



Corporate Parenting Committee

24 April 2023

Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People

Brent Adoption Report 6-monthly report:

1st October 2022 to 31st March 2023

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>Debbie Gabriel Head of Service, Adopt London West, Brent's Regional Adoption Agency GabrielD@ealing.gov.uk</p> <p>Elena Muller Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency Elena.Muller@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.Eboji@brent.gov.uk</p>

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 – 31st March 2023
- 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 is provided by Brent; the rest of this report includes the progress and activity of Adopt London West.

- 1.2 This is the seventh 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, 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 delivery model.

- 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, these are non-agency adoptions and often 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 and updated in July 2021, covering the 3-year period 2017-2020.

Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))

5.1.1 The non-published data for the period under review shows performance against the two most significant indicators:

- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 467.5 days. This is a 4% increase on the previous reporting period (450 days).
- **A2** (The average time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 140 days. This is a 17% decrease on the previous reporting period (169 days).

6.0 Child related data

6.1 There have been 7 Adoption Orders granted during this reporting year.

6.2 There are currently 5 adoption applications in the Court process, the remaining children have been placed more recently, therefore, applications are likely to be made for these children within the next quarter.

6.3 There are currently 15 children with an adoption plan who have not yet been adopted.

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

- Six children are placed with their new families
- Four children are subject to a Placement Order, three of these children are already matched or linked with a new family and will be moving shortly
- The remaining five children have recently had a plan of Adoption agreed by Brent, but no Court order has yet been granted.

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. Three of the children placed this year have been placed in Early Permanence placements, allowing the children to spend less time in foster care and begin building attachments to their new families.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

7.1 20 Adopter households have been approved in 2022/23

25% of the Adopters approved this year are from a Black, Asian or mixed black ethnicity and 15% 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: 14 of whom already have a child placed with them, 15 are in the active family finding stage and 3 families are matched/linked to child/ren. 5 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 18 families in the formal stages of assessment, 10 in Stage 1 and 8 in Stage 2.

8.0 Casework

- 8.1 ALW is currently offering a service to 182 Brent children, families or individuals who are accessing their adoption records – 28 children are allocated to a social worker for family finding, 23 are receiving a Social Work service, 31 are currently receiving an ASF therapeutic service that is under review, and 19 individuals are accessing adoption records.
- 8.2 There are 81 contact cases open relating to Brent families - 13 direct contact arrangements and 68 active letterbox exchanges.
- 8.3 There have been 117 requests for access to records in relation to Brent records, out of a total number of 210 requests received by ALW during 2022/23. This represents 56% of all requests, this remains a consistently busy area of work, however, significant progress has been made through effective partnership working to clear a waiting list of requests.

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.

65 applications have been made to the ASF on behalf of Brent families in this reporting year and a total of £158,175 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, 20 new Adopter households have been approved in 2022/23 and 5 Brent children have been formerly matched with

their new families by the Agency following positive recommendations from the Adoption panel.

- 10.5 Annual training for panel members is a regulatory requirement, a series of practice development discussions have taken place throughout the year with panel members, and all attended Safeguarding training on February 10th 2023.

11.0 ALW practice updates

Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

The Ofsted inspection took place in February 2023 and found the services to children who leave care to adoption or special guardianship to be good. The report makes the following comments.

“A small number of children leave care and achieve timely permanence through special guardianship and adoption. There is good use of foster to adopt arrangements that enable children to live with their forever families at the earliest opportunity. Special Guardians receive bespoke support, including financial support to help them look after children and give them the permanence of a family away from the care system”.

“Adopters benefit from good quality assessments and training through the regional adoption agency, Adopt London West. Children's plans for adoption are timely and supported by cohesive and effective partnership that work well to achieve permanence through adoption.....”

October 2022 half term Drama workshop

As part of ALW's support offer to families, during the Oct half-term break, 10 young people took part in a 4 day drama workshop facilitated by ALW Social Workers and an independent drama therapist, funded by the Adoption Support Fund. The workshop was open to 11-13 years old young people in both Special Guardianship and adoptive families.

The 10 young people, aged 11-13 years of age, started the week looking at setting the scene, building characters and roles, and creating stories, progressing to directing. The children worked together, supporting each other to bring one of their stories to life, which was wonderful to see. It was impressive that all 10 children came on the first day and continued to come for each of the 4 days.

After just 4 days we could see that they all felt more comfortable in themselves, with each other, and with the staff, and their friendships were becoming more solid. From some parental feedback, we know that some of the young people want to stay in touch, which is an indicator of enjoying each other's company.

A celebration evening was held in November, all of the young people attended as did their parents and special guardians, the children enjoyed pizza's and watching the edited film of the workshop they each received certificates recognising their individual contributions and celebrating their talent.

After first day of workshop S's Mum and she said she had a great day yesterday and was really keen to come back today. Mom said that S is amazing and is so proud of her.

(Families' feedback on the drama workshop)

Thank you all for your hard work for the drama workshop last week and for the regular feedback from ALW. R really enjoyed it and her confidence was definitely boosted. I know she has already exchanged messages with couple of the other attendees and will look forward to the 25th.

(Families' feedback on the drama workshop)

Drama Therapist's feedback to the social workers who co-facilitated.

I think it was the most amazing week that the young people seemed to get so much from, and I really wanted to thank you for your incredible support.

From the conception of the idea a few months ago, to the ongoing organisation of the celebration follow up session, it has been an absolute pleasure to be involved in a project that has been run so smoothly, and with such enthusiasm. I am so grateful to you and your team for supporting the therapeutic work in such a solid and yet subtle and understated way. It makes such a huge difference.

All of the interactions I was witness to, were so astute, well timed and completely relevant to the situation. I am certain that the young people will hold these personal connections and newly formed relationships firmly and with real meaning feeling the benefit of them for many weeks/months to come.

As a result of the success of the workshop, another workshop is being planned for May half-term.

12.0 Clinical Psychology

Clinical Psychology in Adopt London West

The clinical psychology offer embeds two NHS employed clinical psychologists (equivalent to 1.0 WTE) alongside Adopt London West's social care services which encompasses the recruitment of adopters, family finding and support services for adoptive and special guardian families in Ealing, Hounslow, Brent, and Hammersmith & Fulham.

Clinical Psychology Provision

This is a Tier 2 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS); the service offers a range of provision to both social work staff and adopted/special guardian families. Below includes an overview of the clinical psychology provision currently:

- Psychology consultation with social workers
- Supporting transitions from foster-carer to adoptive families
- Reflective practice for the recruitment and family finding social work team
- Supporting the team manager/consultant practitioner to hold and maintain the structure for 'group supervision' for the support team
- Training and workshops for staff
- Preparations groups for prospective adopters
- The development of practice guides
- Direct work with children, young people, and families (*funded via the Adoption Support Fund*); this includes:
 - i. *Assessment and Formulation model*; a four-session clinical psychology assessment (with an additional review appointment after a written report has been provided to the family) for adopted and special guardian families.
 - ii. *Foundations for Attachment*; a Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) informed programme, for those parenting children who have relationship difficulties, especially children who have experienced attachment difficulties, trauma, loss and/or early separation in their life. This is a nine-week programme and we approximately run four groups a year
 - iii. *Other Therapeutic Interventions*: The range of direct interventions include Dyadic Developmental Practice/ Parenting/ Psychotherapy (DDP); Narrative therapy; Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT); Mentalisation based approaches; Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) Skills; Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR); Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT); and

Compassion Focussed Therapy (CFT). These interventions are funded through the Adoption Support Fund from the child/young person's intervention grant.

Case Study example of Clinical Psychologists support to a family

D, aged three years, was referred to the Clinical Psychology service within Adopt London West following the adoptive parents sharing concerns with their social worker in relation to some of D's behaviours and requesting support in understanding and responding to them. Her parent's described their caring relationship to be 'intense'; D often struggled to play and explore independently and remained preoccupied with remaining close to them. D was also rejecting in her relationship with her adoptive father.

The clinical psychology assessment was four sessions and involved a comprehensive account of the family's strengths, presenting needs and parenting experiences. The parent's described strengths of family stability, commitment and D becoming more open to their attempts of physical comfort. They identified parenting challenges of intense connection seeking, control, and hypervigilance. Within the sessions together, there was an emphasis on co-developing a shared understanding of D's needs and the parenting challenges they were experiencing. We understood D's connection seeking as a communication of need, and in response to this the necessity to provide D with attachment experiences that address missed experiences and supports trust in her parent's availability, whilst also holding in mind the impact this has on them as parents.

Considering the needs identified and the shared understanding that was co-developed, therapeutic parenting values were discussed to further strengthen the parent-child relationship and D's experience of safety and security. Some of the recommendations included dedicated and planned attachment time with D, as well as offering preventative connection prior to key moments of separation. We also thought about embodying playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy within their way of being with D; and the value of naming and storying her emotions and experiences to support D in mean-making her inner world. The recommendations also recognised the need for adults to be consciously aware of their non-verbal communication and provide storytelling of their emotional world to lessen any worries of rejection or the 'threat-lens' in which D views their interactions with her. Considerations were also given to her parent's noticing when there may be a wrestle for control within their relationship and how they may respond to this.

It has now been agreed to add an additional Clinical Psychology post to enhance the clinical offer and increase the number of families that can be offered a service, this post will be funded by claims made to the Adoption Support Fund at no additional costs to the partner Local Authorities.

13.0 Adopt London Black Adoption Project

As a reminder, the project aims to explore the long standing and persistent challenges recruiting sufficient black adopters for those children with a plan of adoption and the impact on black children.



The initial research phase focussed on data analysis, an online survey and focus groups. The purpose was to gain a better understanding of adoption trends in the Adopt London region and the direct experience of black children, adopters and communities to inform the co creation of a project strategy and theory of change.

In late Autumn 2022, a series of meetings took place with academics to gain support and engagement in the project and to explore funding opportunities. Two theory of change workshops took place in February and March, attended by Cllr Collymore and Cllr Gbajumo, all involved in the project are extremely grateful and appreciative of Brent elected members support to the project. A summary of the phase 1 report will be ready for circulation in early May.

14.0 Feedback - Some examples of feedback received in the period October 2022 to March 2023:

Brent residents who attended information sessions for prospective adopters

"I've been to quite a few information sessions and this one was the best; it was so good! It was so clear and informative and helped us confirm that we definitely do want to move agency".

"I was so impressed with the information session you organised, so I would love to see if we could start the adoption process with you - would this be a possibility?"

"Thank you so much for the fantastic session last week and for sending over the below information".

A couple at the beginning of their Adoption journey with some complexities in their history

"Many thanks for getting back to us so quickly, it has been on our minds alot since we last spoke so having that quick response is much appreciated.

Thank you both for carefully considering moving us forward and we will look out for the form and return it as soon as we get it. I am more than happy to provide those contacts to support our reference.

Thank you also for making us aware that it is highly likely that it will be brought up throughout the process and preparing me for potential triggers. Many thanks"

Brent residents approved as Adopters, December 22

"From the first contact with Adopt London West during the online information session, we felt trusted and listened to. The warmth and quality of the support was constant throughout the preparation process, both during the first home visit and during the interviews with Hana. The preparation courses were very rich for us, both in terms of the encounters we were able to make, the wealth of content and resources we discovered, and which gave us food for thought, and the availability and open-mindedness of the team. If the evaluation was a demanding process insofar as it questioned our motivation, our identity, and our history, it was above all a driving force for us to deepen our reflection and also our reflective view of ourselves as individuals and as a couple."

Adopters who live in Brent who have a Brent child placed.

"We are grateful for your support throughout the whole process, worth mentioning are:

- your help in getting ... a place in the nursery,*
- proactively supporting us on the final steps on the adoption - help with filling in required documents for a matching panel and a court hearing.*

Your availability, support and advice have been invaluable. I felt that you have done everything you could to make our adoption journey as smooth as possible and as quick as it can possibly be in the given circumstances.

re the 9-week Foundations for Attachment course we just finished on Monday: we found it valuable, educative, and great opportunity to reflect on our parenting style as well as the style in which we were parented.

It was a great opportunity to not only learn more from ALW specialists, but at the same time a great opportunity to hear from others about their parenting challenges. ALW employees were professional, understanding, and knowledgeable. I am glad we had an opportunity to take part in this course so early on our adoption journey."

Adopters using the ALW contact service.

"I am continuing to get help and support. ALW have helped tremendously since we have been in contact with them, once we were provided with ALW's details, they have been really really, good and I am so happy I have access to them in terms of contact arrangements for our daughter, and the annual letterbox agreement. Thank you very much ALW, for everything thus far."

"First to say, I am happy because of giving me this opportunity to take care of my niece baby and to reach out to me. Second, we thank all the supporters for taking care of us as we are in Kenya, to have contact with ALW, who emailed me to know which supports I needed, and I say thanks for everything. ALW and the ALW Support Team have been really good, if we had access to ALW/ALW Support Team earlier I am sure we would have saved ourselves a lot of stress!!! ALW has suggested various training courses for us as well as informing us how she will be managing the letterbox agreement between us and birth parents. We feel at ease knowing ALW is doing this."

Adopted adults who requested access to their records held by Brent.

"Once again thank you for your time and effort in solving the mystery of who Mum's father was. Although we don't have a picture of him it is wonderful to finally know his name and after some further research a little more about his extended family. I hope you find this little update interesting, knowing the important part you played in helping Mum and I connect the dots and finally put to rest the mystery."

"She was very grateful for the details you provided and as you had said found the original photograph of her very precious – it is the earliest photo of her as a baby she had ever seen."

Another adopted adult, now 43 who was removed from his mother's care as a young child and placed for Adoption in the 1980's gave comprehensive feedback on how important accessing his records was to him and how the social worker supporting him helped him to make sense of his very difficult story

"I would just like to say a big thank you to every single person that ever helped care for me. You all went the extra mile in every way. What really shines through in the reports is the level of care, compassion, perseverance, and resources.

Everything from washing my clothes to helping me to learn new words and the speech therapy. The level of support from the details to the bigger picture of trying so hard to help my Mum to develop fundamental skills in effort to look after me. The sheer amount of hard work and dedication from everyone makes me eternally grateful. You collectively saved my life literally. I wouldn't be living the good life I am living now if social workers had not intervened. You kept me safe and placed me for adoption. Social workers deserve a good reputation."

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:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People