

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

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 - Adopt London West Annual Report 2021/22
<b>Background Papers:</b>	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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 – 30<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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