	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee 22 April 2024</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 October 2023 to 31 March 2024</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:	N/A
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, Early Help and Social Care 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 October 2023 – 31 March 2024
- 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.

- 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 Brent annual performance data for 2023-24 is not yet published and therefore performance at the 31 December 2023 was:

- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 443 days (424 in the last 12 months) compared with 447 days in 2022-23.
- **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 (119 in the last 12 months) compared with 140 days in 2022-23.
- **A20** (The average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child): 374 days (311 days in the last 12 months)

6.0 Child related data

6.1 There have been 4 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, applications are likely to be made for these children within the next quarter.

6.3 There are currently 16 children with an adoption plan who have not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:

- Five children are placed with their new families
- Ten children are subject to a Placement Order, two children will be matched with their new families in the next month and begin the process of introductions. ALW and Brent are exploring potential families for the rest of the children who are subject to a Placement Order

- One child has 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. Two 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 2023/24.

The target for recruitment of adopters remains at 30, however, this is not achievable with the current resource of 2.5 assessment social workers, this will be discussed again at the next Partnership Board meeting.

Of the 20 approved adopters, 55% are White British, 25% are of; Indian, Black Caribbean or Mixed Ethnicity, and 20% are any other White Background. 30% of these approved adopters also identify as LGBTQ.

The profile of adopters recruited in this period does broadly match the needs of Brent children with the exception of Black Adopters. 3 out of 4 Brent children placed this year have been with ALW Adopters, and there are a further 3 Brent children linked with ALW adopters who will hopefully be successfully matched and placed within the next 2/3 months. The lack of Black adopters is well documented and the reason why the Black Adoption Project was established.

7.2 There are currently 39 ALW approved adopters: 18 of whom already have a child placed with them, 12 are in the active family finding stage and 3 families are matched/linked to child/ren, another 4 families have begun the introduction stage with children. 2 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 60 days, 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. DfE Adoption and Special Guardianship (unpublished) data for 2023 shows the England average for Stage 1 is 134 days, the London average is 176 days, ALW average = 131 days.

7.4 Stage 2 should take a maximum of 4 months 182 days, this is a detailed assessment that is both reflective and analytical. In total, the comprehensive assessment process should be completed within 6 months. ASG unpublished

data for 2023 shows the England average for Stage 2 is 152 days, London average at 171 days and ALW average = 151 days.

- 7.5 There are 16 families in the formal stages of assessment. 9 are in Stage 1, and 7 in or about to commence Stage 2.

8.0 Casework

- 8.1 ALW is currently offering a service to 211 Brent children, families or individuals who are accessing their adoption records – 25 children are allocated to a social worker for family finding, 25 are receiving a Social Work service, 33 are currently receiving an ASF therapeutic service that is under review. 55 people have received an Access to Records service in this reporting year.

- 8.2 There are 128 contact cases open relating to Brent families - 27 direct contact arrangements and 101 active letterbox exchanges.

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. 69 applications have been made to the ASF on behalf of Brent families in this reporting year and a total of £173,173 of funding for therapeutic services received for these families. This is 4 more than in 2022-23.

- 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, 20 new Adopter households have been approved in 2023/24 and 4 Brent children have been formerly matched with their new families by the Agency following positive recommendations from the Adoption panel. 3 children have been placed “in-house” with ALW adopters and 1 child has been placed with adopters from another adoption agency.
- 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 London wide training on disruptions in November 2023.

11.0 ALW practice updates

Ofsted Inspection

Adopt London West was subject to Ofsted inspection in November 2023, this was part of the first thematic inspection of Regional Adoption Agencies, ALW were one of six agencies inspected. There was no formal inspection judgement due to Adoption Regulations not being updated to reflect the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies.

The thematic inspection report was published by Ofsted on 26th March 2024, [Regional adoption agencies – thematic inspection report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1181412/Regional_adoption_agencies_-_thematic_inspection_report_-_GOV.UK.pdf)

Informal feedback was given at the end of the inspection visit, a sample of which is listed below. Inspectors found that:

Recruitment & Assessment of Adopters

- *ALW has skilled & experienced assessment social workers, prospective adopters supported really carefully to understand the needs of adopted children. Assessment work is thorough and analytical, very good standards.*
- *Linking & matching is timely, Adopters return to ALW to be assessed again, practice with same sex couples strong, positive reputation, consistency of support.*
- *Work is relational, there is authenticity & honesty – consultations with psychologists positively support the work.*
- *Early support & transition work identified as a strength, detailed plans made & reviewed, support offered to all parties.*

Family Finding

- *Timely linking & matching, good interface with partners in each LA.*

- *Team Manager – strong knowledge of children waiting & those coming through who may need adoption, early links & matches evident.*
- *Experienced team who carefully consider children's needs, Q&A sessions helpful, meeting with adopters, ALW team chase planning & keep plans on track.*
- *Case tracking is effective, systems in place to track children through process, updates to each Local Authority via each boroughs panels.*
- *Family finders carefully consider children's needs, Q&A sessions helpful, meeting with adopters, chase planning & keep plans on track.*
- *CPR's good, chemistry visits/play dates all important parts of introductions process. CPR support offered to LA social workers, training on core topics offered to Local Authority social workers.*

Adoption Support

- *Maintaining relationships work strong, specialist team, new approach being embedded, passionate about the work, new referral forms designed, emphasis on who is important to the child.*
- *Lots of learning in the service, outward facing, connected, strong learning culture.*
- *Education Support Group is part of a strong offer of support, educational psychologist co-facilitates support group, effective in supporting adopters to challenge schools, role play used, considered a safe space by adopters, supported by worker to access virtual school.*
- *Mediation between birth families and adopters routinely offered.*
- *Proactive adoption support response, effective to stabilise and support families, described as non-judgemental, accessible and available.*
- *Exceptional – proactive, responsive, targeted support, families benefit from a willingness to engage and offer support that has kept families together*

Adoption Panel

- *high expectations challenge quality of CPR's*
- *Panel adviser provides robust oversight, child focussed, understands the needs of children.*
- *Panel membership diverse, quality of analysis clear & consistent, reflected both pre and post panel.*
- *Panel Chair – extensive experience, annual appraisals take place*
- *Panel effective, knowledgeable, open learning culture, positively challenge to improve practice.*

Clinical Psychology

- *Psychologists offer a comprehensive service and are making a positive impact, consultations valued, brief intervention model with families 4-5 sessions.*
- *Psychology service highly effective, supportive to social workers, enhances practice across the service.*
- *Foundations for Attachment training a very positive offer, co facilitated by Clinical Psychologist and Social Worker helps to extend psychological thinking & knowledge.*
- *Psychologists deliver sessions on attachment theories and developmental trauma in preparation training.*

Ofsted did not provide any formal feedback on areas for future development, but they reflected that:

- The Board should consider increasing capacity in the recruitment and assessment team.
- Timescales from initial enquiry to Stage 1 vary and can take longer than we would like, a number of factors influenced the responsiveness in the early enquiry process. A new member of staff is now in post who is responsible for managing engagement with prospective adopters from initial enquiry and we are confident that timely responses will consistently happen from now on.
- The Adoption panel would benefit from additional membership from people with lived experience of adoption who are younger than some of the existing members. 3 new independent panel members have been recently recruited, including an adopted adult, and a male adopter.
- ALW recognise that further development is needed to evidence that the voice of children and others with lived experience inform service delivery, a drama group planned for the Easter school holidays will include activities that encourage young people to share their views and experiences of adoption.

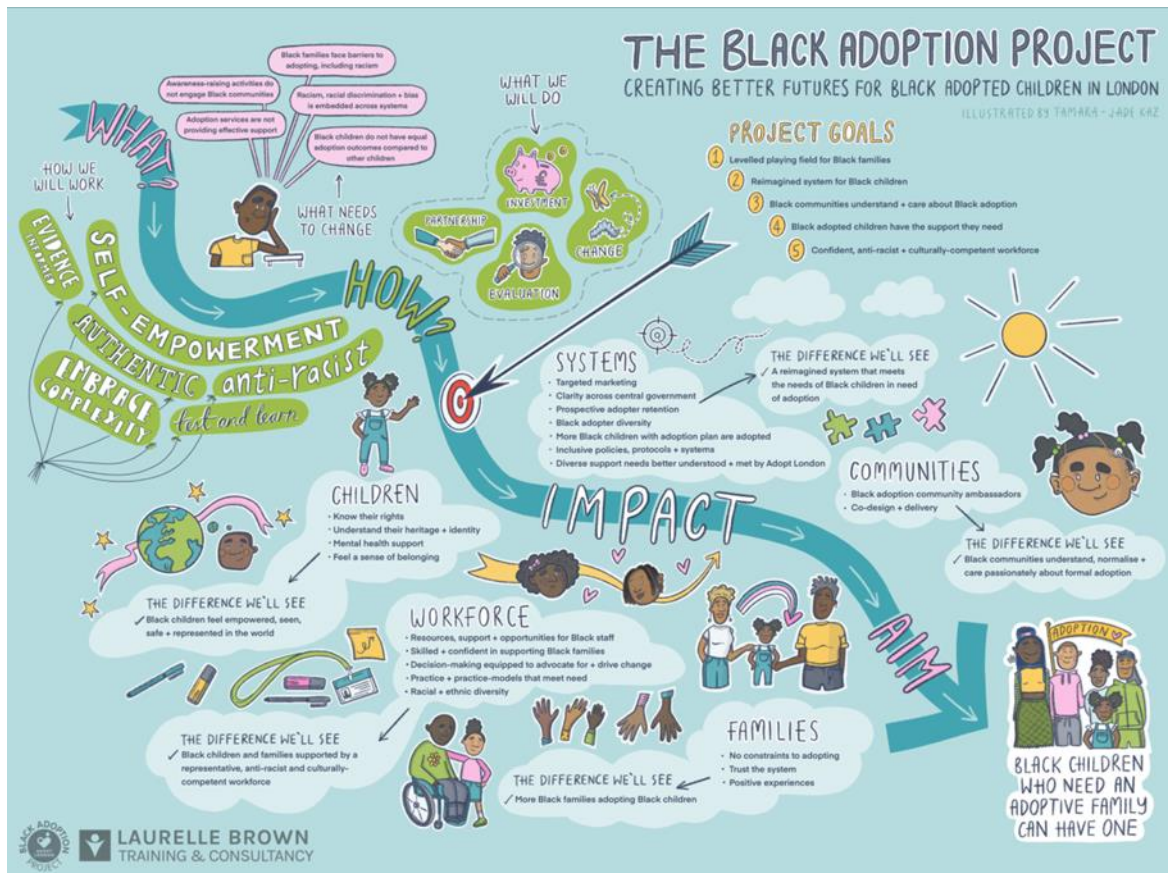
Adopt London Black Adoption Project

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 project has continued to gain momentum, following the publication of the Phase 1 report [Black-Adoption-Project-Phase-1-Report-March2023.pdf](#) (adoptlondon.org.uk), the steering committee agreed a number of project principles and core work strands, engaged academic partners and developed a 'theory of change'. There have been 2 webinars one in December 2023, the second in February 2024, raising awareness and interest in the project, in excess of 150 people attended each webinar, they will continue quarterly focussing on elements of the research findings and practice developments.

[Black Adoption Project | Adopt London](#)





Three stakeholder groups have been established,

- Young people
- Adopted adults
- We are Family, Adoptive parents group.

The next phase of the project will be the launch of various pilots, to test, evaluate and learn from practice changes. DfE grant funding via the Adoption England network will hopefully be confirmed by the end of April, this will enable a project manager to be employed to implement the pilot projects.

12.0 Feedback

Some examples of feedback received in the reporting period October 2023 to March 2024:

Adopters/Special Guardians:

"Quick note to say thank you so much for all the support you give the birth family with the letterbox. Both children loved the letters and photos that were sent and were so happy to receive a letter from dad for the first time!"

Adopters/Special Guardians:

"Our social worker at ALW has always been very proactive in her support for us. She is keen to attend all meetings and to keep up to speed with our progress with therapy for our adopted twin girls. Just to say thanks to ALW. Without the therapeutic support we have had over recent years, I don't know where we would be right now

Adopters/Special Guardians:

"We have found ALW always very helpful, especially our social worker, who has always been quick to respond and support our family when called upon for advice."

Adopters/Special Guardians:

"I'm really grateful to you (SW) as its down to you communicating and your perseverance with the Tavistock, I really appreciate all of your help and support to our family. T had a good day at school today, which is so positive and good to hear."

Adopter re Foundations

"Just to say thanks to ALW. Without the therapeutic support we have had over recent years, I don't know where we would be right now as a family."

Birth Father

"I haven't shared these things with other people, I feel like you are listening, I feel like my side of the story is being heard for the first time."

Adopter RE: Education Support Group

"I found the podcast helpful... thank you so much. I also found other very useful ones too. I am so grateful, thank you again."

13.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

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

14.0 Financial Considerations

14.1 Brent Council's contribution to the cost of running the functions of ALW in 2023/24 was £0.411m.

14.2 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.

15.0 Legal Considerations

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

16.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

17.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

17.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

18.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

18.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

19.0 Communication Considerations

19.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children and Young People