

	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee 16 October 2023</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</p>
	<p align="center">Lead Cabinet Member: Cllr Gwen Grahl</p>
<p>Brent Adoption Report 6-monthly report: 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023</p>	
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
List of Appendices:	Appendix 1 - ALW Annual Report 2022-2023
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	<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> <p>Palvinder Kudhail Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Executive Summary

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

- adoption performance data for the period 1 April – 30 September 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 CYP; the remainder of this report includes the progress and activity of Adopt London West. An Adopt London West annual report (2022-2023) is also available as an appendix to this report.

- 1.2 This is the eighth 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 (ALW) 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 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 Recommendation(s)

- 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 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1.1 This report sets out the provision and management of the local authority's adoption service and the developments that have taken place in the reporting period. The work of ALW contributes to the following borough priorities:

- **The Best Start in Life**
- **Prosperity and Stability**
- **A Healthier Brent**
- **Thriving Communities**

In order for care experienced young people to have the best start in life, prosperity and stability, safety, and good health they need safe, stable, permanent homes with primary carers who love them and who are able to meet their holistic needs throughout their minority. The work of ALW and the LAC and Permanency service contribute to these priorities by ensuring permanency is achieved for children and young people either via a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Adoption. Providing safe, stable, permanent, loving placements for children and young people when they are unable to remain with their parent/s, means that they will have the best life chances.

3.2 Background - Adopt London West

- 3.2.1 Adopt London West Regional Adoption Agency became operational on 1 September 2019 with a formal launch in October 2019.
- 3.2.2 A comprehensive partnership agreement forms the basis of the ongoing service arrangements. The Partnership Board on which the Strategic Director, Brent CYP is a member of continues to provide the necessary oversight to ensure that the shared service is appropriately scrutinised and supported to deliver improved outcomes for children and adopters.
- 3.2.3 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 the Department for Education (DfE) who remain interested and engaged in the RAA delivery model.
- 3.2.4 National priorities have been agreed by the network of RAA leaders and several workstreams established to progress specific elements of the National Adoption Strategy. ALW's Partnership Board and Heads of Service meetings will continue to be informed of practice changes 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 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 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](#))

5.2 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): 447 days (388 in the last 12 months). This is a 10% decrease on the previous reporting period (467.5 days).
- **A2** (The average time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 128 days. This is a 10% decrease on the previous reporting period (140 days).

6.0 Child related data

6.1 There have been 2 Adoption Orders granted during this reporting period.

6.2 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:

- 2 children are placed with their new families
- 3 children are subject to Placement Orders
- 2 children have been matched with prospective adopters
- 1 child was placed in a fostering for adoption placement
- The remaining 7 children have recently had a plan of adoption agreed by Brent, but no court order has yet been granted.

6.3 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 care proceedings have concluded. During this reporting period one

child has been placed in an Early Permanence placement, allowing the child to spend less time in foster care and begin building attachments to their new family.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

- 7.1 7 adopter households have been approved since 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023. 84% of the adopters approved in this period are of White ethnicity, whilst 14% are White & Asian. 42% identify as LGBTQ+.
- 7.2 As of 30 September 2023 there were 34 approved adopters. 9 have already had a child placed, 3 are early permanence placements, 12 are matched/linked to child/ren, and 10 are on hold.
- 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 20 families in the formal stages of assessment. 9 are in Stage 1, 11 are in Stage 2.

8.0 Casework

- 8.1 ALW is currently offering a service to 216 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 Adoption Support Fund (ASF) therapeutic service that is under review, and 25 individuals are accessing adoption records. The overall total represents an 18% increase on the previous reporting period.
- 8.2 There are 103 contact cases open relating to Brent families, 26 are direct contact arrangements and 87 are active letterbox exchanges.
- 8.3 There are 25 access to records requests currently open in relation to Brent records. 50 have been made in this reporting period so far.

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 (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 (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. 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 new adopter households have been approved and 2 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, the most recent session exploring unconscious bias was facilitated by Dr Nedah Basit and took place on the 17 July 2023.

11.0 Value for Money

11.1 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 previously not possible for LA Adoption services to offer the range of support and services that can now be delivered as a Regional Adoption Agency.

12.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

12.1 There are currently no stakeholder and ward member consultation considerations arising from this report.

13.0 Financial Considerations

13.1 There are currently no financial considerations arising from this report.

14.0 Legal Considerations

14.1 There are currently no legal considerations arising from this report.

15.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

15.1 There are currently no Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) considerations arising from this report.

16.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

16.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

17.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

17.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

18.0 Communication Considerations

18.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children and Young People