



**Corporate Parenting Committee
24 April 2019**

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

Brent Adoption Service Report: 1st October 2018 – 31st March 2019

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	1
Background Papers:	N/A
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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 1st October 2018 – 31st March 2019.

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** The 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; and
- children, birth parents/guardians and families, and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.

- 3.2** Adoption services are fully delivered by the Adoption and Post Permanence Team within the Looked After Children and Permanency Service. This team is responsible for two main areas of work:

- In relation to adults – the recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters, as well as family finding and support for them post-approval up until Adoption Order, the undertaking of step-parent and private adoption assessments as directed by the Court and providing a counselling and intermediary service for adopted adults and their birth relatives.
- In relation to children – family finding for children with an adoption plan, statutory social work responsibility for one child subject to a Placement Order up until the Adoption Order (all new cases now remain held by social workers within the care planning teams) and supporting adoptive families, Special Guardians and birth families.

4.0 Performance Data

- 4.1** The most recent set of national adoption scorecards was published in March 2019, covering the 3-year period 2016-2018.

Adoption Scorecards detail can be found [here](#)

- 4.2** The non-published data for the period under review indicates that performance against the two most significant indicators continues to perform strongly:

- **A1** (The time taken from a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 386.7 days. This is an 8.3% decrease against the previous reporting period (354.6 days) but still compares favourably against a national average of 486 days and a statistical neighbour average of 552 days.
- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 180.8 days. This is a 16.9% increase against the previous reporting period (150.1 days) but still favourably compares against a national average of 201 days and statistical neighbour average of 228 days.

4.3 Child related data

In the second six months of this reporting year (1st October 2018 – 31st March 2019) three children were adopted, bringing the total number of children adopted for the financial year 2018-2019 to six. There are currently three adoption applications in the process of being submitted to court and it is hoped that these will result in Adoption Orders for these children being granted in the next reporting period. As at 31st March 2019, there were twelve children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:

- two children are placed for adoption;
- a sibling group of two children were matched at Brent's Adoption and Permanence Panel on the 11th March;
- three individual children are going to be adopted by their current foster carers;
- three individual children are expected to be matched with prospective adopters in panel by June 2019;
- one child is waiting for a match, with extensive family finding in progress;
- one remaining child's case is still within the court arena.

4.4 Adopter Recruitment

As of 31st March 2019, there were 5 approved adoptive households waiting for a placement where a child had not yet been matched or placed. Of these five households, two are likely to have their cases re-presented to the Adoption and Permanence Panel to consider their ongoing suitability for adoption.

During this reporting period the service received 37 general enquiries about domestic adoption resulting in one couple, who are already Brent approved adopters for a Brent child, proceeding to a full assessment as 'second time' adopters and two new prospective adoptive families being accepted for full assessments. There were three further enquiries related to step-parent

adoption. As in the previous reporting period, Brent is continuing to see an increase in the volume of step-parent and private adoption applications, which is also the experience of other local authorities in the West London Consortium. 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.

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 either of Asian, African Caribbean, African or White European heritage.

There has been one new adoptive family approved at panel during this reporting period.

As of the 31st March 2019 there were:

- 2 assessments in Stage One of the process;
- 3 assessments in Stage Two of the process; and
- 1 ongoing private adoption (step parent adoption) assessment.

In this reporting period, one Brent adoptive household was matched with a child from another local authority. In addition, another Brent adoptive household was matched with a child from another local authority within the West London Consortium, who had been placed with them on a 'Fostering for Adoption' basis.

4.5 Adoption Support

In the six months between 1st October 2018 – 31st March 2019, 4 new families requested post adoption support bringing the total number of families being actively worked with to 29, a slight increase from last period. During this period, 11 new applications to the DfE Adoption Support Fund (ASF) were successfully approved to support the therapeutic needs of Brent families caring for children under an Adoption or Special Guardianship Order. In the past 6 months a number of DfE ASF applications have been completed on behalf of a wide age-range of children. 1 of these applications was in relation to an adoptive family who had not previously accessed therapeutic support from Brent. 2 of them were for young people under a Special Guardianship Order, who also receive support from the adoption and post-permanence team and are eligible for this government funding. There are currently 4 adoption support assessments in process, which will be resulting in applications for therapeutic intervention for these families in the next few months. 17 kinship placements are being supported by the team.

30 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. There were a further 37 enquiries from other Adoption Agencies seeking information on whether files were held by Brent.

Should the regionalisation of Brent's adoption services be agreed by Cabinet in April 2019, the responsibility for the above work will transfer to the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) (see **6.1 Adoption Regionalisation** below). There is expected to be a period of transition whilst carers and localities and care planning social work staff get used to linking with the RAA rather than an internal team. In order to minimise any confusion, communication about the changes are being shared via a newsletter to all adopters and special guardians and workshops are being offered to staff via their bi-monthly staff forum. There has been a slight increase in the demand for post-permanence support during this reporting period; this is an area of work that is expected to grow further post-regionalisation.

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** A central list of panel members, in line with statutory guidance, is used on a rotating basis to ensure members maintain regular links with Brent and current issues in adoption. The central list in Brent remains the same as recorded in previous reports to the Corporate Parenting Committee, with the addition of a new council representative following the local elections in May 2018. All panel members receive an annual appraisal and have the opportunity to attend any additional relevant training provided by Brent and the West London Adoption Consortium.
- 5.3** A joint annual training day for adoption panel members and adoption team staff is held as per statutory regulation; this took place on 8th February 2019, the focus of which was the role of local authorities in adoption moving forward, given the Regionalisation agenda set out by the government and coming into force later this year and learning from another local authority's serious case review involving the death of a young adopted child.
- 5.4** Panel feedback from prospective and approved adopters and presenting social workers has remained consistent in confirming good or excellent comments regarding the panel process and conduct. Feedback concerning the performance of the social work casework is provided to the Agency

Decision Maker (Operational Director – Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People’s Services) who ensures this is given to the Head of Service (LAC and Permanency) and Service Managers for follow up with individual staff or, should the issues be more systemic, broader service improvement.

5.5 During the period 1st October 2018 – 31st March 2019 3 panels were held with 5 specific adoption cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- one couple were recommended as suitable to adopt for the second time, having previously adopted a child in April 2017;
- one couple were recommended for continued approval following their 1st annual review;
- the approval of a prospective adoptive couple was terminated due to them withdrawing from the process;
- three children were matched with prospective adopters (a single child and a sibling group of two).

The low numbers of panels within this period continues to reflect the reduction in Looked After Children numbers and, more specifically, the ongoing relatively low numbers of children for whom an adoption plan is recommended.

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

6.0 Service Development

6.1 Regionalisation of adoption

The work to establish an RAA is on-going but the number of councils has reduced, with the withdrawal of Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster and Hillingdon from the proposed *Adopt London West* regional adoption agency. Brent, Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham remain committed to the model and the rate of progress has increased significantly again during this reporting period. Ealing remains the proposed host of the project, with Brent continuing to take a leading role by co-ordinating a number of planning meetings to ensure there is direct involvement in every aspect of the creation of the model. These include: staff engagement meetings, where staff are informed about new developments and how this work will affect their employment status; meetings with representatives from lead colleagues in finance, human resources and social care; and workforce development groups designed to shape practice and inform future policy.

Regular updates are provided to The Corporate Parenting Committee about the work around RAA. A detailed briefing report is due to be presented to Brent’s Cabinet on 15th April 2019. If approved, a period of 30 working days’ consultation would begin for all the staff in scope once all four council Cabinets

have met. Given the changes in membership of the proposed model, this has had an impact on the timings for implementation of the model; the intention now is for the new RAA model to be implemented incrementally from late September 2019.

As previously mentioned, the Adopt London West RAA will include support for SGO carers that will enable better joint commissioning of post-permanency support services in order to achieve more cost effective service delivery.

6.2 Increasing adopter numbers

As mentioned in the previous report, the national picture in adoption for some time had been an imbalance between the number of children waiting for adoptive placements and approved adopters, with an extremely large number of adopters waiting for a relatively small number of children. As such, many local authorities slowed their recruitment activity to redress the balance. Given the plans for regionalisation of adoption services across England, this has now changed and all local authorities are open for new enquiries. Brent's Adoption and Fostering Teams have continued to facilitate monthly joint information evenings, but with the move towards adoption regionalisation, the Adoption Team will be joining with Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith & Fulham from May 2019 (post-Cabinet approval) to run shared adoption-specific information sessions. Adoption preparation training courses have been run collaboratively by the West London Consortium for the last two years and these have proved to be very successful and have helped to minimise the time prospective adopters have needed to wait for this mandatory training. These will continue post-regionalisation but will be run solely by the 4 local authorities in *Adopt London West*.

6.2 Support for special guardians and kinship carers

The Adoption and Post-Permanency Team holds quarterly support groups for Special Guardians (SGO carers). Those attending continue to give consistently positive feedback about the service they receive from the team. Consultation is taking place with current kinship carers to establish how they would prefer to obtain support from each other – whether this by through group attendance or online forums – which will inform support offered via Adopt London West RAA moving forward.

7.0 Involving Adoptive Families

- 7.1** A festive party was held in December 2018 for Brent's adoptive families. There was a good turnout with positive feedback from the adults and children. The day was filled with crafts, cookie decorating, a piñata, and closed with a sing-a-long. The adults were able to renew old friendships and make new connections, as well as using the time to update staff on how their children were doing and seek advice. Feedback always places this opportunity to

socialise and share experiences as supportive as any other offered by the adoption service.

7.2 Some adopters and children attended Voice in a Million concert. Adoptive families provided positive feedback about the event.

7.3 There have been several education seminars offered to both adopters and Special Guardians by the Brent Virtual School for LAC during the last six months. These have been offered by an educational advisor, offering information and guidance. This position is funded by the DfE and has proved invaluable to Brent's post-permanence families. Topics covered at the seminars included: how to encourage attachment-friendly schools; use of the Pupil Premium money; and supporting children with additional difficulties. These will continue over the next few months.

7.4 Brent is part of the West London Adoption and Permanency Consortium, who organise bi-monthly seminars on a variety of adoption-specific topics. Recent ones have included: life-story work; sensory integration issues; and one workshop tailored to helping family and friends understand adoption. Adopters continue to take advantage of these. Additionally, they are able to take up anything on the Brent CYP training calendar for foster carers and adopters and occasionally do attend these.

8.0 Adopter Feedback

During this reporting period, Brent's Adoption and Post-Permanence Team has continued to receive very positive feedback from service users. No complaints were made about the team or the service received during this reporting period. Many Brent adopters have continued very willingly to attend preparation training groups and information evenings as 'guest speakers' and have given very honest, balanced accounts of their respective adoption journeys, which is commonly reported as the highlight of the sessions for the participants attending. There has been no adoption breakdown.

Appendix:

Cabinet Paper – 15th April 2019 'Adopt London - West Regional Adoption Agency'

<http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=4726&EVT=101&DT=A>

Report sign off:

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