

 <b>Brent</b>	<p align="center"><b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b></p> <p align="center">30<sup>th</sup> October 2019</p> <p align="center"><b>Report from the Head of Looked After Children and Permanency</b></p>
<b>Report Title:</b>	Brent Adoption Service Report 1 <sup>st</sup> April – 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2019

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b>  (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	0
<b>Background Papers:</b>	0
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b>  (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Nigel Chapman,  Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes  Onder Beter,  Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency

## 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 1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019.
- 1.3** This will be the last 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* consisting of the London boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham for the provision of Adoption services and Special Guardianship Support; and to
  - 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.
- 1.4** The Key Decision was made on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2019 and, following the TUPE of those Brent staff members who chose to move to Ealing, Adopt London West went 'live' as an RAA on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019.
- 1.5** Brent Corporate Parenting Committee will receive future six-monthly reports on adoption activity, which will incorporate information from Adopt London West and Brent CYP as Brent will continue being responsible for children with care plans of adoption.

## **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 Responsibilities

**3.2.1** Adoption services were delivered by the Adoption and Post Permanence Team within the Looked After Children and Permanency Service within this reporting period. This team was 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.

**3.2.2** The above regulated activity remained the responsibility of Brent's Adoption and Post Permanence Team until the RAA went live on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019. After this point the adults work in its entirety, plus all family finding for children with an adoption plan and support (in the form of advice and guidance) for adoptive families, Special Guardians and birth families affected by adoption, transferred to Adopt London West.

## 4.0 Performance Data

**4.1** The most recent set of national adoption scorecards was published in March 2019, covering the 3-year period 2015-2018.

**Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))**

**4.2** The non-published data for the period 1<sup>st</sup> July – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019 demonstrates that performance against the two most significant indicators has continued to perform strongly in comparison to national and statistical neighbour averages:

- **A1** (The time taken from a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 392 days. This is a 1.4% increase against the previous reporting period (387) but still compares favourably against a national average of 486 days and statistical neighbour average of 552.

- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 208 days. This is a 14.8% increase against the previous reporting period (181 days) which is longer than the national average of 201 days but compares favourably to the statistical neighbour average of 228.

### **4.3 Child related data**

**4.3.1** In the first six months of this reporting year (1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019) Adoption Orders were granted for two children: one child was adopted by his Brent foster carers; and another was adopted by a ‘second time’ approved adopter from a different local authority.

**4.3.2** There are currently five adoption applications that have been submitted to Court, with another three in process and it is anticipated that these will result in Adoption Orders within the next reporting period. Of the five adoption applications that have been submitted to Court, two are from foster carers applying to adopt the Brent children for whom they have been caring for a significant length of time.

**4.3.3** As at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019, there were ten children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children’s cases are as follows:

- Eight children are already placed for adoption;
- One child, with a complicated life history and resulting behavioural difficulties, is due to be matched at the first Adopt London West Panel on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 2019.
- One child’s case is still within the court arena. Active family finding is therefore delayed until a Placement Order is made by the Court.

### **4.4 Adopter Recruitment**

**4.4.1** As at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019, Brent had seven approved adoptive households waiting for an adoptive placement and where a child had not yet been formally matched or placed. However, of these seven households, two families are being reviewed with a view to terminating their approval for reasons related to health issues and disengagement with the adoption process.

**4.4.2** During this reporting period the service received 17 general enquiries about domestic adoption, resulting in one couple being accepted for Stage 1 of the adoption assessment process and another couple, who are already approved adopters (with another local authority) who adopted a Brent child, proceeding towards a full assessment as ‘second time’ adopters. As of 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019, both these families are transferring to Adopt London West for full assessment.

**4.4.3** Since 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019, in a move towards Adopt London West going live in October, monthly joint Adoption Information Evenings have been held, facilitated by Brent, Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham Adoption Social Workers. These have been helpful in enabling workers from the four local authorities to have the opportunity of working together and building rapport.

**4.4.4** As in the previous reporting period, Brent has continued to see an increase in the volume of step-parent and private adoption applications, which has also been the experience of other local authorities in the West London Consortium. From 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019, any new assessments of this nature will be undertaken by Adopt London West. 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.

**4.4.5** Brent has continued striving to attract adopters from a diverse range of backgrounds in order to best meet the variety of needs of looked after children. This ethos will continue with Adopt London West. Brent adopters currently waiting to be linked or matched to children are either of African Caribbean, African or White European heritage.

There have been four adoptive families approved at panel during this reporting period.

**4.4.6** As of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019 there were:

- 2 assessments in Stage One of the process, which will transfer to Adopt London West for Stage Two of the process;
- 1 assessment of 'second time' Brent adopters in Stage Two of the process;
- 1 ongoing private adoption assessment;
- 2 ongoing step parent adoption assessments.

**4.4.7** In this reporting period, one Brent adoptive household was matched in June 2019 with a Brent child and the child was placed for adoption in early July 2019. In September 2019 a second Brent adoptive household was matched with a Brent child, for whom they were already caring as foster carers. Both adoptive households have already submitted their adoption applications for these children.

## **4.5 Adoption Support**

**4.5.1** During the period under review, 39 families accessed ongoing social worker assistance from the team and 8 new families requested post permanency support. 3 further adoption support assessments are in progress.

#### **4.5.2 Adoption support fund (ASF)**

Applications were made on behalf of 5 new families to the ASF for individual therapy or therapeutic parenting courses. 9 applications were made for families that we were already working with, bringing the total of ASF applications for this period to 14.

**4.5.3** There was a slight drop in services requested by adopted adults, with 26 people receiving access to birth records, intermediary services or counselling around these issues. However, there was an additional 21 requests from other adoption agencies to explore whether the service held records on cases of interest to them.

**4.5.4** Much of the adoption team's work during the past six months has been dedicated to closing cases where needed and alerting all service users to the move to Adopt London West. This has been more challenging with birth families, who can often change phone numbers and home addresses more frequently.

**4.5.5** During the last six months, the team organised an annual picnic for adopters. There was a large turn-out of both longstanding and newly approved adopters. Many of the adopters have expressed an interest in forming a 'Brent Adopters' network which will carry on after regionalisation.

**4.5.6** There were several workshops and seminars during this period. The first two were organised in partnership with the West London Alliance and the most recent one in September was the first to be facilitated by Adopt London West. Adopt London West plans to continue the tradition of bi-monthly evening seminars for adopters, with an occasional focus on issues specific to Special Guardians, as well. The topics covered during the last six months were:

- an introduction to the therapeutic parenting programme 'The Great Behaviour Breakdown';
- attachment-friendly schools; and
- an interactive session on exercises and activities to do with a child to help emotionally regulate them.

**4.5.7** The post-LAC education advice resource ended in September and the RAA will be providing a continuation of this service in the new arrangements. In this reporting period the post-LAC education resource facilitated a number of daytime and evening forums on educational issues, that were well attended.

**4.5.8** Adopt London West has an 'Education Support Group', which will be meeting six times throughout the year and looking at different relevant topics each time. They plan to hold general support groups in addition. Adopt London West also has a contract with PAC UK (specialised adoption agency) where adopters, birth parents, and adopted adults can access up to six sessions of therapeutic

input, if needed. This is in addition to having a part-time clinical psychologist who can offer consultation to adopters or to social workers.

**4.5.9** The ALW is staffed by very experienced social workers and support staff from across all four local authorities. They have a robust plan in place for continued post permanency support and Brent residents will continue to receive a high level of support.

## **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 for 1<sup>st</sup> July – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019 has remained the same as recorded in previous reports to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

**5.3** Panel feedback from prospective and approved adopters and presenting social workers over the period under review 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.

**5.4** During the period 1<sup>st</sup> July – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019 3 panels were held with 5 specific adoption cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- one couple and one single applicant were recommended as suitable to adopt;
- one couple were recommended for continued approval following their annual review;
- one child was matched with prospective adopters; and
- one child was matched with their foster carers for long-term fostering.

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.

**5.5** With the regionalisation of adoption services, panels are moving to sit within RAAs. As such, the last Adoption Panel was held in Brent on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019. The Lead Member, Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care attended at the end of this panel to provide her thanks and appreciation for the work of the panel and its members.

**5.6** The roles of the RAA and the local authority from 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019 onwards are as follows:

- approvals, reviews and terminations of adopters' suitability to adopt will be heard at Adopt London West's panel, where a recommendation will be made and sent to their own Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service) for ratification/challenge;
- consideration of whether a relinquished baby from Brent should be placed for adoption will be heard at Adopt London West's panel, where a recommendation will be made but this will be sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge;
- adoption matches between Brent children and their prospective adopters will be heard at Adopt London West's panel, where a recommendation will be made but this will be sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge.

**5.6** The process of feedback from RAA to Brent and back to aid service development and quality assurance of the work of the new RAA will be replicated in Adopt London West, with feedback being shared with Service Managers in Brent after each panel presentation.

## **6.0 Service Development**

### **6.1 Regionalisation of adoption**

As mentioned throughout this report, the adoption and post-permanence teams in Brent, Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham have joined forces and created *Adopt London West* regional adoption agency. Ealing has been secured as the host of the RAA but Brent have taken 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. As previously mentioned, Adopt London West 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.



- 6.1.1** A report was presented to Brent's Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019 and approval was given for Brent council to join the RAA *Adopt London West* consisting of the London boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham for the provision of Adoption services and Special Guardianship Support; and for delegated authority to be given 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.
- 6.1.2** This decision was followed by a period of 30 working days' consultation for all the staff in scope – a total of 9. As part of this process, three members of Brent's adoption and post-permanence team decided to join Adopt London West, two employees took early retirement, one resigned and three elected to remain employees of Brent in alternative social work roles.
- 6.1.3** The Key Decision was made on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2019 and, following the TUPE of those Brent staff members who chose to move to Ealing, Adopt London West went 'live' as an RAA on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019.
- 6.1.4** Regular quality assurance meetings are scheduled for heads of Service of each of the 4 local authorities to discuss any snagging issues and develop the service. The first one is taking place on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2019.
- 6.1.5** The Strategic Director (CYP) attends the RAA board to ensure that the new arrangements are meeting the needs of Brent's children as set out within the partnership agreement. Updates will continue to be provided to the Corporate Parenting Committee on a 6-monthly basis in relation to decisions about children with an adoption plan and the development of Adopt London West.

## **7.0 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 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.

## **Contact Officer**

Onder Beter, Head of Service, LAC and Permanency.

Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 0FJ.  
Tel: 020 8937 1228

Email: [onder.beter@brent.gov.uk](mailto:onder.beter@brent.gov.uk)