



**Corporate Parenting Committee
24 October 2017**

**Report from the Strategic
Director, Children and Young People**

**Brent Adoption Service Report 1st April 2017 – 30th
September 2017**

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 report details the activity of Brent's adoption service from April 1st 2017–September 30th 2017.

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 outcomes that the service aims to support:
 - 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, enjoying 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 Adoption services are delivered by two teams within the Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency Service:
- A Placements Assessment and Recruitment 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.

4.0 Performance Data

- 4.1 The most recent set of national adoption scorecards was published in April 2017, covering the 3-year period 2014-2016. The next round of national adoption scorecard data will be released in December 2017.

Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))

- 4.2 Our non-published data for the period 2015-2017 indicates that performance against the two most significant indicators has continued to improve:

- **A1** (The time taken from a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 384.5 days. This is a 25% improvement against the previous reporting period (515) and compares against a national average of 558 days and our statistical neighbour average of 578.
- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 160 days. This is a 13% improvement against the previous reporting period (184) and compares against a national average of 226 days and our statistical neighbour average of 222.

4.3 Child related data – 1st April – 30th September 2017

- In the first six months of this reporting year seven children were adopted. In the same reporting period last year there were three children adopted. Nine children are projected to be adopted by the end of December 2017.
- At the 30th September 2017, there were eleven Looked After Children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:
 - Five children are placed for adoption;
 - One child is due to be matched for adoption with his current foster carer at the October Panel;
 - One child is due to be matched with the adopters of her older sibling at the October Panel;
 - Adopters have just been selected for one child and they are booked in to attend November Panel;

- Proactive family finding is being undertaken on the remaining three children with a view to matches being presented to the Adoption Panel within the next three months.
- It was stated in previous reports that Local Authorities across England had been reporting a reduction in the number of children being made subject to placement orders. A placement order is the court authorisation that a child can be formally placed with approved adopters. This trend now seems to be shifting with an increase in the number of children needing adoptive homes during the last 6 months. This is reflected in the numbers above.

4.4 Adopter Recruitment

At 30th September 2017 Brent had 6 approved adoptive households waiting for an adoptive placement and where a child had not yet been matched or placed. The number of children requiring adoption, but not yet matched or placed, continues to be lower than the number of Brent approved adopters.

During the reporting period the service received 25 general enquiries about adoption with two proceeding to full assessment. The other 9 enquiries related to step-parent adoption, kinship and inter-country adoption. The last of these are referred to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) with whom a service agreement is in place.

Brent strives to attract adopters from a diversity of backgrounds in order to best meet the variety of needs of our Looked After Children. Brent adopters currently waiting to be linked or matched to children are mainly of Asian and African Caribbean heritage.

Towards the end of this reporting period, an increase has been seen in the number of children likely to need adoptive homes and therefore active recruitment for adopters has recommenced.

There were 2 adopter approvals during this reporting period.

At 30th September 2017, there were:

- 4 assessments in Stage One of the process.
- 3 assessments in Stage Two.

Also in this reporting period two Brent adopters received children matched and placed with them from other local authorities and one Brent adopter was matched to a Brent child.

One approved adoptive couple stated their intention to end their commitment during this period and their approval will be formally ended at the Adoption and Permanency panel in the next reporting period.

4.5 Adoption Support

- In the six months between 1st of April 2017 and 30th September 2017, six new families have requested post adoption support. During this period, fourteen applications to the DfE Adoption Support Fund (ASF) were successfully approved to support the therapeutic needs of Brent families. In the past six months a number of DfE ASF applications have been completed on behalf of a wide age-range of children. We have also seen a significant increase in applications, from eight to fourteen, in this period, due primarily to an increased awareness in relation to the availability of the ASF. Most of these applications were on behalf of children known to us, however we have had contact with some new families also following increased awareness raising of the fund.
- Fifty-one adopted adults also received adoption support. This was in the form of provision of access to their records, linking them with members of their birth family, and providing counselling support around issues related to adoption.

5.0 The Adoption and Permanence Panel

- 5.1 The purpose and role of the Adoption and Permanence panel was set out in detail within a previous Brent Adoption Service Report to the Corporate Parenting Committee.
- 5.2 During the period 1st April 2017 – 30th September 2017, 4 panels were held with 6 cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:
- Two households were recommended as suitable to adopt;
 - Four children were recommended to be placed for adoption with specific carers (one sibling group of two and two single children)

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

6.0 Service Improvement

- Alongside bi-monthly Adopters' Support Groups, we have now set up quarterly support groups for carers with Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). The first support group was well attended and received. It is planned to build upon this early success and to establish a strong group to provide mutual support.
- At the request of the SGO carers we arranged a picnic where they attended with the children they care for. This was also a successful event that will be repeated next year.
- We are exploring 'child appreciation days' for children placed for adoption. These days aim to bring all professionals working with the child

to meet with prospective adopters, share information and show appreciation of the child's journey. This is going to be an important part of the child's life story.

- In this reporting period, we explored with the West London Adoption Consortium whether we could jointly commission post-permanency support services in order to achieve more cost effective service delivery. This work is on-going.

6.1 Involving Adopters

- The Adoption and Post Permanency team are currently planning our annual Christmas children's party, and have decided to split the adoption party into two separate events, one for younger children and the other for older, more active children. They have also planned a separate Christmas party for Special Guardians and their children as there has been a really positive response to our SGO support group over the past 12 months and these families are beginning to build a support network for themselves.

6.2 Adopter Feedback

During this reporting period, Brent Adoption Service received positive feedback from the service users. No complaint has been made against the Adoption Service in this reporting period.

7. Broader adoption issues and the future

- 7.1 As stated in the previous report to the Committee, the DfE has capped the amount of financial support available to individual children through the ASF. This has had an impact on some of our families as the projected therapeutic support package costs are in excess of £5k, meaning that support arrangements in these cases have to be modified and renegotiated as the Local Authority has no additional resource capacity to make up any shortfall. Although the cap on the Adoption Support Fund continues to be an issue for some families with a very high level of need most of our adopted children are able to receive relevant therapeutic input within the £5,000 limit. The therapeutic agencies that we are currently using are trying to be accommodating by stretching the available funding to make it work.

7.2 Adoption Regionalisation

- 7.2.1 The work to establish a London Regional Agency (LRAA) is on-going. The LRAA Project Team has paid a visit to Brent and we have provided feedback about how the regional service could be developed. Feedback received from all Local Authorities that sign up to LRAA will help to design the Outline Business Case for the new Regional Adoption Agency.

The London Adoption Board is undertaking further exploration of how the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) is serving London's adoptive and special guardian families with plans being taken in October 2017 for ratification by the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS).

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