	Corporate Parenting Committee 23 April 2025
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People and Community Development
	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Cllr Gwen Grahl
Brent Adoption Report 6-monthly report: 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025	

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>	Debbie Gabriel, Head of Service, Adopt London West Brent's Regional Adoption Agency GabrielD@ealing.gov.uk Kelli Eboji, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk Palvinder Kudhail, Director, Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk

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 2024 – 31 March 2025
 - 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 tenth 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 Previous reports have set out the background and circumstances leading to the formation of Adopt London West Regional Adoption Agency in October 2019.
- 3.2.2 The partnership continues to mature and evolve, relationships between all partners remain positive with consistent attendance of Directors and senior leaders at the quarterly partnership board meetings.

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, Early Help and Social Care then considers and ratifies any adoption plans.

5.0 Performance Data

- 5.1 Brent's 3-year performance for 2021-24 is:

- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 556 days (3-year average) (716 in the last 12 months) compared with 444 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): 180 days (3-year average) (289 in the last 12 months) compared with 119 days in 2022-23.
- **A20** (The average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child): 380 days (3-year average) (447 days in the last 12 months).

5.2 Performance variance in this small cohort of children is caused by a range of factors, and can be the result of significant delays for just one child, due to extended complex care proceedings, the individual needs of the child impacting on the availability of suitable adopters and therefore 'family finding' taking longer than hoped, these factors affect the average timescale for all children placed, some of whom may have been placed very quickly

6.0 Child related data

- 6.1 There have been 7 Adoption Orders granted in this reporting year (2024-25).
- 6.2 There have been 10 children placed for adoption since April 2024, compared to 4 children last year, this is the highest number of children placed since ALW became the Regional Adoption Agency delivering services on behalf of Brent.
- 6.3 There are currently sixteen children with an adoption plan who have not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:
- Eight children have been placed with their new families in this reporting year, six of those are placed with adopters approved by ALW.
 - Six children are subject to a Placement Order but are not yet placed, two have been matched with their new family and introductions and transitions are due to start imminently. Two of the children are likely to have a change of care plan and they are expected to stay with their current foster carers.
 - ALW and Brent are exploring potential families for the remaining child who is 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. Four of the children placed

this year have been placed in Early Permanence placements, allowing the children to move earlier and begin building attachments to their new families.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

- 7.1 18 Adopter households have been approved in 2024/25, this is less than last year's 20 approvals, a decrease in approvals has been affected by a social worker leaving the service causing a reduction in assessment capacity. An additional fixed term post was agreed by the partnership board and that worker joined the service in February 2025. Of those approved, 2 were foster carers adopting a child in their care, 1 was a second time adopter, planning to adopt the sibling of her child and another household are also second time adopters.

72% are White British, 11% are Black, 17% Mixed White/Asian. 17% of these approved adopters identify as LGBTQ.

The profile of adopters recruited in this period does broadly match the needs of Brent children, with the exception of sufficiency of Black Adopters. The lack of Black adopters is well documented and the reason why the Black Adoption Project was established.

6 out of the 10 children placed this year have been with ALW Adopters, and there are a further 2 Brent children linked with ALW adopters who will hopefully be successfully matched and placed within the next 2/3 months. The six children that have been placed with ALW adopters have all been placed with families who reflect their racial, cultural, religious backgrounds and are considered to be strong matches.

- 7.2 There are currently 35 ALW approved adopters: 19 of whom already have a child/children placed with them, 11 are in the active family finding stage, 7 of these families are already matched or linked with children 3 families are on hold due to their personal circumstances, 2 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. Department for Education (DfE) Adoption and Special Guardianship data for 2023/24 shows the England average for Stage 1 was 134 days, the London average was 193 days, ALW average for those adopters approved in 2024/25 = 131 days.
- 7.4 Stage 2 should take a maximum of 4 months (120 days), this is a detailed assessment that is both reflective and analytical. In total, the comprehensive assessment process should be completed within 6 months. DfE data for 2023/24 shows the England average for Stage 2 was 150 days, the London average was 160 days, for those adopters approved in 2024/25 the average for ALW is = 184 days, this is due to 2 households taking a break in their

assessment due to a significant health issue and personal matter for the other applicant, without these delays, the ALW average would have been 153 days.

- 7.5 There are 25 prospective adopters in the formal stages of assessment. 13 households are in Stage 1, 9 in or about to commence Stage 2 and 3 households are currently on hold.

8.0 Casework

- 8.1 In this reporting year ALW has offered a service to 373 Brent children, families or individuals who are accessing their adoption records – 33 children are open to a social worker and at various stages of family finding, 28 are receiving a social work support service, a further 42 are receiving an Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) therapeutic service that is under review. 99 requests have been made for access to adoption records held by Brent.
- 8.2 There are 171 keeping in touch arrangements (formerly referred to as contact) being facilitated for Brent families - 43 direct contact arrangements and 128 active letter exchanges.

9.0 Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

- 9.1 Families who require specialist therapeutic support are assessed by a social worker and an application submitted to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) for funding to cover the costs of the therapeutic services. 67 ASGSF applications have been made on behalf of Brent families and this year, £139,870 funding has been received for these services.
- 9.2 Due to delays from Government making an announcement about the ASGSF from April 2025, funding applications cannot be submitted at this point but are being prepared in anticipation of this announcement.

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 child whose parent/s are consenting to their adoption, (formerly referred to as 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, Early Help and Social Care, 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,

Early Help and Social Care, 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, 18 new Adopter households have been approved since April 2024 and 12 Brent children have been formerly matched with their new families by the Agency following positive recommendations from the Adoption panel. Of the 10 children placed in 2024/25, 6 children have been placed "in-house" with ALW adopters, and 4 children have been placed with adopters from another adoption agency. (Please note that children may be matched with their new family and placed in a different reporting year).
- 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. Training for all Adopt London panel members took place on 11th November 2024 on a new practice model for considering transracial and trans cultural placements, AFDIT (Anti -racist framework for decision making and transitioning children from minoritised racial and ethnic groups into transracial adoptive families) developed by Dr Tam Cane, University of Sussex, and coproduced with adoptees with lived experiences.

11.0 Adoption practice updates

National

Adoption England Strategy 2024-27 published



ALW development plan aligns to the 5 national outcomes set out below. Adopt London HOS group and ALW staff are involved across some of the working groups progressing culture change and practice development initiatives.

Outcomes for 2024-2027

In the next 3 years, 2024 -27, Adoption England will prioritise supporting the delivery of the following outcomes:



Training to LA partners reflects national work and modernising of Adoption agenda, there is a particular emphasis on work for children to maintain relationships with their birth families.

Work has progressed throughout the year on all priority areas identified in the National Strategy, Adoption England have indicated, subject to DfE grant funding continuing that previous grant funding allocated for specific practice developments is likely to be consolidated to enable regions to prioritise innovations within agreed parameters.

If grant funding is consolidated as expected, the Adopt London Heads of Service group will work together to identify priorities and make an application for funding accordingly. There is a plan to discuss this proposal at the National RAA Board Chairs meeting on May 16th 2025.

12.0 Adopt London Updates

Adopt London Black Adoption Project

Black Adoption Project Principles

The Black Adoption Project is committed to taking a different approach to create better futures for Black adopted children in London.

To work consistently and reach our goals, we:

- Are accountable and empowering: We think about how we use our power and ensure we are held to account. We work closely with Black children, adoptive families, and communities to make positive changes, enabling self-empowerment and leadership.
- Use data to guide us: We gather information and insights to understand what's working, what isn't, and what questions we need to answer.
- Learn and adapt as we go: We know things can be complicated, so we try things out, learn from them, and stay open to new ideas and approaches.
- Practice anti-racism: We actively work to get rid of racism wherever we find it, and in all its forms, including within the Black Adoption Project. We recognise that this requires continuous effort and action.
- Are honest and authentic: We're real about our imperfections and mistakes, and we use them as opportunities to learn and improve.
- Continuously learn: We're committed to learning and getting better every day, so we can do better for Black children.
- Embrace complexity and uncertainty: We know things can be tough, but we face challenges head-on, knowing they're part of the journey toward positive change.







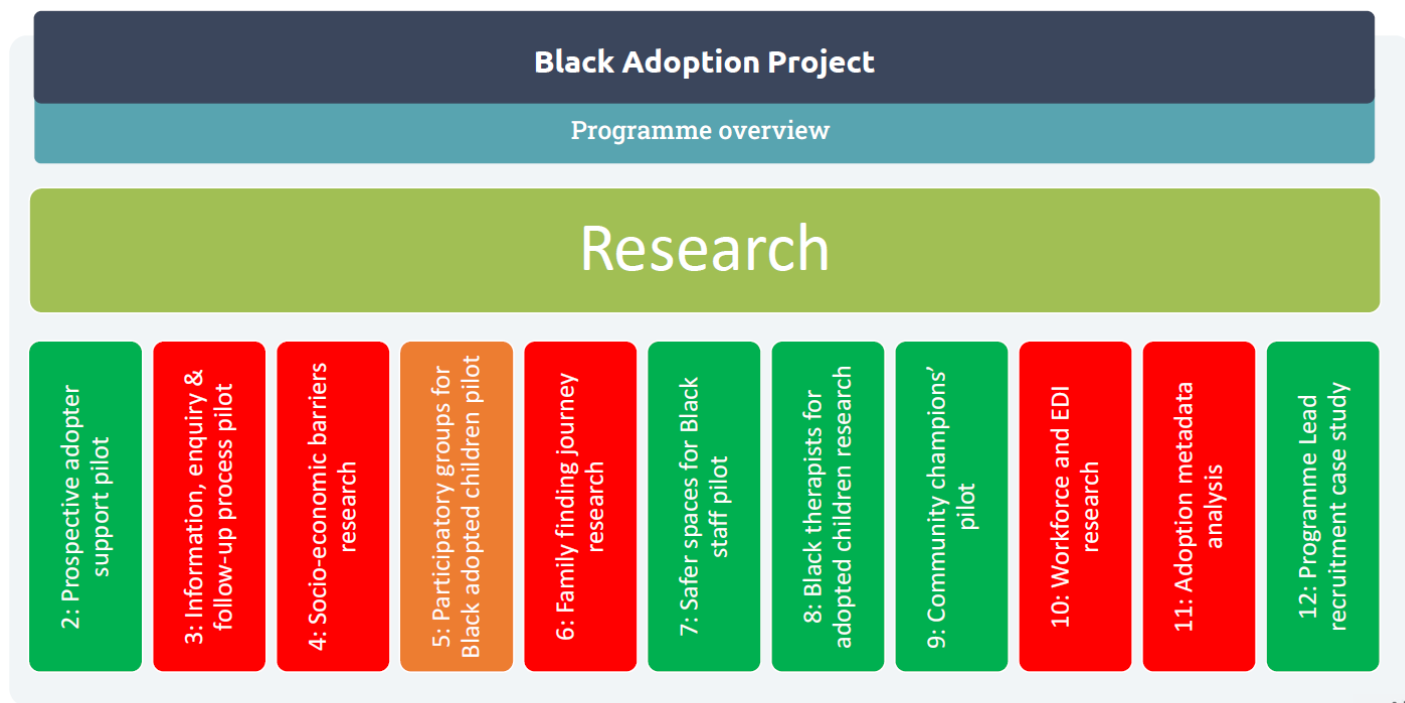







Updates

The Black Adoption Project pilots are shown below with green representing pilots that are currently in progress or completed, orange representing pilots that have started or in the planning stages and red representing pilots that have not begun or require additional funding to launch.



Pilot 2 which is the prospective adopter support pilot is currently in progress via the **Adoptive Parent Stakeholder Group (APSG)** which had two meetings, one in January 2025 and the other in March 2025. New members have been welcomed making the group much larger (12 parents in January & 11 parents in March).

January was primarily focused on introducing new members and in March, the group had useful suggestions about the pilot updates provided. In-depth discussions took place whilst sharing important insights. Overall, the group was highly motivated and committed. The group have identified that there is a need for some work to encourage more Black men to engage with the project, 2 fathers are offering to take this work forward.

Annual Adopt London Staff Conference

The Annual Staff conference took place in February, attended by 150 staff from across the Adopt London partnership, the themes for the day focussed on practice issues primarily related to Black children. A presentation by Dr Tam Cane, University of Sussex on the AfDIT Framework, used to guide decision making when considering a transracial placement, the rest of the day was spent on progress of the Black Adoption Project hosted by the Steering Committee members.

In attendance were Adoption England representatives and the Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby who also met with the BAP steering committee members privately.

Black Adoption Project

Communications updates

Staff conference

Presentations to staff conference from Chloe & Farrah, Esther & Nikki, Malaika & Charmaine, Laurelle; followed by Q&A panel discussion with audience.

[Blog post by Linda](#)



Communication Updates

Business Card size

Black Adoption Project

Communications updates



The Black Adoption Project was born out of a commitment to address the stark disparities that exist within adoption for Black children and families.

It is a partnership between four Regional Adoption Agencies (covering 24 London boroughs) and Laurelle Brown Training & Consultancy.

The Project is in collaboration with Adopt London staff, those with lived experience and community groups.

@blackadoptionproject



Creating better futures for Black adopted children in London

Be part of the change.

Scan or search for the

Black Adoption Project Linktree account to:

- stay informed about the Project
- be the first to hear about webinars and events
- learn how you can support and get involved



13.0 Adopt London Projects funded by Adoption England, DfE grant funding

13.1 Early Permanence

- Project was due to conclude on 31/3/2025, however, there is sufficient funding to extend until 30/9/2025. The focus for the next six months will be specifically on ensuring each agency's Early Permanence practice is compliant with fostering regulations, an increasing area of interest in recent Ofsted inspections.
- Shared SW training programme will continue to be delivered in the next six months in various sites across London.

13.2 Matching

- Funding for this project ends on 31/3/2025, there will be a short extension until mid- June when the Clinical Psychologist commences maternity leave.
- The addition of a Clinical Psychologist to the project has enabled more capacity to support Child Appreciation Days, three have taken place since January, practice guidance has been developed to support their continuation.
- One of the themes emerging from the project is the needs of neurodivergent children in transitions. The psychologist has experience and expertise in this area and is working with Professor Beth Neil, University of East Anglia to develop practice guidance to support these children as they move to new families.
- A practitioner day in June will conclude the project, the focus will be on the needs of neurodivergent children in transitions and Child Appreciation Days,

13.3 London Commissioning

- Adoption England continues to promote the development of a regional commissioning framework nationally, London is significantly way behind other regions in this area. Funding was allocated to undertake regional needs assessment, this was completed at the end of June, a commissioning discussion paper has been produced for discussion at the next Adopt London Executive Advisory board to consider next steps.
- Grant funding of £190k was awarded to the Adopt London partnership to develop a clinically informed social work practice model across Adopt London. A Service Manager has been appointed on a secondment opportunity to lead this work. Also, the allocated funding will enable additional Clinical Psychology resource to further develop business case & funding model for in house psychology provision in all Adopt London regions. There have been some delays in progressing the appointment of additional clinical psychology capacity due to some contracting issues with West London NHS Trust, a solution has now been agreed, and posts will be advertised imminently.

14.0 Conversations for Change

An Adopt London, adopter consultation project was launched earlier in the summer with an adopter with experience of community engagement facilitating the consultation.

Over 100 responses were received, feedback from families aligned with messages heard in the focus groups that were held as part of the regional needs assessment. The plan is to continue the consultation project, including some at least one face to face focus group each year.



15.0 Adopt London West practice updates

15.1 Keeping in Touch (formerly referred to as Contact)

Practice development

A focus of work in this period has been to further develop the keeping in touch arrangements for children, previously referred to as Contact. In line with the adoption transformation agenda:

- Brent workers seem engaged with talking to the keeping in touch team, wanting to learn, share ideas around keeping in touch, attending training
- ALW's Consultant Practitioner who manages the Keeping in Touch team presented at Brent Staff Forum in December 2024 (all LAC, permanence staff) on life story, identity, keeping in touch, and stayed for the whole event, which, apart from ALW contribution was all about lifelong links, life story etc so it was clear and positive that ALW messages were aligned with the local authorities practice too.
- The ALW Consultant Practitioner based herself in the Brent office for the rest of that day and invited staff to come with ideas / consultations which several did
- The main result of this was the leaving care team talking to ALW about several cases where contact with adopted siblings has been lost / never established, and ALW are supporting with this. There are 6 siblings in one family, 9 in the other. In the family with 9 siblings, contact has been reestablished contact between 3 of these siblings.
- ALW are currently supporting 148 letter exchanges and 43 direct contacts for Brent children.
- ALW are part of Adoption England's culture change programme around Keeping in Touch and were already promoting a more open and proactive approach to telling children their stories and maintaining meaningful connections.
- Some key activities over the past couple of years include adapting ALW training and messages for prospective adopters, rolling out training for each partner local authorities, attending team meetings / staff forums, offering case consultations, re-designing the keeping in touch referral form, introducing

team members to families earlier, offering adopters an annual review and sharing information about different ways to stay in touch.

- As such, ALW is capturing information on the additionality; that is how many children are having increased opportunities to be in touch with their family members as a result of the focus on this area.

There are 35 Brent children currently experiencing some sort of additional contact with birth family members.

- Some Brent examples:
 - A 17 year old has been supported to make a pre-recorded video for her birth father and paternal aunt; ALW supported the father to make a video in response, and now the team is supporting a face to face contact
 - A sibling group of 6; placed in pairs. Adopters responded to the offer of review, ALW have offered support to enable all siblings to be in touch with each other.
 - 2 adopted children aged 9 and 6: the adopter has been supported to meet with birth mother, birth father, paternal grandparents, and face to face meetings between the children and these members of their birth families. The adopter now manages the relationship with the birth father and his parents independently and ALW provide very light touch support for birth mother's contact.

16.0 Feedback

"Thank you for sharing your knowledge and experience with us. And thank you for offering us an open and caring space to talk and reflect. I'm coming away from this course with some tools that I'm already implementing and others that I want to familiarise myself with to try and be a better parent. Thank you to all the members of the group for your kindness and sincerity: if parenthood is a journey, I've learnt a lot by doing this part of the journey with you."

- *"I feel like the staff are amazing."*
- *"I am very happy with my relationship with my contact person."*
- *"I feel you guys are doing a great job."*
- *"I have a lovey relationship with my son's adoptive mum and it was all thanks to you."*

"The service from my worker has been very good ... she has been very kind and considerate and always replies sensitively and in a timely manner."

17.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

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

18.0 Financial Considerations

- 18.1 Brent Council's contribution to the cost of running the functions of ALW in 2024/25 was £0.424m.
- 18.2 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.

19.0 Legal Considerations

- 19.1 There are currently no legal considerations arising from this report.

20.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

21.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 21.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

22.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

- 22.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

23.0 Communication Considerations

- 23.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children and Young People