

 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 19 April 2022
	Report from Adopt London West, Regional Adoption Agency
Brent Adoption Report Six Monthly Report: 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2022	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
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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 October 2021 – 31st March 2022
- 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 were provided by Brent; the rest of this report includes the progress and activity of Adopt London West.

1.2 This is the fifth 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. 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, which 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 work streams 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 Adoption 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 performance against the two most significant indicators has weakened against the A1 indicator, 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 a 9% increase on the previous reporting period (420 days) 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): 185 days. This is a 9% increase on the previous reporting period (169 days) which is higher than the 2017-20 national average of 175 days but compares favourably to the statistical neighbour average of 205.

5.1.2 It is important to note that the above indicators have 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 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.

6.0 Child related data

6.1 There have been 3 Adoption Orders granted during this reporting period.

6.2 There are currently 3 adoption applications in the Court process, the remaining children have been placed more recently; therefore, adoption applications are likely to be made for these children in 2022-23.

6.3 There are currently 12 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 for adoption.
- One child has been placed in an Early Permanence placement and will be matched with their new family within the next month.
- Five of the eight children above have been placed with ALW approved adopters.
- Four children are yet to be formally matched with a family but links are currently being explored for 3 of them and 1 will move to their sibling's adopters shortly.
- There are currently no other children who are likely to have a plan of adoption confirmed.

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. One child is currently in an Early Permanence placement, the Adoption Order on another child who was placed in an Early Permanence placement in August 2021 was granted in December, considerably sooner than is usual. This demonstrates the positive outcomes 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.

ALW and our Adopt London partners are working to increase the numbers of Early Permanence placements made across London ensuring specialist training and support is offered to those adopters who are willing to consider early placements. A successful funding bid has been approved to develop Early Permanence practice in London, a project lead has been appointed to progress this work.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

7.1 ALW approved 14 Adopter households in the period 1st Oct 2021 – 31st Mar 2022, and a total of 21 households in the full reporting year 2021/22. This is a slight increase on the numbers approved in 2020/21. Ambitious targets have been set to approve 30 Adopter households in 2022/23, it is hoped that funding for additional temporary posts will be made permanent to support achieving this target.

47% of adopters approved during this reporting period are from Black or Mixed ethnicity communities and 28% identify as LGBT.

7.2 There are currently 40 ALW approved adopters: 17 of whom already have a child placed with them, 16 are in the active family finding stage (7 of which were approved within the last month), and 2 families are matched/linked to child/ren. 4 families are on hold due to their personal circumstances.

7.3 During this reporting period, (Oct 21 – Mar 22) the service received 275 general enquiries about adoption compared to 249 in the same period last year.

7.4 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.

7.5 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.

7.6 There are currently 16 families in the formal stages of assessment, 9 in Stage 1 and 7 in Stage 2. 21 families have been approved in 2021/22.

8.0 Adoption and Special Guardianship Support

8.1 Throughout the assessment and post approval process of searching for the right child to join their family, prospective adopters are informed about support services available to them and are encouraged and supported to attend the Foundations for Attachment training course, a course that offers adopters insight and strategies to meet the needs of children who are likely to have experienced developmental trauma.

8.2 An internal mentoring scheme is in place to offer support to any new adopters, or those who may need some additional empathic support. ALW have a contract with Adopter Hub, an online support forum and adopter community run by voluntary adoption agency, PACT that provides training and resources to adopters. In addition, a peer support organisation We are Family organise frequent training events and social groups. ALW have a contract for services delivered by PAC-UK that offer sensitive and independent therapeutic support.

8.3 ALW runs an 'education support group', which meets six times a year. The group is co-facilitated by an Educational Psychologist and an ALW Social worker and provides a forum for families to receive support and guidance on how to engage with their child's school and a range of education related issues.

Support group topics in this period have been:

- 16/11/21 – Home/School partnerships – attended by 22 households, (6 Brent families)
- Friendships – attended by 11 households (3 Brent families)
- Trauma aware Schools – attended by 18 households (3 Brent families)

8.4 In addition, adopters receive regular newsletters that outline relevant research, learning materials, advice, and tools to support parenting strategies as well as training opportunities, seminars, and specialist support groups. There are also adoption related evening seminars that take place at least 4 times a year.

8.5 As part of Adopt London's partnership with We are Family (WAF) an Adopter led peer support organisation; a comprehensive webinar programme is delivered, "WAF Talks" there are at least two webinars a month, all of which are recorded and available "on demand" and form an online library of resources for families to access at their convenience.

8.6 In addition, a new podcast series "**Adoption Shared**" was released between October – December 2021, the concept for the series is a combination of authentic adopter voices and professional voice content, the content is adopter led, based on requests and suggestions from members so directly relevant and responsive to identified needs. The series is hosted by an adopter who is also an actor.

Series 1

- Episode 1 – Choosing a Secondary School for your Adopted Child.
- Episode 2 – Life as a Single Adopter of Two Children.
- Episode 3 – Choosing a Primary School for your Adopted Child.
- Episode 4 – Contact with your Adopted Child's Birth Family.
- Episode 5 – Strategies for Managing Big feelings at Christmas and beyond.
- Episode 6 – Five Questions

Episode 1 featured the 2 facilitators' of ALW's Education support group– Dr Gabrielle Pelter (Educational Psychologist) & Social Worker Jane Pickerden, this episode has been downloaded more than 250 times, evidencing the

extended potential and reach of content that can be accessed virtually, the overall number of downloads for the series is 1,150 to date.

Series 2 - is currently in development with some sessions already recorded and is likely to be launched in April/May, the topics are,

- Supporting your Adopted Child (recorded)
- Adopting as a parent in a same sex couple
- Executive Functioning (in development)
- Adopting an older child as a single adopter(recorded)
- Embracing Fear (recorded)
- Child to Parent Violence (NVR)

Series 3 - funding has just been agreed and will form part of the Adopt London Black Adoption Project and will coincide with Black History Month in October 2022, the series will focus on the experiences and voices of Black Adopters

8.7 Special Guardianship Support

ALW remains the only Adopt London region that has Special Guardianship support as part of the core offer.

Following the presentation to Corporate Parenting Committee in October 2021, the offer to Special Guardians in ALW has developed further. The Brent Special Guardian, who co-facilitates the ALW support group has extended her offer to include peer support, an informal network of “chill & chat” sessions that is likely to appeal to those families who favour a more informal approach. This peer support network is supported by ALW with a small financial grant; however, the groups are to be independent and autonomous.

In addition, the first meeting of a planned forum is scheduled for the end of April, which will be an opportunity for Special guardians to meet with senior staff of partner LAs to present issues of concern and to influence practice developments. Brent’s Special Guardian has a clear vision to inspire and engage other special guardians and work towards a champion from each of the 4 partner LAs, the ambition is that this group of champions will work in partnership with ALW staff to inform and influence practice development.

The National organisation “Kinship” (formerly Grandparents Plus), provides advocacy, peer support and expert advice and information to Special Guardians. ALW’s Partnership Board has given agreement to a contract with Kinship for 2022/23 to provide membership services and direct support to some families regardless of the legal status of the family’s kinship arrangement.

It is widely recognised that many children who cease being looked after by the Local Authority to live within their extended family or kinship network benefit from improved outcomes. Therefore, it is essential that the Special Guardians who care for them are offered comprehensive, appropriate support that is often different to that needed by Adopters.

9.0 Feedback on quality of service

9.1 Some examples of recent feedback on the quality of the service offered by ALW, the feedback relates to; information sessions, a Meet the Adopter LGBT event, family finding profiling event, approval as adopters, adoption support services, ASF applications for therapy funding.

November 2021

“We chose ALW as we attended Information Sessions earlier this year with (other agencies) and felt most comfortable with ALW, who were the most helpful, friendly, knowledgeable and approachable. ALW’s Information Session 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.”

December 2021

“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!”

January 2022

“We just wanted to say a huge thank you for a very informative session. It was really useful and honest”

February 2022

Feedback from Adopt London East colleagues, following a family finding event hosted by ALW

“J fed back how fantastic the event was ALE have three potential links as a result of the event. J has been involved in all the events across London and she said that she thought that the one ALW ran had been seamless”.

“Thank you very much ALW colleagues- this was my first session- Excellent Event! Well organised and good opportunities to network!”

March 2022:

“Fantastic presentation - really helpful and loved S sharing her story too. THANK YOU”.

Feedback following Meet the Adopters LGBT event

“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!”

Email following notification of 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”.

9.2 People using the helpline and Adoption Support services

“Thank you very much for your email. And a big thank you to you for helping secure the funding for therapy. It is a godsend, and essential for their well-being, and we sincerely appreciate that they are able to have this therapeutic intervention. Thank you for everything you have done. Kind regards,”

“Thank you SO MUCH! You have been AMAZING!!! We really appreciate the help and support that you have given to our family. It is so incredible that, years after the adoptions, we have continued to receive the same level of care that we had during both adoptions. Yours gratefully (redacted)”

10.0 Casework

10.1 Currently ALW is supporting 51 Brent families - 14 are receiving a Social Work service and 37 are currently receiving an ASF therapeutic service that is under review.

10.2 There are 77 contact cases open relating to Brent families - 11 direct contact arrangements and 66 active letterbox exchanges.

10.3 There have been 47 requests for access to records in relation to Brent records, out of a total number of 76 requests received by ALW during this period.

11.0 Adoption Support Fund

11.1 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.

11.2 58 applications have been made to the ASF on behalf of Brent families in this reporting year and a total of £143,349 of funding for therapeutic services received for these families.

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



12.0 Adopt London

12.1 ALW is one of 4 Regional Adoption Agencies that make up “Adopt London”, the wider collaboration of 23 boroughs that form Adopt London:

- **Adopt London North:** a partnership between Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, and Islington, hosted by Islington.
- **Adopt London South:** a partnership between, Achieving for Children (Richmond and Kingston) Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Wandsworth, Southwark, and Sutton, hosted by Southwark.
- **Adopt London East:** a partnership between Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Newham, and Tower Hamlets, hosted by Havering; and
- **Adopt London West:** a partnership between Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hounslow, hosted by Ealing.

12.2 In order to ensure the best possible services for children and families across London, Adopt London West collaborates closely with the other 3 Adopt London regions. A key priority for Adopt London will continue to be to maximize the opportunities and efficiencies across shared priority areas.

12.3 Key priorities/activities for Adopt London in the next six months include:

12.3.1 Adopter Recruitment

12.3.1.1 The recruitment of adopters is now a shared activity across the Adopt London partnership of the 4 RAAs, a marketing and communications strategy provides the framework for all public facing recruitment efforts. A strapline “the heart of adoption in London” encapsulates the partnership and communicates our vision of being the regional adoption agencies of choice for London residents, putting London children at the heart of everything we do.

12.3.1.2 We are committed to recruiting adopters who understand the needs of our children, our preparation and training of adopters encourages them to parent therapeutically. There is a particular focus on targeting prospective adopters who can meet the racial, religious, and cultural needs of our black children.

12.3.1.3 Our key messages represent our focus on children, the strength of the Adopt London partnership, the scope of our service provision and the inclusivity of our brand. These are incorporated in all our marketing activity, on our website, and printed materials, a comprehensive social media

strategy ensures that content is posted each week that reflects the messages below.

- Children are at the heart of what we do
- Experts in adoption
- Supporting you throughout your adoption journey
- Everybody is welcome
- Celebrating London's diverse adoption community.

12.3.1.4 The COVID pandemic changed the way we recruit new adopters and support our approved adopters. The pandemic also meant fewer opportunities for us to meet adopters in person, so we had to focus on how we could consistently reach adopters in new and innovative ways by pivoting to a digital approach.

12.3.1.5 We continue to fund the [Adopt London virtual Choir](#) as a means of families keeping in touch and having some fun, this was initially a Covid response initiative but has been so successful in becoming a peer support community it is now considered a core element of our support offer.

Season's Greetings

from everyone at Adopt London



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www.adoptlondon.org.uk

12.3.1.6 Our understanding of using a digital approach and the “soft advertising” potential of promoting the Adopt London brand has been considerable, increasing traffic to the website, a growth in social media followers, and extending the content reach to our target audience enables us to reach more prospective adopters.

12.3.1.7 Using appropriate hashtags that target specific groups and using diverse images in content we post and publish, reflecting key adoption dates, national holidays and religious and cultural festivals ensures that our content is relevant, varied, and interesting

12.3.1.8 We will continue to build on experience to deliver a marketing and communications approach that supports

London's diverse communities accessing the publicity and advertising via different marketing channels and to establish a strong reputation as a leading provider within the adoption services marketplace.

- 12.3.1.9** A comprehensive social media plan to promote blogs and engage with a more contemporary audience using popular platforms ensures the Adopt London brand remains current and influence prospective adopters to choose one of the Adopt London regions. A shared marketing and communications strategy sets out the objectives for this work.

13.0 Adopt London Priorities

13.1 Launch of adoption readiness tool - potential adopters will be able to complete an online guided tool to help them decide if Adoption is right for them. Adoption is an extremely sensitive and private consideration, enabling families to decide if they are ready to proceed with an enquiry privately will support families to be better prepared once they start the formal process.

13.2 “Our Children” an animated film has been launched to help potential adopters understand the needs of children who require an adoption placement, to think more about their characteristics and to challenge assumptions about who the right child for them may be.

(Click on link in picture below to view the film)



The style, content and messages of the Our Children animation, fits well with the National Adoption Recruitment Strategy and Marketing Campaign which for 2022 has a focus on moving from a public message of #YouCanAdopt to

#CanyouAdopt, the emphasis will be an appeal to consider the needs of children who need Adoption and the recruitment of families who can meet those needs and away from a more general message that anyone can adopt, an essential shift in emphasis.

14.0 Adopt London, Black Adoption Project



An innovative and ambitious project has been launched by the Adopt London partnership. A long standing and persistent gap exists between the number of black adopters and the number of black children for whom an adoption plan is agreed. Adopt London recognises and acknowledges this inequality and will make every effort to remove obstacles and provide support to both adopters and children.

The intention is that this will be a long- term project that evolves as new priorities and objectives emerge.

Phase 1

- **Data analysis**
- **Survey**
- **Establish Steering Group**

Data analysis – to establish a baseline position, Coram have been commissioned to provide specific details on black children and adopters from existing ASGLB data. Data from 2016/17 - 2020/21 has been used to confirm the position over the last 5 years, 19.2% of children placed by Adopt London LAs in this period were from black or dual black ethnic background compared to 5.3% nationally. Black children in Adopt London were 12 times more likely to have their care plan changed from Adoption because no adopters could be identified for them as opposed to a change in their needs, nationally it is 3 times more likely. This provides stark evidence of the need and case for change.

Survey - a survey was launched on 21st March seeking views and experiences of Black families, the purpose of the survey is to better understand the perceptions and life experiences of black families in and around London, so that we might attract more of them to consider adoption.



The survey is for anyone who may have adopted a child, may be going through an adoption assessment at this time, or may have made an adoption enquiry in the past with any adoption agency and either decided not to progress or was not offered an assessment. It is also for those who may have never considered adoption previously. The aim is to achieve 300 responses, focus groups with different groups will then be held to discuss further messages from the survey to inform the

next stage of the project.

Steering Group - A steering group will provide governance to the project and will be chaired by one of the Adopt London partner LAs DCS. Membership will include adopted adults, adopters, Adopt London staff and other interested parties with experience of adoption. A working group of WAF members will act as a consultation and reference group to the steering committee, a representative from WAF will be part of the steering group.

14.1 Further Development of the partnership with WAF (We are Family)

The popular and successful Webinar programme of online training and support to Adopters will continue and a further series of Podcasts "Adoption Shared" will be launched in April/May following the success of Season 1, referred to earlier in this report.



The partnership with WAF enables Adopt London to hear directly from Adopters what services are helpful to them, and to explore with them the most useful mediums to offer online/virtual support which has proven to be much more accessible to Adopters than more traditional face to face services.

WAF have increased their membership offer to include prospective Adopters who are in the early stages of assessment, the webinar programme and other resources will enable adopters to be better prepared for the likely challenges they may face when a child joins their family. Crucially it will also provide peer support from more experienced adopters.

In addition, Adopt London staff will have access to the WAF website and resources from April 2022, this will enable staff to offer more specific guidance on resources that may support an individual family.

A partnership statement from Adopt London supports further funding bids that WAF wish to submit, a sustainable business and funding model for the ongoing partnership is also now agreed.

14.2 Adopt London Partnership Agreement

As the potential for further development of the Adopt London partnership and collaboration activity is understood by the four Heads of Service and Executive Board, a decision has been taken to enter into a formal partnership agreement to provide a robust framework for joint projects.

Please see the [link](#) for Adopt London's website.

15.0 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Adopt London Black Adoption Project as described above in partnership with a training & consultancy organisation, the focus is specifically on the experience of black adopters within Adopt London, the aim is to co-produce a programme of work to address the disparity in the system for adopters and for black children who typically wait longer for an adoptive family. It is envisaged that this will be a medium to long term project and be fully inclusive across the Adopt London partnership.

16.0 National Adoption Strategy

16.1 Government published the first National Adoption Strategy in July 2021, a recent announcement by the Secretary of State on 3rd March 2022 reinforced an ongoing commitment to improving Adoption services and a 3-year funding announcement was made.

- Confirmation that the Adoption Support Fund will continue for a further 3 years
- £19.5 million to strengthen the work of RAAs and wider Adoption system, some of which will be ring fenced for bids to develop local practice such as the successful London bid to develop Early Permanence practice.
- Original priorities on National Recruitment, and improvements in Early Permanence practice to continue
- New priorities added to support developments in national matching, regional commissioning pilots and the creation of centres of excellence have been added.
- All development priorities will be incorporated into the national workstreams mentioned earlier in this report.

17.0 ALW Adoption Panel

17.1 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.

17.2 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.

17.3 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.

17.4 During the period under review, 8 adoption panels were held in ALW resulting in the successful approval of 7 adoptive families. The Panel recommended adoption as the care plan for 1 Brent child, 3 other children were matched with their new families during this time.

17.5 Annual training for panel members is a regulatory requirement, practice development discussions on Transracial Adoption and on the implications arising from a recent Court judgement have taken place in this review period. Training on the use of a newly developed Early Support Guide is to take place in May facilitated by Dr Mel Jarvis, Clinical Psychologist, and author of the Guide. Formal training will take place later in the year, the subject of which will be jointly agreed between ALW and panel members.

18.0 Value for Money

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:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People