young people about their experience of coming to Corporate Parenting Committee so they knew what to expect when they came to the meeting, mentoring other young people who

may want to come forward for the meeting. One action arising from the discussion was for members to be identified by first names as well as surnames on nameplates to make the Committee feel less formal.

CLIA and CIA concluded their update by thanking Gail Tolley, who would be retiring as Strategic Director Children and Young People at the end of August. They advised that they felt privileged to have worked alongside her and wished her the best for the future.

The Committee thanked the representatives for the updates and RESOLVED:

That the updates by the representatives of Care in Action/Care Leavers in Action be noted.

8. **Annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Report 2021-22**

Sonya Kalyniak (Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Brent Council) introduced the report, informing the Corporate Parenting Committee of the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to the quality assuring and improvement of services for Looked After Children (LAC). She explained that Brent Council had a hybrid model of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), with both in-house and external IROs. External IROs were commissioned through AidHour, who had been providing the service for almost 20 years. They had known the young people they worked with for a very long time and were often the most consistent person in their life. The service was commissioned until October 2023, and the Council would begin reviewing what the service would look like in the future 6 months prior to that. For 2021-22, there were 925 reviews for LAC, overseeing care plans for 509 children, which equated to approximately 75-100 reviews per month.

In relation to quality assurance, a key role for the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team was to ensure consistency of reviews across IROs, and the team met regularly with IROs to see what was going well and what could be improved. The team were also working to ensure children were participating directly in their reviews, and monitored IRO escalations to identify trends and feedback to the service to improve quality.

Priorities for the current reporting year were around timeliness of LAC reviews, with a target of 100% within timescales. The team were working to drive improvement and quality in pathway plans, including ensuring a needs assessment at 15 and a half years old took place. In response to a query from a new member of the committee on what pathway planning was, Sonya Kalyniak advised that the pathway plan advised how to support the young person into adulthood so they had everything they may need to be successful, including housing, education and healthcare. This was then monitored through the leaving care service once the young person turned 18. The importance of pathway planning was emphasised, as it helped the young person to be clear about what their future held and define that as soon as possible. The service were focusing on ensuring the young person was involved in their pathway plan so that they owned it and felt confident raising issues on it.

In relation to a query regarding the caseload for IROs and how that was managed, the Committee were advised that the caseload of between 60-65 children was nationally recommended, which Brent maintained. This was different to a social worker, who may have between 15-20 young people they actively worked with on a daily basis, compared to an IRO who was not as actively involved in a young person's every day life and may only see the young people they worked with every 6 months.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

9. Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021-22

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which primarily detailed the activity the Corporate Parenting Committee had observed and monitored throughout the year and which was a statutory requirement that local authorities needed to comply with publishing. He highlighted the key points within the report, including the increase in LAC numbers of 18.4% compared to the previous year. The report also detailed the increased number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs). There had also been an increase in the number of young people the Council were supporting between the ages of 18-25 years old. In terms of the profile of LAC, 44% were 16 and above. This meant there would be a growing number of care leavers in the next few years. He highlighted the importance of this as there would be additional financial pressure on the Council going forward. In terms of the reasons for the increase in demand, one was due to the Home Office placing a significant number of asylum seeking adults in 3 hotels in Brent, some of whom came forward to say they were under 18 and were subsequently assessed to be children and accommodated. The Council had also noticed an increase in demand for Children Services post Covid-19 restrictions.

Priorities for the current reporting year (2022-23) were detailed in the report.

The Committee highlighted that many UASCs had very specific needs, and asked how the Council were delivering on that with the increase in numbers. The Committee were advised there were specific programmes designed to meet the emotional wellbeing needs of UASCs. The Council had a commissioned service operated by the Anna Freud Centre called 'West' working directly with UASCs. Specialist CAMHS was available also, and while there were high waiting lists they were focusing a particular interest in UASC. The adult mental health teams had also offered bespoke mental health support for people from Afghanistan. Some money had been secured through the Council to put in place a bespoke programme of support for UASCs, starting at the end of September, and focusing particularly on former UASC (who are now care leavers) who would not meet the threshold for adult mental health services and did not engage with online counselling. The Committee were reminded that the support to looked after children, care leavers and UASCs had been considered a strength by Ofsted in the 2018 inspection.

Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) advised the Committee there was good ESOL provision in secondary schools and colleges, as learning English was the first thing a lot of young people arriving wanted.

The Committee acknowledged the data which suggested there would be more care leavers over time, and felt it was a difficult time for young people to become independent with the cost of living crisis. They queried how Brent was doing compared to other councils in relation to the degree of support offered to care leavers. Onder Beter advised the Committee that Brent had a comprehensive local offer, as authorised by the Corporate Parenting Committee. There were a number of statutory requirements as well as discretionary Council offers to care leavers. Currently the Association for London Directors of Children's Services were looking to create a London-wide offer for care leavers, which would also look at the possibility of piloting the free bus passes Wales were currently piloting. Brent Council had recently upgraded its offer with additional benefits including gym and leisure activity for looked after children and care leavers. Brent was also one of the first councils who exempted care leavers from paying council tax.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

10. **Foster Carers' Charter 2022**

Darren Johnson (Service Manager, LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, regarding engagement and involvement of foster carers in the revision of Brent's Foster Carers' Charter. The new charter now included kinship carers in the offer and emphasised their importance. The charter set expectations for what Brent wanted from carers regarding the quality of support they provided to children and how they conducted their role, and equally what carers should expect from Brent in terms of the offer of training, support and how carers were treated. In creating the revised charter, officers undertook consultation with foster carers on the offer and what they felt should be included. The Council was responsible for monitoring the impact of the charter and whether it was making a difference. Carers had asked for 6-monthly reviews to ensure the Council were making progress on the areas in the charter, and were pleased with the focus on carers' learning and development needs.

The Committee asked for more information on the foster carer support group, and were advised this had been running for quite some time. Officers hoped to utilise the skills, experience and expertise of foster carers in the design of the service and work in partnership to improve the service.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the contents of the report.
- ii) For foster carers to be invited to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

11. **Fostering Service Quarterly Report, Quarter 1 (Apr 2022 - June 2022)**

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which was a regular quarterly update on the fostering service. He highlighted that there was a challenge in recruiting foster carers in London and nationally, which had been featured in the recent independent review of children's social care. In response Brent was focusing on recruitment, attempting to restructure the service to improve innovation and have more financial investment in marketing and recruitment of foster carers. The Council was in a partnership arrangement with 2 other local authorities to work on recruitment of foster carers, which was due to pick up pace in September 2022.

The Committee noted that the number of looked after children (LAC) placed with independent fostering agencies (IFAs) was above target, and asked for an explanation of the difference between the use of independent fostering agencies compared to in-house carers, in terms of a child's experience and the cost implications associated with that. The Committee were advised that the cost implications were significant, as the local authority paid at least double to IFAs compared to what they paid for in-house foster carers as there was the agency fee also. Most councils were not able to compete with IFAs in relation to the allowance paid to carers, with IFAs able to pay more to carers, but Brent tried to supplement that with an excellent support package to carers, recognising that a carers' motivation may not be money but serving the community. This year, Brent is increasing the support function and trying to bring in a therapeutic element to the support offered to foster carers, although this came with cost implications as there was no budget for this additional support meaning funding would need to be sought. Alongside this, officers were lobbying to level up in-house carer allowances to at least the London average. Onder Beter highlighted

that, nationally, the sector was depending on IFAs as no council was able to absorb the number of children coming into care and needing to be placed.

In response to whether the use of IFAs made it more likely a child would be moved out of borough, Nigel Chapman advised this was not necessarily the case as there were a lot of IFA foster carers within Brent and IFAs gave the local authority a greater choice on where a child could be placed. Some children were placed away from the Borough in their own interest, such as risk factors relating to gangs. The local authority always looked to place a child with a Brent foster carer first, but sometimes further outside of the borough meant more housing space and the ability to keep siblings together.

In relation to recruitment methods, Onder Beter advised that during the pandemic most recruitment activity moved online through local adverts and online recruitment techniques, which research suggested was most effective. The Council were now starting face to face recruitment events in combination with other marketing, such as through the Brent magazine, local radio station, and recruitment agencies. A Marketing and Recruitment Officer was now in post specialising in this area and Brent had begun to see more foster carers being approved. The Committee were asked to support the online activity whenever they saw it and talk about fostering in their surgeries. The Brent Fostering Twitter page was '@BrentFostering'.


- i) To note the report.

12. **Any other urgent business**

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) informed the Committee that this would be Onder Beter's (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) final meeting, and the Committee thanked Onder for his hard work over the years and making a difference to the lives of young people. The Committee wished Onder luck for the future.

The meeting closed at 18:20 pm

Councillor Gwen Grahl
Chair

 <p>Brent</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 19 October 2022</p> <hr/> <p>Report from the Corporate Director, Children and Young People</p>
<p>Placement Stability Report 2021/2022</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
Background Papers	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Zafer Yilkan Interim Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, CYP</p> <p>Kelli Eboji, Acting Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency, CYP</p> <p>Elena Muller, Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency , CYP</p>

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 There was an increase of multiple placement moves amongst children in care in 2021 and 2022 (from 11% March 2021 to 15.7% in March 2022). This report explains the reasons for this increase and articulates the work undertaken to minimise unplanned moves for looked after children.

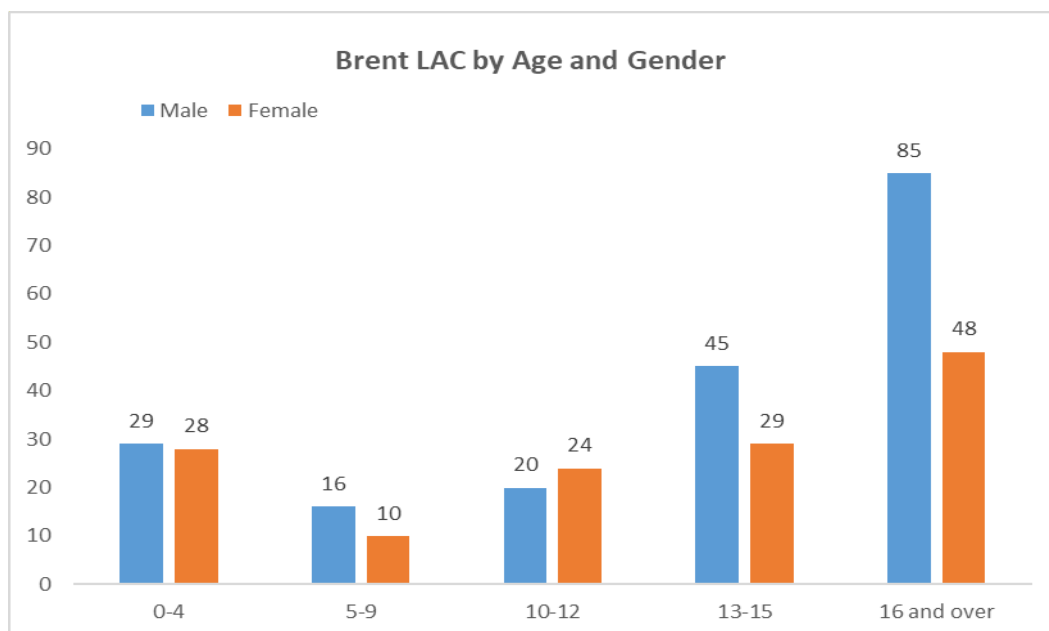
1.2 Placement stability for children is closely linked with sufficiency of placements. A report on placement sufficiency¹ was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) in April 2022.

2 Recommendations

2.1 The CPC is requested to review and comment on the contents of this report and note the activity undertaken to enhance placement stability for looked after children in Brent.

3 Detail

3.1 Changing demographics of looked after children has been one of the drivers of placement moves. Over the last 12 months, Brent's LAC population has increased from 312 in September-2021 to 334 in September-2022. The total Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC) population has dropped from 65 (20.8%) in Sep-2021 to 52 (15.6%) in Sep-2022. Some of these young people had to be placed in emergency placements pending the outcome of their age assessments. Hence, such process has increased the number of placement moves. Additionally, 40% of Brent's LAC population are 16+, with cases featuring contextual safeguarding concerns such as gang affiliation criminal and child exploitation and frequent missing episodes. Some cases of adolescents bring a higher degree of complexity and make placement stability more challenging due to presenting issues such as difficulties around emotional and mental health, self-harming and suicidal ideation. The below graph includes age and gender profile of looked after children in Brent:



¹ <https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=446&MIId=6614&Ver=4>

- 3.2 A national shortage of suitable placements also contributes to multiple placement moves. There is unprecedented demand for placements nationally and regionally (in London), caused by rising national numbers of children in care, shortage of foster carers and issues within the market around residential care for children with increasingly complex and additional needs. The Independent Review of Children Social Care² highlighted the shortage of placements, particularly foster placements on a national scale.
- 3.3 The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has also recently undertaken a market study into children's social care placements in England, Scotland and Wales. The CMA's final report (March 2022)³ highlighted the lack of sufficient placements and the high placement costs.
- 3.4 Locally, West London authorities have recently reported an increasing complexity of need and an older age range of young people entering the care system. This is putting significant strain on individual local authorities' sufficiency of suitable foster placements. Speaking to neighbouring authorities across West London, the following difficulties have been voiced:
- Insufficient number of local foster placements – for individual young people, sibling groups and mother and babies
 - Children placed at a distance from their families, communities, friendship networks, schools and local services
 - Too much placement instability – particularly for older children
 - Variability in placement planning and support contributes to placement breakdown and/or escalation to residential care
 - Challenges of recruiting foster carers – competing recruitment campaigns by boroughs
 - Increased costs due to reliance on independent sector
 - Residential placements being used due to lack of “specialist” or “therapeutic” supported foster placements
 - Future demand profiling indicates a higher-than-average increase in 10-14 year olds and 16+ across the sub-region
 - Many residential homes being reluctant to accept local children and young people because of the risks they present given proximity of family and friends networks
- 3.5 A reduction in the number of in-house fostering beds has also contributed to placement moves by limiting the choice to get the right placement at the right time for children and young people. The Local Authority has a greater degree of control and support over in-house placements compared to IFAs and they are at a lower cost. Over the last 12 months Brent fostering available beds/places have

² [Final Report - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk\)](https://www.independent-review.org/children-social-care-final-report)

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-final-report>

reduced from 153 to 146, in addition the impact of Care Leavers remaining in foster placements in Staying Put arrangements has meant the number of available beds have reduced during this reporting period. Brent had 101 fostering households at year end.

3.6 Whilst Brent has experienced a reduction of in-house fostering placements, the demand for placements has increased during the pandemic. Brent has seen a significant increase in demand across children's services, with caseloads increasing by 3.5% over twelve months period:

- an increase in child referrals from 2,326 in Sept 21 to 2,538 in Sept 22 (9.1%)
- an increase in children in need under 18 yrs from 2,246 in Sept 21 to 2,296 in Sept 22 (2.2%)
- an increase in the number of children subject of Child Protection Plans from 318 in Sept 21 to 403 in Sept 22 (26.7%)
- an increase in the number of Looked after Children (LAC) from 312 in Sep-2021 to 334 in Sep-2022
- a decrease in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) from 65 (20.8%) in Sep-21 to 52 in Sep-22 (15.6%)
- an increase in the number of care leaver population aged 18-25 years from 432 in Sept 21 to 481 in Sept 22 (11.3%)

3.7 Alongside the increase in demand, there has been increase in number of looked after children with complex emotional and behavioural needs who cannot safely remain living with their foster carers which contribute to placement moves.

3.8 Brent has seen an increased number of young people being placed in semi-independent accommodation this year. This is partly due to national lack of sufficiency around foster carers for teenagers, including within Brent's in-house fostering service and the increasing number of older children coming into care in their late teens. The number of LAC placed in semi-independent provision increased from 41 in April 2021 to 86 at the end of March 2022. This increase is in line with the UASC increase who are mostly placed in semi-independent provisions.

4 Main headlines of analysis

4.1 Placement stability remains a challenge and a priority area for Brent. As of March 2022, there has been a significant increase in the number of children and young people with two or three placement moves compared to previous years. This has coincided with increases in Brent LAC population over the last 12 months. The cases of children who have experienced 2+ placement moves were reviewed and below were the main headlines:

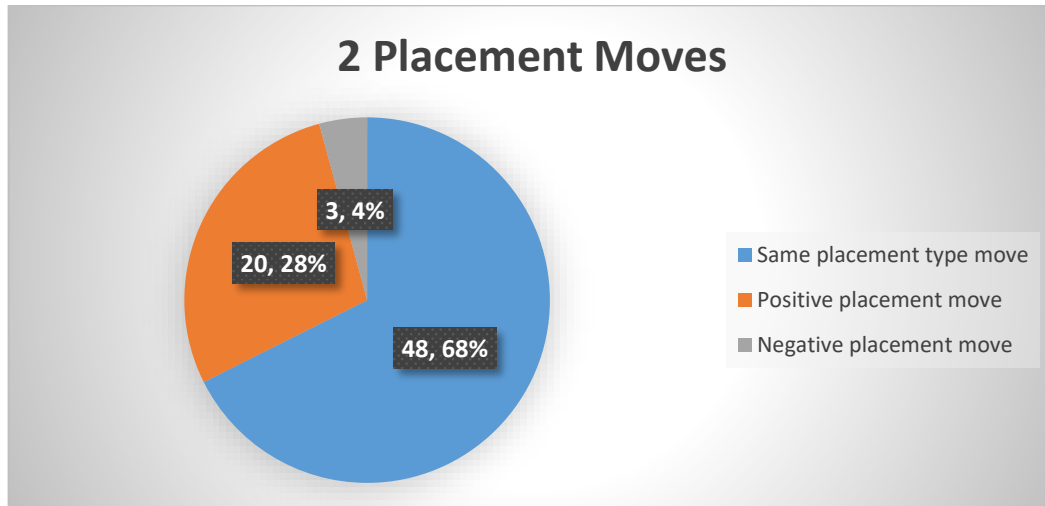
Children and young people with 3 Placement Moves

- **End of 20/21** 11% or 34 children
- **End of 21/22** 15.7% or 55 children

Children and young people with 2 Placement Moves

- **End of 20/21** 17% or 49 children
- **End of 21/22** 21% or 71 children

4.2 The chart below shows the breakdown of number of children with 2 or more placement moves for this reporting period. The data indicate 28% of placement moves are due to positive placement endings involving successful transition to alternative arrangements as per care plans.



4.3 50% of positive moves were linked to children moving from fostering to semi-independent placements as part of transitioning to adulthood. 35% were step down moves from residential children's home to fostering placement. 15% were moves from semi-independent to fostering placement

4.4 Negative placement moves (4%) reflect those children who have moved from a fostering or semi-independent placement to Children's residential homes due to their complex needs requiring more specialist care and support.

4.5 68% of children experienced placement moves involving "same or similar" types of provision e.g. foster carer-giving notice on placement and child moving to alternative fostering arrangements or residential placement disruption involving moves to alternative residential provision.

4.6 Further work is underway to scrutinise, monitor and review all placement moves during 2022/23 to better understand circumstances that lead to placement moves e.g. whether they were planned or unplanned and early interventions involving placement stability meetings enhanced/increased placement stability and achieved positive outcomes for children.

5 Actions taken to increase placement stability

- 5.1 A Lead Practice Consultant for placement stability monitors and tracks all placement moves, identifying emerging trends associated with placement disruption/breakdown.
- 5.2 The Practice Consultant works closely with LAC teams to identify and strengthen “fragile placements” and any additional support is required to prevent placement breakdown. The Council’s Commissioning and Resources Team (CRT) are working with providers to get these packages of support put in place swiftly.
- 5.3 Both LAC Teams and CRT can access the Lead Practice Consultant who chairs placement stability meetings to explore options and implement steps/measures for supporting fragile placements e.g. through agreed “wrap-around support” or additional therapeutic support packages.
- 5.4 Placement Stability Core Group Meetings are held monthly, chaired by the Fostering Service Manager and attended by
 - i) CYP Performance Manager
 - ii) Lead Practice Consultant
 - iii) CRT Manager
 - iv) Performance Team

The group are responsible for tracking/reviewing actions for reducing placement moves and sharing quantitative and qualitative data/information to identify the cohort of CYP currently in ‘fragile placements’ where early intervention and additional support is required. More recently, the Lead Practice Consultant completed specific work analysing the data of children with 2 plus moves to inform early intervention/support plans with allocated social workers that can help to avoid unplanned endings.

- 5.5 The Council’s Children’s Placement Panel also monitors use of placements and authorises additional support required to sustain the placement, if need be.

5.6. Enhanced support and resources for Brent’s foster carers

A review of supervision and support provided to in-house foster carers has recently been started. The review has already identified creative, cost-effective ways in which to enhance our service offer to carers and looked after children recognising the need for dedicated in-house specialist support aimed at strengthening placement stability and building confidence and resilience in carers. For example, the review explored approaches/best practice in “growing our own” especially regarding development of more specialist and therapeutic

carers to care for children with more complex needs. The findings from the review will be provided to the CPC in the next Quarterly Fostering Report.

- 5.7 The review is also exploring securing additional in-house clinical support for foster carers via utilising existing commissioned services, i.e. the West Service and using family support workers to provide a more flexible, targeted multi-disciplinary approach that is trauma-informed and rooted in achieving placement stability and permanency for children. The outcome of this review will be shared with the CPC in the next Quarterly Fostering Report.
- 5.8 The CPC has been provided with regular updates on the 'West London Fostering Project', which aimed at creating a joint entity to recruit more foster carers, particularly for adolescents. There has been a slow progress in the project for various reasons including some financial pressures in partner local authorities. There is an added difficulty around equalisation of payments to foster carers as Brent's fostering allowances are below the average allowances paid to foster carers in West London.
- 5.9 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care has recommended the establishment of regional fostering cooperatives in order to maximise placement options for children in care. The government is expected to respond to the review by the end of the calendar year. This might open up some funding opportunities for Brent and neighbouring authorities to build on the work undertaken in relation to the West London Fostering Project. The CPC will be updated accordingly.


6. Conclusion

- 6.1. Placement stability for children in care is linked to positive outcomes for children, including educational attainments, improved physical and mental health, sense of belonging and happiness and successful transition to adulthood. Placement choice and stability is a priority area for Brent. This report draws attention to some of the local, regional and national activities to increase placement stability for children as well as the challenges in Brent.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman
Corporate Director Children and Young People

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 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 19 October 2022
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report Quarter 2: 1 July 2022 to 30 September 2022	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Elena Muller, Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency elena.muller@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Kelli Eboji, Acting Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Zafer Yilkan Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Zafer.Yilkan@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards

(2011).

- 1.2 This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from the 1st of July 2022 to the 30th of September 2022.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the fostering service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for Brent Looked After Children.

3.0 Background

3.1 Service Priorities

The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency Service (LACPS) of the Children and Young People's Department. The service is focusing on the following priority areas in 2022/23:

- To have a greater focus on recruitment, assessment and approval of new carers with the view to achieve 5 net gain by the end of the financial year, considering termination of approvals and resignations
- To enhance the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers, considering therapeutic element to support placement stability
- To enhance the training and development programme for carers to include a permanent, ongoing mix of virtual and direct delivery of courses and seminars
- To continue improving the stability of children by providing more local and in-house placement options, minimising change of social workers and placements
- Developing partnerships with neighbouring authorities to recruit and retain more foster carers.

3.2 Staffing Arrangements

3.2.1 The two Fostering Support and Assessment Teams have now been merged into one team with one team manager and one Interim Deputy Team Manager. There are currently 12 Supervising Social Work posts, 1 Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) post in this establishment.

3.2.2 The workload in the team continues to grow as new kinship and foster carers are approved and allocated to supervising social

workers to ensure ongoing support and monitoring.

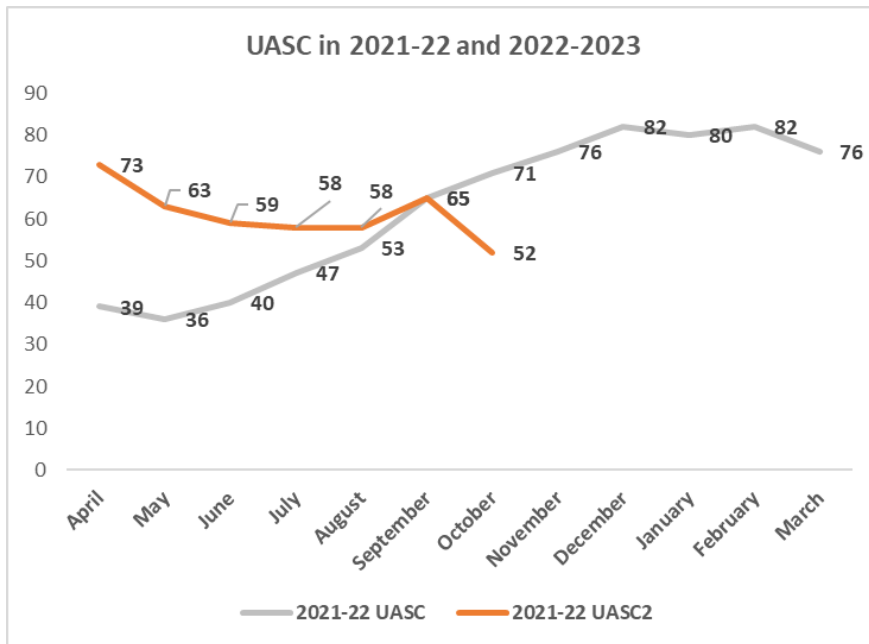
4.0 Placement Activity:

The total number of looked after children as at 30th Sep- 2022 was 334, which is a decrease by 5 children from Q1 of 2022-2023 and an increase by 22 children from the same period in 2021 (312 children)

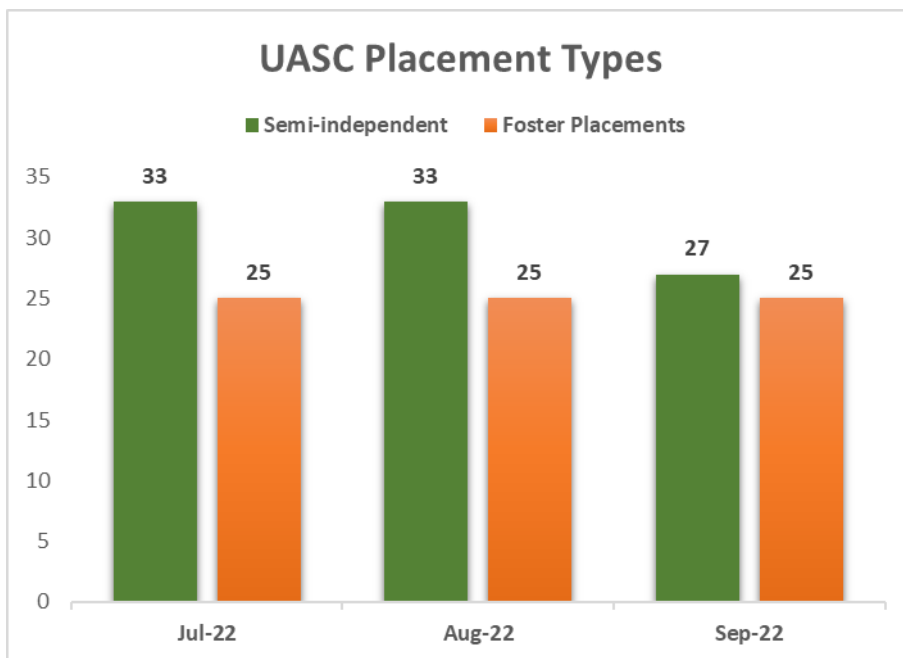
4.1 The corporate performance targets for 2022/2023 are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2022 was 18.9% (63 children), an increase of 3.6% the previous quarter Q1 of 2022/2023, 15.3% (52 children).
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 20% - the actual percentage as of 30th Sep - 2022 was 15.6% (52 children), same as Q1 of 2022/2023 of 15.6% (53 children)
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th Sep - 2022 was 28.7% (96 children); decrease from Q1 of 2022/2023 by 1.1% (29.8%, 101 children)
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 70% - the actual percentage as of 30th Sep -2022 was 64.7% (216 children), which is an increase by 3.9% from Q1 of 2022/2023 which was 60.8% (206 children). This is primarily related to the age of new looked after children and the increase in the number of 16 - 17 year-old UASC who were placed in semi-independent accommodation.
- There were 68 looked after children in registered semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30th Sep - 2022, which represents 20.4% of all looked after children. This is a decrease by 2% from the end of Q1, 2022/2023 (22.4%, 76 children).

4.2 As of 30th Sep-2022, there were 52 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), a decrease of 7 UASC (59 UASC in Q1 2022-23). The decrease is attributable to the number of UASC turning 18 and those dispersed into the National Transfer Scheme.



4.3 The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation is 27, 5 less than at the end of Q1, 2022-23 (35 UASC), none in residential children’s home and 25 UASC placed in foster placements, 1 UASC more from Q1 (24 UASC).



5.0 Recruitment and Assessment:

5.1. Marketing and recruitment activities continue to take place online. The monthly fostering information evenings have taken place online via Zoom, which attendees reportedly enjoyed, and continue to find more convenient than having

to travel to a venue to hear more about fostering. Face-to-face recruitment activities and information evenings continue to be considered but at the moment the feedback from participants is that they prefer online events.

- 5.2. To enhance recruitment, the MRO finalised a recruitment plan to be implemented starting mid-October. The aim is to recruit six more fostering households by the end of the financial year to meet the yearly target of 15 approved foster carers. The plan revolves around advertising on popular digital channels such as Google Ads and Facebook to acquire new leads that will afterwards be converted via the fostering newsletter/information evening. The campaign dedicated landing page has been built, and will be shortly followed by an update of the main fostering landing page. Both pages have been optimised for lead conversion.
- 5.3. The Fostering newsletter continues to be delivered monthly to the 5000+ subscribers. The September edition has recorded an all-time high click through rate of 4.1% - higher than the 2022 government and non-profit benchmarks of 3.99% and 2.79% respectively.
- 5.4. The service is promoting the need for local foster carers in the autumn issue of The Brent Magazine through an interactive ad which contains a QR code allowing viewers to download the digital fostering brochure. The number of downloads is being monitored throughout the campaign.
- 5.5. The MRO is working to promote the Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers campaign throughout October. Promotion will include a case study about a Brent fostering household and additional internal activities to celebrate the contribution to fostering of Brent foster carers' children.
- 5.6. In the reporting period, the fostering team recorded 16 information evening sign ups and 11 enquiries. Of these 1 is progressing to an initial visit. Phone calls and web request for callback were two of the most popular ways people contacted the service.
- 5.7. Of the 10 assessments that were reported to be in progress in previous quarter (Q1 2022/23), 2 of the 3 in stage 1 progressed to stage 2 and 1 remains in stage 1. Of the 7 assessments which were reported to be in stage 2, 4 remain in stage 2, 1 is on hold and 2 applicants have withdrawn due to changes in their personal circumstances.
- 5.8. During this reporting period, 8 assessments were undertaken. Of these:
 - 1 in Stage 1; and
 - 7 in Stage 2.

6.0 Fostering Panel

- 6.1 The LACPS has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a diverse and highly experienced central list of panel members that includes an elected member. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional and personal experience of fostering and panel members include those with personal experience of the fostering system. Current demand requires three panels to be held every two months.
- 6.2. The functions of the fostering panel are to consider:
- Each application and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster carer or Connected Person(s) (Family and Friends foster carer) and the terms of their approval;
 - The first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the service, including those of a Standards of Care issue and those exploring any allegations made;
 - The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a foster carer; and
 - The long-term fostering matches of all children below the age of 12.
- 6.3 During this period, 4 panels were held with 15 cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:
- 5 were recommended for approval as short term connected persons
 - 1 was recommended for approval as short term carers
 - 2 carers were re-approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review
 - 3 carers were re-approved as long term carers
 - 4 carers fostering approval/status were terminated

All of the recommendations made above were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who is the Head of LAC and Permanency.

7.0 Training and Support for Foster Carers:

- 7.1 The CYP Learning and Development Team within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service continues to offer learning opportunities for foster carers and special guardians using a mix of delivery methods comprising of face-to-face, online virtual and E-Learning. The Team regularly review the number of face-to-face learning opportunities in consultation with Brent carers, and it is evident that there is an increase in their participation in sessions within each quarter. Additionally as part of learning evaluation feedback obtained from carers on whether they preferred face-to-face or online virtual sessions, there is an equal preference for both options.

7.2 In this quarter two opportunities for face to face training offered; First Aid and Missing Persons' Training. There are at least a further two face-to-face sessions coming up in the next quarter. In the last quarter four facilitated learning sessions were completed [two face-to-face in July 2022 and two online virtual in September 2022. The online virtual sessions were Key Legislation and Delegated Authority training, and PREVENT Training. There were no facilitated sessions in August due to the summer holiday, however there has been an increase in carers accessing and completing E-Learning courses this year with 73 courses completed in 2021 and 113 in 2022.

"I like both, because it depends on the type of training. Some definitely need face to face. For example, First Aid."

"The course was well put together, abundance of information, the content explained nicely so that each and everyone could understand what is been said. I really enjoyed the course. Thank you"

"The legislative side of the course. How it works. From the beginning middle and the end result of a child being LAC. The many agencies evolved. All working together for the betterment of the child/young people. Was an eye opener for me in regards to private fostering. Was good to know that they are not under the radar."

7.3. In addition to facilitated training and in response to carers requesting more flexible training times, the team continue to provide all carers access to learning opportunities at any time of the day, evenings and weekends, through access to an E-Learning online courses package. The E-Learning courses available are many under the following categories: Core Knowledge and Values, Safeguarding and Child Protection Skills, Therapeutic Care, Supporting Adolescence, Working with Looked after Children (Fostering, Residential Care and Adoption), Understanding Trauma and Promoting Positive Behaviour, Working in Health and Social Care, Working with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs, and Children Safe Online.

7.4. Moving forward the plan is to continue towards more balanced hybrid training sessions from 2023, by progressively increasing the number of face-to-face sessions, towards a target of 50/50 split for all facilitated training being, face-to-face, or online virtual sessions.

7.5 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW)

7.5.1 Retention of foster carers remains a priority, based on feedback from annual reviews and fostering panel. The support offered to foster carers

forms a large part of why carers remain committed to Brent.

- 7.5.2 To keep foster carers engaged and informed, the fostering service provides a monthly newsletter and facilitates foster carer support groups.
- 7.5.3 The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as foster carers have expressed that it is their preferred option. However, some foster carers have expressed that they would welcome in the future alternate face-to-face and virtual sessions. This is being explored with foster carers.
- 7.5.4 The support groups that took place during the reporting period focused on topics ranging from training, foster carer association, life story work and working together. There was no Foster carers Support group meeting in August as the summer trip takes place in August each year. This year the foster carers went on a Summer Seaside trip with their families and children in their care to Southend-On-Sea. Positive feedback received from foster carers was that they thoroughly enjoyed spending time away from London and having fun with the children.

8.0 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints:

- 8.1 During this quarter, there were no complaints or allegations made by or against any Brent foster carers.
- 8.2 There have been 28 annual reviews of foster carers in this reporting period.

9.0 Service Development

9.1 Website Development

The fostering website is fully optimised to support recruitment; furthermore, a bespoke landing page has been created for our Google Ads digital campaign due to be launched late-October.

Brent Fostering continues to have a social media presence on all major social networks: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.

9.2 West London Fostering Collaboration Project

The CPC has regularly been updated about the progress of this piece of work. The work continued until March 2022 and, due to the end of year budget setting period affecting other local authorities involved and local elections taking place, the work has now been put on hold until the end of the financial year.

Brent will continue to champion a joint working approach to recruiting, preparing

and assessing foster carers with neighboring Local Authorities.

9.3 Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers

9.3.1 The team reviewed the current resources allocated to Brent's in-house fostering function, by looking into the structure of the teams and the existing budget for support and supervision of carers. The two fostering teams have now merged with one full time Team Manager supported by a full time Acting Deputy Manager. By doing this we are anticipating that we will uniform the practice across the fostering service, upskill the supervising social workers and strengthen placement support.


9.3.2 The main focus remains marketing, recruitment and approval of new carers. Brent continues to have a good social media presence intended to attract more potential foster carers. The team is currently revisiting the fostering offer to new and existing carers, exploring creative, cost effective ways in which to enhance our service offer in order to prepare and upskill the existing foster carers so they feel empowered and confident to look after children with complex needs and trauma. A working group has been set up to look at developing an in-house specialist support service aimed at strengthening placement stability and training and supporting carers who would like to become specialist and therapeutic carers, this is also reflected in our current Sufficiency Strategy.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People

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 Brent	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p align="center">19 October 2022</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Adoption Report</p> <p>6-monthly report: 1st April 2022 to 30th September 2022</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Adopt London West Annual Report 2021/22
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Debbie Gabriel, Head of Service, Adopt London West Brent's Regional Adoption Agency GabrielD@ealing.gov.uk Kelli Eboji, Acting Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk Zafer Yilkan Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Zafer.yilkan@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a briefing to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to:

- adoption performance data for the period 1st April 2022 – 30th September 2022
- annual report for the reporting year 2021/22
- the progress and activity of Adopt London West.
- how good outcomes are being achieved for children.

Information and child level data presented in Section 5 of this report was provided by Brent; the rest of this report includes the progress and activity of Adopt London West.

1.2 This is the sixth report presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in this format as Cabinet gave approval in April 2019 for Brent council to:

- a) join the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) *Adopt London West* consisting of the London boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham for the provision of Adoption services and Special Guardianship Support; and
- b) delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Children and Young People, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care to agree and enter into a Partnership Agreement with participating boroughs.

1.3 The Key Decision was made on 2nd September 2019 and, following the TUPE of those Brent staff members who chose to move to Ealing, Adopt London West has been a 'live' RAA since October 2019.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review, comment on, and question the contents of this report and the annual report for 2021/22. This is to provide evidence that the management of the adoption service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children. This is in line with standard 25.6 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2014).

3.0 Background – Adopt London West

- 3.1** Adopt London West (ALW) Regional Adoption Agency became operational on 1st September 2019 with a formal launch in October 2019.
- 3.2** A comprehensive partnership agreement forms the basis of the ongoing partnership arrangements. The partnership board on which the Strategic Director, Brent CYP, sits will continue to provide the necessary oversight to ensure that the shared service is appropriately scrutinised and supported to deliver improved outcomes for children and adopters.
- 3.3** As part of the national RAA implementation and development programme a network of RAA leaders has been established and a national strategic lead appointed. Government published a National Adoption Strategy in July 2021, that sets out ambitions to further improve the consistency of support offered to adopters and achieve innovation and change in various aspects of the adoption system. Monthly meetings take place attended by DfE who remain interested and engaged in the RAA implementation programme.
- 3.4** National priorities have been agreed by the network of RAA leaders and several workstreams established to progress specific elements of the National strategy. ALW's Partnership Board and Heads of Service meetings will continue to be informed of practice change and developments and will closely monitor performance and practice to ensure standards of service to children and their families remain consistently high.

4.0 Responsibilities

- 4.1** As delegated in the partnership agreement between Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hounslow, Ealing (as the host Local Authority for ALW) is responsible for ensuring that children whose permanence plan is adoption in all four partner Local Authorities are matched in a timely way with adopters who best meet the needs of those children. This involves featuring children in various profiling events, via national linking websites, supporting them in adoption activity days and networking events with other Regional Adoption Agencies in London and nationally. ALW is also responsible for the preparation and assessment of prospective adopters, supporting adopters with family finding following approval and the on-going post placement support to adopters and special guardians. ALW is also responsible for the provision of services to adopted adults and all those affected by adoption who request a specific service or an assessment of need.

- 4.2** ALW also provides a service to Brent residents who wish to make a private application to adopt their partner's child, referred to as step-parent adoption, or special guardians who may wish to adopt the child in their care. The team is also involved in completing adoption reports on children who may have travelled from and been adopted abroad; there is a legal requirement for these adoptions to be made lawful in the UK.
- 4.3** Inter-country adoption referrals continue to be referred to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA), with whom a service level agreement is in place.
- 4.4** Statutory social work in relation to children needing adoptive placements remains the responsibility of Brent CYP. The care plans for children are formulated by the social work teams and agreed by Head of Service for LAC and Permanency. The Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes then considers and ratifies any adoption plans.

5.0 Performance Data

- 5.1** The most recent set of national adoption scorecards was published in August 2020, covering the 3-year period 2017-2020.

Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))

- 5.1.1** The non-published data for the period under review demonstrates that Brent performance against the A1 indicator has remained steady, but continued to strengthen in comparison to the A2 indicator in published national and statistical neighbour averages:

- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 489 days. This is the same as the previous reporting period and compares unfavourably against the 2017-20 national average of 367 days and the statistical neighbour average of 350.
- **A2** (The average time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 149 days. This is a 19.5% decrease on the previous reporting period (185 days), and is lower than the 2017-20 national average of 175 days and compares favourably to the statistical neighbour average of 205 days.

- 5.1.2** It is important to note that the above A1 indicator has been significantly impacted by two specific adoption cases where there were delays in placing for adoption due to challenges in identifying adopters because of the age and challenging behaviour of one child and the complex disability of

another child. The A1 indicator without these two cases would be 393.3, which is significantly lower than the previous reporting period. The A2 indicator has also been positively impacted by a child placed in an early permanence arrangement.

6.0 Child related data

6.1 There have been 4 Adoption Orders granted during the first half of this reporting year.

6.2 There are currently 2 active adoption applications in court, with a third application in the process of being made.

6.3 There are currently 10 children with an adoption plan who have not yet been adopted.

The details of these children's cases are as follows:

- Seven children are placed with their new families, 3 of these children are placed in early permanence placements and 4 are formally placed for adoption.
- The remaining 3 children, with plans of adoption, have not yet been formally matched with adopters. 1 has a prospective adoptive family identified. Family finding is in process for the remaining 2 children.

There are an additional 5 children who are likely to have a plan of adoption confirmed in the next reporting period.

6.4 Early Permanence for Children

For some children it is appropriate to consider placing them with foster carers who are also approved adopters, this is referred to as an Early Permanence placement. This enables the child to be placed earlier than is usually possible and before Court proceedings have concluded. 3 children are currently in Early Permanence placements, 1 of these children has been with his new family since February of this year whilst complex court proceedings are concluded. This demonstrates the positive benefits for children placed in this type of arrangement, ensuring that the child can benefit from the security and stability of their adoptive family and development of early attachments as early as possible rather than "waiting" in their foster placements.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

7.1 6 Adopter households have been approved since April 2022, this has been a slow start to the year but more families will be approved in the remaining quarters of 2022/23.

Unusually, only 1 of the families approved so far during this reporting period are from Black or Mixed ethnicity communities and none identify as LGBT. The other families have been from mixed European backgrounds, who are also a valued and welcomed resource.

- 7.2** There are currently 37 ALW approved adopters: 19 of whom already have a child placed with them, 13 are in the active family finding stage and 2 families are matched/linked to child/ren. 3 families are on hold due to their personal circumstances and are likely to resign as adopters
- 7.3** The adoption assessment process comprises 2 stages. Stage 1 assessments should take place within 2 months - this stage is described as "adopter led", where adopters work through exercises and complete various tasks that contribute to a full and thorough assessment of their suitability.
- 7.4** Stage 2 should take a maximum of 4 months and is a detailed assessment that is both reflective and analytical. In total, the comprehensive assessment process should be completed within 6 months.
- 7.5** There are currently 17 families in the formal stages of assessment, 8 in Stage 1 and 9 in Stage 2.

8.0 Casework

- 8.1** Currently ALW is supporting 47 families that have Brent children placed with them - 11 are receiving a Social Work service and 36 are currently receiving an ASF therapeutic service that is under review.
- 8.2** There are 77 contact cases open relating to Brent families - 11 direct contact arrangements and 66 active letterbox exchanges.
- 8.3** There have been 80 requests for access to records in relation to Brent records, out of a total number of 143 requests received by ALW during this period. Brent hold National Adoption Society records alongside Brent adoption files, however there has been a 74% increase in access to records requests compared to the same period in 2021/22 and represents a pressure that requires monitoring and review.

9.0 Adoption Support Fund

- 9.1** Families who require specialist therapeutic support, are assessed by a social worker and an application submitted to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) for funding to cover the costs of the therapeutic services.
22 applications have been made to the ASF on behalf of Brent families in this

reporting year and a total of £44,703 of funding for therapeutic services received for these families.

9.2 There are currently no families waiting for an application to the ASF; all assessments for support are allocated.

10.0 ALW Adoption Panel

10.1 The role of ALW's panel is as follows:

- to consider the presentation of approvals, reviews, and terminations of adopters' suitability to adopt, following which a recommendation is made by panel members and sent to ALW's Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service) for a formal decision.
- to consider whether a relinquished baby from Brent should be placed for adoption, following which a recommendation is made by panel members but sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge; and
- to consider adoption matches between Brent's children and their prospective adopters, following which a recommendation is made by panel members and sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge.

10.2 Feedback between ALW and Brent is considered by the Heads of Service quality assurance group and the Partnership Board and shared with Service Managers in Brent after each panel presentation to aid service development and quality assure the work of the RAA.

10.3 ALW Panel continues to take place virtually via Microsoft Teams.

Prior to each panel meeting, the Adviser liaises with the applicants and external professionals to support them to access Microsoft Teams to reduce the risk of delay on the day and explain how the panel day will run and confirm that they are able to access the meeting confidentially. The Panel Adviser sets up a panel member check-in to join Microsoft Team to ensure that everyone can join securely, without delay and with ease. Panel members and observers also complete and return a confidentiality self-declaration, attesting to this for the duration of the panel meeting.

10.4 During the period under review, 7 adoption panels were held in ALW resulting in the successful approval of 6 adoptive families

10.5 Annual training for panel members is a regulatory requirement, practice development discussions on the use of a newly developed Early Support Guide took place in this review period facilitated by Dr Mel Jarvis, Clinical Psychologist, and author of the guide. A series of three workshops on transracial adoption took place in July, August and September delivered via Zoom from the USA. Further additional training will take place later in the year, the subject of which will be jointly agreed between ALW and panel members.

11.0 The overall benefits of a shared service are also realised through the practice improvement and opportunities that are possible now that small individual services have become part of the wider Adopt London collaboration and the national RAA network. It was simply not possible for LA Adoption services to offer the range of support and services that can now be delivered as a Regional Adoption Agency.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People

Adopt London West

Annual Report

1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022

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1. Introduction and Context

The creation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) was part of a national agenda to improve the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters and speed up the matching and placement of children for adoption.

The Education and Adoption Act 2016 required local authorities to combine their adoption services into Regional Adoption Agencies by April 2020 or they would be directed to do so.

The premise of regionalisation was to:

- *Increase the number of children adopted*
- *Reduce the length of time children wait to be adopted*
- *Improve post-adoption support services to families who have adopted children who were previously in the care of a Local Authority*
- *Reduce the number of agencies that provide adoption services and thereby improve efficiency and effectiveness*

A London project board made the decision to create 4 Regional Adoption Agencies for London, 24 London boroughs are part of this arrangement, and the collaboration has become “Adopt London”. The primary aim was that each RAA would work collaboratively with each other across London on areas that would contribute to an equitable standard of services to children and families, services are delivered through a hosted model.

The shared vision of the benefits of an Adopt London collaboration includes the belief that:

- *Stronger leadership focusing on Adoption is achievable*
- *There is the potential to achieve an improved offer to families through joint delivery of some services and ultimately joint commissioning*
- *Improved relationships with voluntary adopt agencies and other provider services will benefit the whole adoption sector*
- *Services across the partnerships can become more responsive, flexible, and resilient by sharing resources, knowledge and expertise*
- *A shared commitment to continually improving practice for adopted children, adopters and all those affected by adoption will drive forward change, encourage innovation and contribute to establishing a model for joint working in other areas of children’s services.*

Ealing is the host borough for Adopt London West (ALW), the service went “live” on 1st October 2019, along with the other 3 Adopt London regions. 3 Brent staff were transferred under TUPE legislation to Ealing on 3rd September 2019, 4 staff from Hounslow chose to transfer to Ealing terms and conditions, these decisions were made by individual staff based on their personal circumstances.

ALW’s LA partners delegated responsibility to ALW to carry out the following functions.

- *Recruit and assess new adopters*
- *Family finding for children and matching them with Adopters*
- *Post Adoption and Special Guardianship support services that offer.*
 - *Support to adopters and special guardians including arranging specialist therapeutic services funded by the Adoption Support Fund.*
 - *Letterbox services to facilitate indirect contact between birth families and children*
 - *Birth parent counselling*
 - *Services to adopted adults*

2. Purpose of Report

This report provides a summary of activity and progress to date and of ALW's performance in 2021/22.

Prior to the implementation of the RAA a detailed partnership agreement was developed and approved by all partners. This included a range of legal clauses and schedules.

The partnership agreement also set out the governance arrangements to oversee and support the implementation and development of Adopt London West.

A Partnership Board made up of Directors from each borough meets regularly to receive updates on progress of key priorities, to discuss issues and risks and to provide strategic oversight and support. The working relationship between each of the partner authorities and the RAA has been fundamental to the success so far of the partnership working and will continue to be the focus as a developing service and partnership.

A Heads of Service Quality Assurance group comprising of Heads of Services from each participating borough meets monthly with the RAA Head of Service and are responsible for monitoring, tracking, and developing a delivery plan and ensuring partner engagement is effective at an operational level.

3. Operating Model

The RAA operates as a shared service, there are currently 30 members of staff, who work across 4 teams.

- a small recruitment and assessment team who are responsible for the recruitment, assessment preparation and training of adopters.
- a family finding team who are responsible for early identification of children, family finding and early permanence arrangements
- an adoption and special guardianship support team offer a comprehensive range of services to families, children and adopted adults and manage a large volume of applications to the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of families who require a therapeutic service.
- a business support team provides a range of services including, management of initial enquiries, data collection, reporting and analysis, financial systems and budget monitoring, co-ordination and administration of Adoption Panel, core administrative services, the business management of the adoption support fund process including a statutory annual assurance statement

In addition, a part time Clinical Psychologist provides support and clinical advice to social work colleagues using a consultation model. A part time marketing and communications lead is part of the Adopt London shared marketing & comms team.

The staff group is stable, all permanent social work posts are occupied, there are a small number of fixed term posts that are yet to be agreed on a permanent basis.

The teams, led by a Head of Service, deliver the core adoption functions as outlined below, ALW has its office base in Perceval House, Ealing Council's main office building.

The partner authorities delegated the following responsibilities to Ealing to deliver on their behalf:

- *The recruitment of prospective adopters*
- *The assessment of prospective adopter's suitability to adopt a child*
- *An Adoption panel to consider recommendations on applicants' suitability to adopt and the suitability of adopters to meet the needs of children with a plan of adoption, "matches" of children*
- *The provision of adoption and special guardianship support services to families living in the region, including.*
- *Independent support to birth parents*
- *Access to adoption records*
- *Letterbox exchange service and support with contact arrangements*

The legal responsibilities for Looked After Children remains with their local authority, the following summarises the key responsibilities that are retained.

- *Corporate Parenting*
- *Agency Decision maker responsibilities and all legal responsibilities for looked after children*
- *Early permanence planning*
- *The provision of and review of financial allowances to adopters and special guardians*

In partnership with the RAA, each partner contributes to.

- Quality assurance and performance tracking
- Ensuring that accurate and timely data is held, collated, and reported to the DfE, ASGLB and any other body as necessary

4. Financial Arrangements

The Partnership agreement set out the agreed financial contributions for the first 2/3 years of operation. The resources that transferred, both staff costs and non-staff budgets, were based on the existing resources that each Borough had allocated to deliver its adoption functions. Inevitably, individual spend varied between each Boroughs as did levels of demand.

Several workshops have taken place during 2021/22 attended by finance leads and directors for each ALW partner to consider options for moving to a demand based budget. Finance modelling was completed based on several options to seek a solution that was fair and equitable for all. A recommended model was agreed in principle and is awaiting final agreement of all partners.

<i>Partner</i>	<i>2021/22 Financial Contribution</i>	<i>2021/22 percentage contribution</i>
<i>Brent</i>	<i>392,912</i>	<i>23%</i>
<i>Ealing</i>	<i>681,713</i>	<i>40%</i>
<i>Hammersmith & Fulham</i>	<i>206,243</i>	<i>12%</i>
<i>Hounslow</i>	<i>413,680</i>	<i>25%</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,694,548</i>	<i>100%</i>

The following paragraphs describe the key areas of financial activity.

Adoption Support Fund

Adopt London West manages all applications from families living in each partner LA to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) a Department for Education fund for the direct provision of therapeutic support to families. Applications to the fund are made following a Social Work assessment and identification of a therapeutic provider

01 April – 31 March 2022					
	Brent	Ealing	H&F	Hounslow	Combined
Special Guardianship Applications	5	19	23	15	62
Funding	£14,000	£49,000	£63,000	£46,000	£172,000
Adoption Applications	57	70	35	60	222
Funding	£146,000	£181,000	£86,000	£204,000	£617,000
Total Applications	62 (+51%)	89 (-16%)	58 (+29%)	75 (+10%)	284 (+10.5%)
Total Funds	£160,000 (+33%)	£230,000 (-10%)	£149,000 (+22%)	£250,000 (+29.5%)	£789,000 (+19.6%)

Interagency placements

Inter-agency placements are purchased when no adopters approved by Adopt London West are available or are not considered to be the most suitable match for a child. 31% of the children placed in 2021/22 were placed with ALW approved adopters, increasing this percentage is a target for improvement in 2022/23. The cost of Inter Agency placements was **£673,856**. Inter-agency income from ALW families matched with children from other regions was **£263k**. Currently each partner local authority is responsible for the payment of inter-agency fees, a finance workshop is planned to explore funding models with the aim of reaching agreement on an approach that is mutually beneficial and equitable to all partners.

Increasing the number of children placed with our partner Adopt London regions is also a priority for 2022/23, a funding bid has been submitted to create a matching manager for London, this post will add additional management capacity and provide robust oversight to the matching process. There is a shared commitment to place London children with London families, maximising the use of all potential families within the partnership provides the best outcome for children and adopters, placing children locally means that, when necessary, high quality, timely support can be arranged.

Children placed – ALW/ Interagency Placements 01 April – 31 March 2022			
	ALW	Interagency	Total
Brent	3	3	6
Ealing	3 <i>(*1 disrupted)</i>	2	5
H&F	2	4 <i>(*1 disrupted)</i>	6
Hounslow	3	14	17
Total	11 *(10)	23 (*22)	34 (*32)

5. Performance

Children

The number of children being placed for Adoption nationally continues to be low, in London there has been a further slight decrease from 191 children in 2019/20 to 180 in 2021/22.

Placement Order, (Court authority to place a child for Adoption) numbers also continue to fall suggesting that the decrease in orders will continue. Placement Orders have fallen from 234 in 2019/20 to 171 in 2021/22.

An exception to this trend is Hounslow who placed the highest number of children in London in 21/22.

32 children were placed by ALW in their new families in 2021/22, 17 of whom were from Hounslow - 53%, the remaining 3 partners placed significantly fewer children.

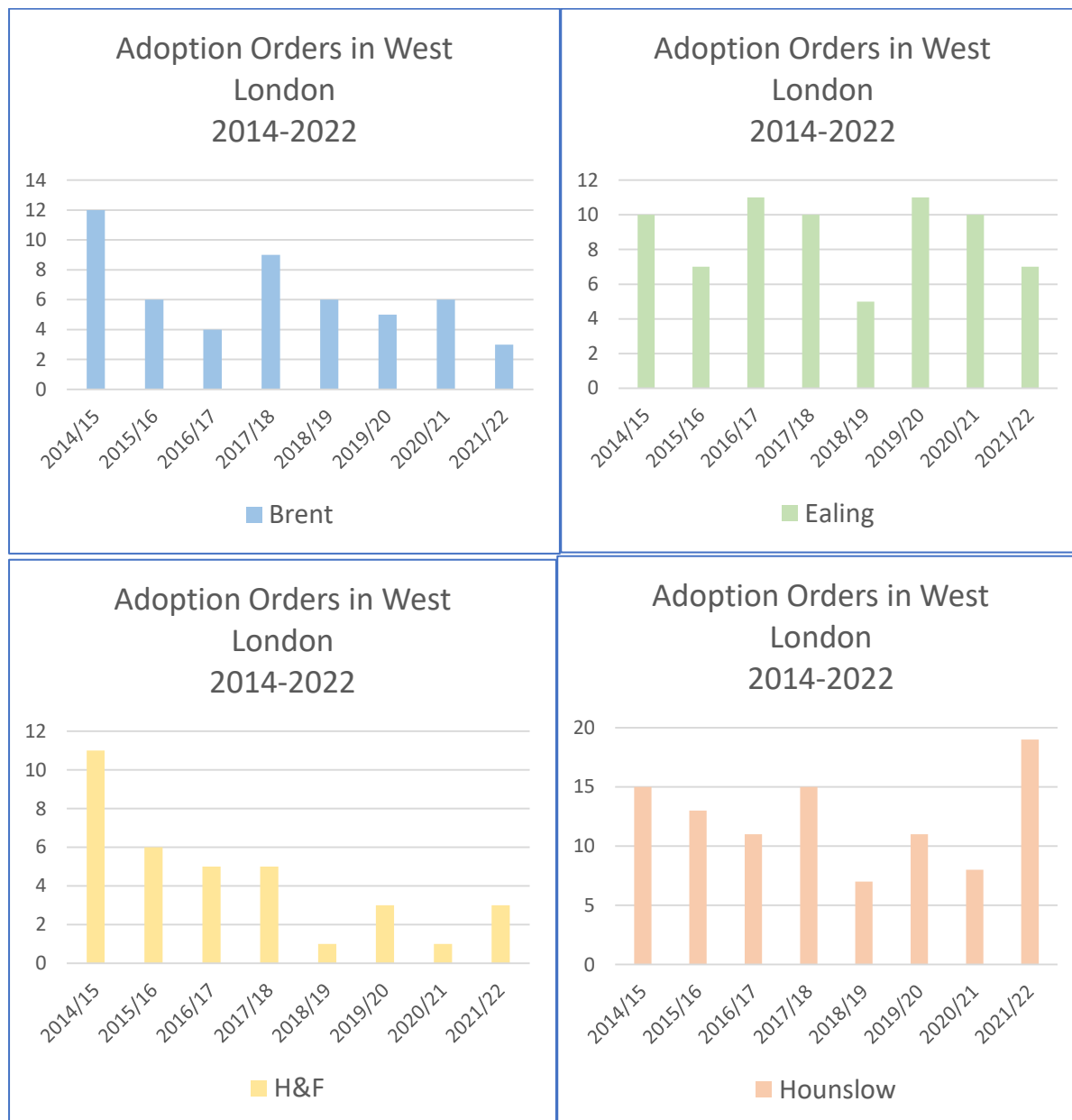
Adoption performance targets set 2 main performance indicators; one directly relates to ALW performance.

- **A2** length of time between a Placement Order and match with an adoptive family, the expected timescale is 121 days.
- The average for ALW was 201 days, outside the target but stronger than our Adopt London partners and well inside the London average of 270 days

Black children and children with additional needs wait considerably longer than other children to be placed, on average 7 months longer, children with a disability wait an additional 359 days compared to other children.

Of the 32 children placed, 39% are of Black, Asian or Mixed Ethnicity - 12.5% are Black or black/mixed ethnicity

Of the 32 children placed, 7 were placed under Early Permanence arrangements, this means children were placed with adopters who are also approved as foster carers and often before Court proceedings have concluded, enabling the child to move in with their new family, sometimes months earlier than is usually possible.



Adopters

21 new adoptive families were approved, slightly more than the previous year but still not yet at the target number of 30 families, another improvement target for 2022/23.

48% of adopters approved are Black, Asian, or mixed ethnicity and 29% are from the LGBT+ community.

Performance indicators for the approval of adopters set the expected length of the assessment process,

- **Stage 1** – should be completed in 60 days, the average time in ALW was 105 days, lower than the London average of 125 days
- **Stage 2** – should be completed in 121 days, the average time in ALW was 154 days, also inside the London average of 165 days.

Assessments take longer than expected for a variety of reasons, in Stage 1 delays are usually due to the completion of statutory checks, medicals and DBS (criminal records) are most likely to be subject to delay. The detailed assessment at Stage 2 can be affected due to the applicant's personal circumstances. National data confirms that no region is meeting the expected timescales for either stage.

Examples of Practice development in 2021/22

Early permanence

All ALW adopters in assessment are encouraged to consider Early Permanence, additional training and support is offered to those who wish to proceed. Increasing the numbers of children placed in Early Permanence arrangements is a development priority regionally and nationally. London has the lowest rate of Early Permanence placements in the country, just under 5% compared to 33% in some areas of the country. A development project for the whole London region, funded by the DfE has just begun to enhance training and support in this area of practice.

ALW have facilitated 4 Early Permanence workshops for social workers across the 4 partner LA's, 43 social workers have attended, feedback has been positive and social workers and managers are considering Early Permanence more often

University of East Anglia Moving to Adoption practice model

ALW has fully embraced the messages and learning following training on this model, it has changed the way introductions for children moving to their new family. Emphasis is placed on taking time to build relationships between the adults before formal introductions start. The process slows down introductions but allows meaningful relationships to be established that are more likely to endure for the benefit of the child. Feedback on the model helps the process to be adapted and overall, the outcomes for children have been positive.

Special Guardianship Support

Peer support services have developed further this year, a special guardian co-facilitates a monthly support group, in addition, a peer support initiative of informal meetings and "chill & chat" sessions are also coordinated and facilitated by the same special guardian. A special guardianship forum has met for the first time, this was attended by various guest speakers including a director of one of the partner LA's. The forum will meet quarterly and is co-chaired by the special guardian and head of service, the purpose is to enable direct dialogue between special guardians and representatives of the service and to influence policy and practice.

The special guardian who gives her time so generously, also sits on a national steering group looking at services and support for special guardians.

Kinship

ALW has commissioned a service from Kinship, a national charity (formerly known as Grandparents Plus) the service offers membership to all families living in any of the 4 ALW partner authorities who are caring for a child in a “kinship” arrangement regardless of the legal status of the arrangement. In addition, a more specialist level of service is also included in the contract that offers direct more intense support to 40 families a year.

Team Managers from each partner LA meet regularly with ALW managers to ensure that the service is supporting the most vulnerable families.

6. Adopt London Collaboration



[Adopt London website link](#)

A key strength of the Adopt London partnership is the scale of opportunity that 24 boroughs forming the 4 RAAs can bring to developing practice across London and the ability to contribute to influencing and shaping the national agenda.

The 4 Heads of Service form a strong leadership team who all are part of the national RAA leaders network whose focus is to implement the National Adoption Strategy and work together to raise standards nationally.

An Executive Advisory Board comprising of the 4 RAA host directors provides governance and strategic support to the Adopt London agenda and delivery plan, this group meet quarterly and is chaired by one of the partner local authority's DCS. A Partnership document is being drafted to formalise the partnership arrangements and ensure the appropriate governance of Adopt London projects and the shared website, AdoptLondon.org.uk, social media and other projects.

At the heart of Adopt London is the premise that a pooled and dedicated service will deliver better outcomes through:

- Stronger leadership focusing on adoption
- Pooled resources and joint commissioning
- Collaboration with the voluntary adoptions agencies (VAAs) and other provider services
- Developing resilient and flexible services
- A dedicated focus on best practice and implementing the learning of what works best for adopted children, adopters and those affected by adoption

7. Adopt London Marketing strategy

The development of the Adopt London website, as well as coordination and collaboration between the marketing leads in each RAA to establish a recognised and consistent Adopt London brand across the 24 LAs has been a key benefit of the partnership and demonstrates the value of what can be achieved in the future.

A shared marketing & communications team continue to develop the Adopt London website, this is currently transferring to another website provider. The team are growing their knowledge, experience, and expertise in the use of social media as the primary recruitment medium.

Additional functionality is planned for the website, an online readiness tool is about to launch which will provide adopters with a range of resources and guidance to help them decide if it is the right time for them to pursue their interest in adoption.

The team commissioned a short, animated film “Our Children” to deliver a strong and positive message about London children needing an adoption placement.



8. Strategy

Our aims outline the vision and direction for Adopt London. They are:

- To become the Regional Adoption Agencies of **choice in London (with a special emphasis on the agency of choice for Black families)**
- Be child focussed in all we do: meet the individual needs of our children through focussed recruitment.
- Continue to develop the brand recognition, the strapline '**the heart of adoption in London**' sums up the essence of Adopt London and encapsulates what we stand for as a partnership. The strapline communicates our desire to be the regional adoption agencies of choice for London residents, putting London children at the heart of everything we do.
- the key messages 'Children are at the heart of what we do' and 'Celebrating London's diverse adoption community' are embedded in the content produced, use of

appropriate hashtags that target specific groups and by using diverse images that reflect the target groups ensure the content and messages are relevant and relatable

The target audience of the strategy are residents living in the Greater London region and the bordering Home Counties who are able to adopt a London child. There is a particular need to focus on targeting prospective adopters who can meet the racial, religious, and cultural needs of Black African and Black Caribbean children including those with a mixed heritage and children from all backgrounds with additional needs. All our children are unique and our work in placing our children reflects all aspects of each child's heritage.

It is very important to us that we find the right adopters who are prepared for our children. We want to grow our pool of approved adopters that we can place black children, sibling groups, and children with additional needs. In addition, we aim to increase the numbers of children placed in Early Permanence placements.

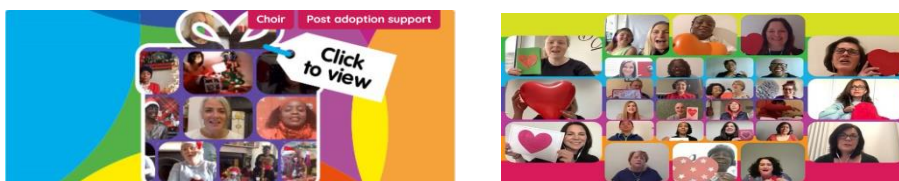
Examples of website and social media images are shown below





Adopt London Choir

Adopt London continues to support and facilitate a choir, the choir started in the Covid lockdown period but has continued supported by a small grant as it is now a valuable resource and source of fun and support for its members.



Choir videos highlight the strength and diversity of Adopt London working together for London children and families and is in itself a supportive community singing for wellbeing for its members. Other RAA's are following Adopt London's example.

Black Adoption Project



There has been a long standing and persistent gap in London between the number of black adopters and the number of black children who have a plan of adoption. This gap has a significant impact on black children, who will wait longer to be placed or may have their care plan changed because adopters cannot be found for them, data analysis shows this is 12 times more likely in London.

It is recognised that black people face more barriers to overcome than others and the disparities that exist within black adoption are stark, a coordinated and organisational focus is needed on this issue to bring about change.

A long term commitment has been made to work in partnership with Laurelle Brown Training & Consultancy on the Black Adoption Project in an attempt to look beyond short term solutions to this issue.

The first phase of the project started in the early part of 2022, understanding the issue and establishing a baseline of data and community participation was the focus for the early work, an online survey was completed by over 380 people, a number of focus groups were held. A steering group has been established, chaired by a Director of Children’s Service, membership includes, black adoptive parents, adopted adults and staff representatives.

Three staff training sessions for Adopt London staff have been delivered with over 100 people attending each session, staff development and understanding of the issues affecting black children and black adopters is recognised as a fundamental part of the project.

A summary report of the first phase has been drafted and recommendations will inform the next stage of planning and delivery.

We are Family peer support community and Adopter Voice



A strong partnership has developed with We are Family, an adoption peer support community with increasing membership across London (currently 800+). The Trustees of We are Family and Adopt London heads, meet

quarterly to plan and prioritise developments, Adopt London awards an annual grant to WAF, this provides funding towards core activities; a members hub, webinar and podcast content. The webinars have proved very popular with adopters and enables fortnightly training sessions, adopters have found this online content far more accessible than face to face training and provides timely relevant support. A podcast series was launched in 2021/22 and the third season of this series will be broadcast in the Autumn.

The strength of this partnership is valued by all, adopters are able to share issues and concerns that are directly relevant, Adopt London heads of service benefit from hearing the voice of adopters and together an opportunity to respond in a timely way by planning training via the webinar series.

Partnerships with Voluntary adoption agencies and Adoption Support Agencies



ALW commissions a service from PAC UK which includes.

- An advice line, supporting adopted adults and birth parents’
 - Counselling services for anyone affected by Adoption

or Special Guardianship arrangements living in any of the 4 partner boroughs.



ALW commissions international assessment work from the Inter Country Adoption Centre, (IAC) this is mainly used by people wishing to adopt a child from their own country of origin or another overseas country

Partnerships between Adopt London and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA's) operating across London are positive and productive, a quarterly meeting takes place to share practice and service developments.



A feature of this collaboration was a new Lunch and Learn project started in 2021/22, by a subgroup of the Adopt London RAA VA group, funded by the ASGLB and delivered by PACT, a Voluntary Adoption agency operating in London. Up to 100 adoption social workers have attended each event on a range of adoption related subjects, this provides an opportunity for all adoption social workers from across the sector to come together, build networks and enhance their learning and development.

9. Adoption: National Strategy & RAA Leaders network



There are now 32 live Regional Adoption Agencies nationally, there is only 1 remaining County Council that is not part of a regional arrangement.

Government published the first National Adoption Strategy in July 2021, the key priorities set out included a vision that:

- Adoption is considered a positive opportunity for children of all backgrounds, and they are found loving families speedily
- Adopters are given support to understand the impact of abuse, neglect and trauma have on children and are given the support to provide sensitive and reflective parenting their children need
- The voice of Adopters and their children is at the heart of local policy decision making and delivery of services and their views demonstrably used in shaping and co-production of local services.

National funds were allocated and the first National Adopter Recruitment campaign #YouCanAdopt began in Autumn 2021 with a budget of £1 million.

Funding was also provided to formally establish the network of RAA leaders into an effective working group, a Strategic lead and a small project team were appointed to co-ordinate and drive the system improvement work to deliver the ambitions set out within the strategy.

The RAA Leaders group meet monthly to work collaboratively to provide high quality standard services across the country. A governance group and a number of working groups are responsible for coordinating activity.

The 3 strategic priorities are.

- Recruitment of Adopters
- The Journey of the Child (Care Planning)
- Adoption Support

Within each of these priority areas are working groups:

- Racial disparity - for both children waiting with a plan of adoption and also for adopters within the recruitment process
- Early Permanence – improving the number of children placed in EP arrangements and the quality of support to carers
- Opportunities to improve matching of children regionally and nationally
- Adoption support – defining a core offer of support that adopters can expect
- Adoption support dataset – work to design a common dataset that be used for to establish a benchmark of activity across all aspects of support
- Design of agreed outcome measures for evaluating therapeutic services provided using ASF funding

Funding opportunities

In March 2022, Government announced a 3 year funding allocation of £19.5 million for improving Adoption services. RAA's are invited to bid for funding for the development of regional initiatives that will further the progress of change.

Early Permanence -work has started to develop Early Permanence practice across the country, which includes a London project involving all 5 RAA's

Matching – bids are to be submitted in early July for improving matching practice, an Adopt London bid will seek funding for a matching coordinator post across London who will coordinate shared profiling events, activity days and other activities.

Adoption Support – expressions of interest in the Autumn and formal bids in the New Year are invited for 2 year funding to pilot multi-disciplinary teams.

The RAA leaders network provides

- *Mutual Peer Support*
- *Collective problem solving*
- *Leadership development*
- *Practice leadership*
- *System leadership*
- *System influencing*

10. Challenges and priorities for 2022/23

There are a number of operational challenges that will be monitored and reviewed throughout the year, these include

- Increased demand in adoption support services, 2021/22 saw a 52% increase in requests for access to records, impacting the business support team and social work teams who provide specialist counselling and support to people who wish to access their adoption records
- Increased demand and process change to managing applications to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF), each application now requires significant additional steps to comply with new system and audit requirements
- Fixed term posts need to become permanent; they are business critical to manage demand, progress on implementing an agreed funding formula with partners needs to be resolved.
- Increasing adopter approvals is essential to make the progress needed to increase the number of children placed with ALW approved adopters, reducing the reliance on inter-agency placements which will achieve a cost saving for partner LA's

There are also a number of opportunities

Development of Clinical Psychology

A decision was taken recently to increase the Clinical Psychology capacity as a pilot for 2022/23, funded through claims from the Adoption Support Fund. The two part time psychologists offer consultation to social workers, advice on transition plans for children, provide specialist training, develop resources, and also undertake some direct work with families. This resource has proved invaluable, a brief assessment and intervention model pilot is about to start that will offer an opportunity for families to have a coordinated, time limited intervention by a psychologist and social worker. Funding for this intervention can be claimed from the ASF and used to offset the additional cost of psychology hours,

It is anticipated that the pilot will prove to be financially sustainable and provide evidence that the service could be expanded further.

National funding

As set out earlier in the report, funding bids have been submitted for additional projects and posts to improve practice in.

- Early Permanence
- Matching

A bid will be submitted in the Autumn for funding to progress establishment of multi-disciplinary teams. All bids are collaborative joint bids with our Adopt London partners

In addition, an Adopt London work plan endorsed by the Executive advisory board covers

Service coordination and development

- Governance and commissioning arrangements – a new Adopt London Partnership agreement
- Strategic development including opportunities for National funding
- Operational and practice development
- The voice of adopters, adopted children, adult adoptees, and birth family members
- Marketing and communications including social media and the shared website

In order to support this work a part time project manager has been appointed. The project manager has responsibility for maintenance of the project plan as well as leading on development areas as directed by the Head of Service group.

Operational development is led by five team manager or service manager led practice groups. Currently these groups comprise:

- Recruitment and Assessment. With a focus on development of shared training and tools including Adopter Family and Friends preparation training and an improved Prospective Adopter Report format.
- Family finding Managers. With a focus on coordination of family finding in order to improve the number of placements made in Adopt London, implementing a shared Link maker group, enabling instant access across all 4 RAAS.
- Family finding practitioners. With a focus on practice improvement, developing of shared tools such as child friendly information booklets.
- Adoption Support Managers. With a focus on practice improvement., sharing ideas including on triage and prioritisation and have also begun to pilot a targeted pan London training offer funded through the Adoption Support Fund.
- Panel Advisors. With a focus on panel improvement and quality assurance., improving panel processes, exploration of complex challenges.

Feedback from families regarding ALW		
Dec 21	Firstly, I just wanted to say that I was so inspired by you and your colleagues for the work that you do to help children. Secondly, I thought the session was really well run and insightful and a good foundation for understanding the adoption process and the presentation looked great!	Email received following Info Session
March 22	<i>Email following notification of Panel approval as an adopter: Thank you so much. This is wonderful news to have come on my Birthday. I am so delighted by this decision. I appreciate all the hard work and support from your team. It has been such a positive experience, and I can't thank everyone enough for that. I am so looking forward to being matched with my child. Have a great day.</i>	Adopter
Mar 22	Fantastic presentation - really helpful and loved Sharon sharing her story too. THANK YOU.	Email received following Info Session
Mar 22	Wanted to say thank you for organising and for sharing all your experiences. It's so encouraging to be in a room of lgbt adoptive parents and also see so many other lgbt+ prospective parents too. Thank you!	Feedback following Meet The Adopter LGBT event
March 2022	Many thanks for organising the funding for continued support. We're very grateful	Support
March 2022	ALW has been incredibly supportive.	Support
March 2022	ALW have always provided superb support to us as a family even through the pandemic.	Support
Feb 22	<p>This was my first event and it was so helpful and informative, thank you!" -PACT</p> <p>Thank you very much Margaret and colleagues- this was my first session- Excellent Event! Well organised and good opportunities to network!" -IAC</p> <p>Just to say that the profiling event today went off really very well It would have been impossible to do so without the help from Margaret and Vanessa . Jackie Power from ALE and Kirsty from ALN commented after the session that it was the best one we have had so far We have had 4 last year.</p>	Feedback from Adoption Agencies following a Family Finding event organised and hosted by ALW

	<p>Margaret facilitated the session effortlessly with her usual pleasant self and the other RAA representatives said that they are amazed at the Vanessa's commitment and contribution in running this and expressed that they do not have such level of support from their support staff so feel very fortunate to have this.</p>	
Feb 2022	<p>We are very grateful for the assistance we have received from ALW so far. It has been a great source of support to us, especially through the recent transition from primary to secondary school. I think we would have really struggled over the last 12 months without the help and support provided.</p>	Support
Jan 21	<p>We just wanted to say a huge thank you for a very informative session. It was really useful and honest</p>	Email received following Info Session
January 2022	<p>We have really appreciated the ALW's support which has been invaluable in helping us provide therapy for our family.</p>	Support
Jan 2022	<p>Sarah Rayner has also been a pillar of support to the whole family. Without her intervention, things would not have progressed the way it has, so we are very much indebted to Sarah too.</p>	Support
Jan 2022	<p>We have found ALW to be available and quick to respond to any help. ALW have continued to be supportive and help us access funding to help support our adopted child and us as a family.</p>	Support
Jan 2022	<p>We have been very pleased with the support and care given to us. Without it, I doubt if we would have been able to continue family life in the way are doing.</p>	Support
Nov 2021	<p>"We chose ALW as we attended Information Sessions earlier this year with Action for Children, Coram and First for Adoption and felt most comfortable with ALW, who were the most helpful, friendly, knowledgeable and approachable.</p> <p>In the other information sessions the social workers didn't seem as enthusiastic or knowledgeable. ALW's was definitely the best session – it was well organised, the presenters came across well, and they even went to the effort of having a previous adopter join the call, which none of the other agencies did at their information sessions. We missed the ALS information session and so had a one to one conversation with ALS which was reasonable, but we still prefer ALW"</p>	Adoptive Enquiry

Oct 2021	<p>Sarah, thank you SO MUCH! You have been AMAZING!!!</p> <p>We really appreciate the help and support that you have given to our family.</p> <p>It is so incredible that, years after the adoptions, we have the continued to receive the same level of care that we had during both adoptions.</p>	Support
July 2021	<p>I just spoke to a parent who Vanessa took a call from on the helpline on Friday and she commented on how lovely Vanessa was. She said that she expected to be passed around and that it would be difficult to get help, but actually she was overwhelmed by how welcoming and supportive Vanessa was on that initial call.</p>	Birth Parent
May 2021	<p>S, an adopted adult phoned on Friday having received a call from someone stating she was relative of her birth mother and that her birth mother was dying and desperately wanted “forgiveness” for having had a child adopted. Munaza immediately advised S what she needed to do and the person at the GRO also pulled out the stops to get the paperwork send and delivered to Ealing yesterday. S has been in contact yesterday with S and will be meeting virtually with her today as this is a legal requirement and help her to think through this unexpected situation</p> <p>Subject: Re: Note for the social worker</p> <p>Thank you so much Munaza</p> <p>I am so impressed with your service and more importantly I am incredibly grateful with the speed, professionalism and kindness with which you helped me today.</p> <p>Thank you for going the extra mile for me today.</p>	Adopted Adult

Debbie Gabriel
Head of Service
July 2022