



**Corporate Parenting Committee  
11 December 2014**

**Report from the  
Director of Children and Young People**

**Brent Adoption Service Report  
1 April 2014 –30 September 2014**

## **1.0 Summary**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the adoption service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children.
- 1.2** This reports details the activity of Brent's adoption service from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014.
- 1.3** Detail has been provided within section (4) below that enables a comparison of adoption performance with national and other statistical neighbour Local Authorities.

## **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**

- 3.1** Our Adoption Statement of Purpose highlights the key values of the service which are that:
  - Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
  - Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefit from excellent parenting and education and experience a wide range of

opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.

- Children, birth parents/guardians and families, and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.

**3.2** Since the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014, following a planned restructure of the Placements Service, adoption services have been delivered through two reorganised teams:

- A Kinship, Fostering and Adoption Assessment team – responsible for the recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters, as well as family finding and support for them post approval up until Adoption Order
- An Adoption and Post Permanency team – responsible for family finding for children with an adoption plan; statutory social work responsibility for children subject to a Placement Order up until Adoption Order; supporting adoptive families, Special Guardians and birth families and providing a counselling and intermediary service for adopted adults and their birth relatives.

#### 4. Performance Data

4.1 The current, published Brent adoption scorecard performance was detailed within the previous report to the Corporate Parenting Committee. This demonstrated that Brent was performing well in relation to improving adoption timeliness. The next set of scorecards will be published within the next two months. The DfE has provided the Local Authority with a draft data set for this scorecard and this corresponds with the additional information provided in the most recent report to the Corporate Parenting Committee. For general information purposes the following data enables a perspective on the Brent position in comparison with the overall national picture.

*Table 1: The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted.*

Rank	LA Code	LA Name	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (days)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2011, 2012 and 2013 (days)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (days)
		<b>ENGLAND</b>	<b>628</b>	<b>647</b>	<b>636</b>
<b>72</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>Brent</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>854</b>

Table 2: The average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family

Rank	LA Code	LA Name	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (days)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2011, 2012 and 2013 (days)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (days)
	<b>ENGLAND</b>		<b>217</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>137</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>Brent</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>343</b>

Table 3: The percentage of children who wait less than 18 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family

Rank	LA Code	LA Name	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (%)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2011, 2012 and 2013 (%)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (%)
	<b>ENGLAND</b>		<b>51</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>78</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>Brent</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>42</b>

#### 4.2 There are a number of other indicators within the Adoption Scorecard.

- The number and percentage of children ceasing to be looked after and who were adopted. Brent has a lower percentage of children adopted as a proportion of those ceasing to be looked after (6% 2011-14; compared to a national average of 14%). The numbers of children ceasing to be looked after within Brent has grown at a faster rate than statistical neighbour authorities over the last five years, despite our overall Looked After Child population remaining low in comparison. This issue is being researched further to enable the whole service to better understand the data. However the high number of children ceasing to be looked after, coupled with relatively low adoption numbers explains the low percentage of children leaving care who were adopted.
- Number and percentage of children for whom the permanence decision has changed away from adoption. A lower figure is generally recognised as stronger performance. Brent has a lower number of these decisions (8% 2011-14; compared to a national average of 12%). This data highlights that

our service works with adoption plans for longer with children to enable them to be placed with a permanent adoptive home.

- Our average length of care proceedings (for proceedings concluded in the year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014) is now 48 weeks which matches the England average.

### **4.3 Child related data – April-September 2014**

In the first six months of this year 5 children were adopted and it is anticipated that this number will rise to 12 or 13 by the end of March 2015. This is a slightly higher figure than the 11 children adopted last year.

- At the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014 there were 14 Looked After Children with an adoption plan. All of these children, except one, were subject to Placement Orders. Of these children, seven have been placed with adopters since the 1<sup>st</sup> April, another child is in a 'Fostering for Adoption' placement and two children are to be adopted by their respective foster carers. Six of the seven children placed for adoption and the child in a 'Fostering for Adoption' placement are with Brent approved adopters.
- Of the four remaining Looked After Children with an adoption plan and subject to Placement Order, one of these children is due to be matched with a Brent adopter in November and another has been placed with her paternal grandmother with a view to Special Guardianship. This leaves just two children for whom the Adoption Team is still family finding. This situation is currently being reflected nationally with fewer children with adoption plans. National data released by the Adoption Leadership Board in November 2014 demonstrated a 34% reduction in the number of Placement Orders being granted between September 2013 - June 2014.
- There were 5 children adopted during the first six months of this year. The children's ages ranged from 18 months to 5 years old at the time of their respective adoptions. Of these, two were adopted by Brent recruited adopters and three by adopters from other adoption agencies.

### **4.3 Adopter Recruitment**

- At 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014 Brent had 8 approved adoptive households for children where a child had not yet been matched or placed. The number of children requiring adoption and not yet matched or placed continues to be lower than the number of approved adopters.
- During the first six months of this year the service received 71 enquiries about adoption. Many people following this enquiry were signposted to our monthly information evenings. The enquiries received have resulted in 14 ongoing adoption assessments and two adoptive households being approved during the first six months of this year. The new, 2-stage adopter recruitment process

is now well embedded in the service. This process is led by the adopter in stage one and is completed within a 2-month period. The second stage is formed around the social worker assessment and should be concluded and presented to panel within 4 months. Of the 14 on-going adoption assessments, five are in stage one and nine are in stage two of the process.

- During the first six months of this year, two adoptive households had their approval as adopters terminated via Brent's Adoption Panel, with Panel's recommendations being ratified by the Agency Decision Maker. However, there were no referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism, which regulates decision making by adoption agencies. This suggests adopters were satisfied with the service they received and that our Adoption Panel activity is sufficiently robust.
- In terms of measuring the length of time taken for the adopters who were matched to children from the 1<sup>st</sup> April until the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014, 62.5% of the cohort was matched with a child within 6 months of approval. This is a drop from the figure of 80% achieved in 2013-2014 but is indicative of the reduction in children currently available for adoption and the fact that many adopters are showing interest in the same children.
- In addition to the eight adoptive households to be matched with children during this period, Brent's first formal 'Fostering for Adoption' placement was also made when a relinquished baby was placed on a fostering basis with Brent adopters. The adopters had already attended Coram training on concurrency and Fostering for Adoption and therefore had a good understanding of the benefits and also the risks attached, given the possibility that the birth mother could change her mind about relinquishing her baby for adoption.
- Brent continues to attract adopters from a diversity of backgrounds in order to best meet the variety of needs of our Looked After Children. However, in line with the general profile of adopters nationally, the majority of Brent adopters currently waiting to be linked or matched to children are of white British or Asian heritage.

#### **5.4 Adoption Support**

- At the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014 there were 89 families receiving an adoption support package from the Local Authority. This support was primarily provided through financial allowances which are reviewed and means tested. This figure has remained stable, as new adoption support packages are balanced by those ending as children reach the age of 18.
- A further 125 families were in receipt of other post-adoption support services within the financial year. These support services ranged from therapeutic services for families to birth records counselling and tracing services for adopted adults.

## **6. The Adoption and Permanence Panel**

### **The Adoption and Permanence Panel**

- 6.1** Brent has one Adoption and Permanence panel constituted in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (amended 2011) and Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011. The panel plays a central role in assisting the Agency Decision Maker (who in Brent is the Operational Director, Children's Social Care) to reach the best possible decision in relation to:
- whether a child should be placed for adoption;
  - the suitability of prospective adopters and concurrent carers;
  - whether a child should be placed with a specific prospective adopter; and
  - whether a child should be matched for long term fostering with a specific carer.
- 6.2** The panel also advises the service on matters relating to contact arrangements; whether an application for a placement order should be made in certain circumstances; the profile of children the prospective adopter(s) may be suitable to adopt; and the provision of adoption support.
- 6.3** The Panel meets once a month in respect of all matters concerning adoption. A joint annual training day for adoption panel members and the adoption team staff is held and was delivered last year by the British Agency for Adoption and Fostering. The next training day has been scheduled for January 2015.
- 6.4** Following each panel presentation those attending are asked for feedback. People asked for feedback include prospective and approved adopters, Brent social care staff and social workers from other adoption agencies within England and Wales. The consistent message received is that the panel is robust in nature and that attendees felt able to express their views and opinions.
- 6.5** In line with statutory guidance, a central list of panel members is used on a rotating basis to ensure members maintain regular links with Brent and current issues in adoption. The central list consists of an independent chair, an independent vice chair, various independent members including a birth mother with experience of adoption, a former Looked After Child and a foster carer from another Local Authority. There are also panel members employed by Brent, including representatives from education, health, the probation service and Children's Centres as well as an elected member. All panel members contribute to an annual appraisal and have the opportunity to attend any additional relevant training provided by Brent and the West London Adoption Consortium.

**6.6** During the period 1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014 four panels were held with fifteen specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:

- Two applicants were recommended as suitable to adopt
- Four children were recommended to be placed for adoption with specific carers
- One long-term fostering match was recommended
- Three prospective adopters were found suitable to continue as prospective adopters following their annual review
- Two prospective adopters were recommended for termination (one withdrew from the process and another was considered unsuitable to adopt for Brent following a breakdown in the relationship between the prospective adopter and the local authority). This latter case did not utilise the opportunity to go to IRM to appeal, accepting the decision.

All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.

## **7. Service narrative**

**7.1** Over the last six months, the service has continued to improve outcomes for children with adoption plans in the following ways:

- Through effective tracking of timescales at monthly permanency planning meetings and quarterly tracking meetings for children with an adoption plan. This activity contributes to a reduction in the period of time from a child becoming Looked After to being placed for adoption.
- By providing training in concurrent foster care via Coram for our adopters where there is the assessed capacity for them to take on this role.
- By meeting regularly with adoption leads from other West London Local Authorities to share children's and adopters' profiles to enhance the pool of prospective placements.
- Through regular feedback from the adoption panel on quality assurance issues which are fed back to the Head of Service and Operational Director. These are incorporated into appraisals and service plans.

**7.3 Recruitment & Assessment Initiatives.** During the last six months, our website has been rebranded to include testimonies from our adopters and improvements have been made to make it more accessible. As a result, the majority of our enquiries now result from our website and we have received positive feedback about this from prospective adopters who often make comparisons between the websites of other adoption agencies. Over the last six months, three prospective adoptive households have attended concurrency training from Coram. The sharing of preparation training with the London boroughs of Hillingdon, Hounslow and Ealing continues so that prospective

adopters are able to access this quickly. The work with the West London Adoption Consortium is continuing to expand and this has included an advertising campaign with Pride magazine and the development of a Consortium website.

**7.4 Adoption Support.** A summary of the activity undertaken in this area was provided in the previous report to the Corporate Parenting Committee and this has continued within this reporting period.

**7.5 Involving Adopters.** Adopters are involved closely in matching and linking and subsequent planning in a variety of ways.

- Adopters are encouraged to attend, with the support of their social worker, Consortium run Profiling Events, Adoption Exchange Events and the Adoption Activity Days that are jointly run in London by BAAF and the four London Consortia.
- A bimonthly Adopters Support Group is held, currently facilitated by adoption social workers, who also provide a crèche, with the aim that this will eventually be run by the adopters themselves without the need for social work input.
- Brent adopters are often asked and are always very willing to regularly contribute to focus groups, Information Evenings, Preparation Group Training for prospective adopters and Life Story Work training for social workers.

**7.6 Adopter Feedback.** One formal complaint was received from adopters approved by another agency during this reporting period. This related to the process involved in the move of a child from foster parents to their care and is currently within the process of resolution.

**7.7 Staff Engagement.** Staff are encouraged to think creatively and innovatively and are engaged to help the adoption service develop in a number of different ways. One of the most significant examples is through the sharing of key development tasks on a Local Authority, consortium or London-wide basis. Examples of this in the last reporting period have included recruitment events, preparation training and DVD profiling events. Staff contributed to the rebranding of the adoption marketing information and provided articles and ideas for inclusion in the regular newsletter. Staff have been encouraged to adapt the service plan at an individual level within team meetings. Training opportunities for staff in the borough and within West London have been provided in areas such as concurrency and transracial placements.

## **8. Broader adoption issues and the future**

**8.1** Brent has taken over the chairing of the West London Adoption Consortium since April 2014 which has provided an opportunity to shape services across the region. A



review of the current structure and operation of the consortium was commissioned with a report due for completion in October 2014.

**8.3** Brent also actively participated in the first London-wide adoption activity day last year and was a member of the steering group involved in the planning of the adoption activity day held in London in June and one scheduled for November 2014, although for these two events, no suitable Brent children were identified to attend due to the low numbers of children currently waiting for adoptive families.

**8.4** Post-adoption support and service delivery will form a key component of the West London Adoption Consortium's (WLAC) planning. Currently there are two services commissioned for adopters across the consortium. A national adoption support fund is being established from May 2015 and is currently in pilot format within a number of adoption agencies. The WLAC will be considering how best to utilise this fund across the boroughs.

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