



**ADOPT  
LONDON  
NORTH**

# ANNUAL REPORT

OCTOBER 2019 – MARCH 2021



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## INTRODUCTION

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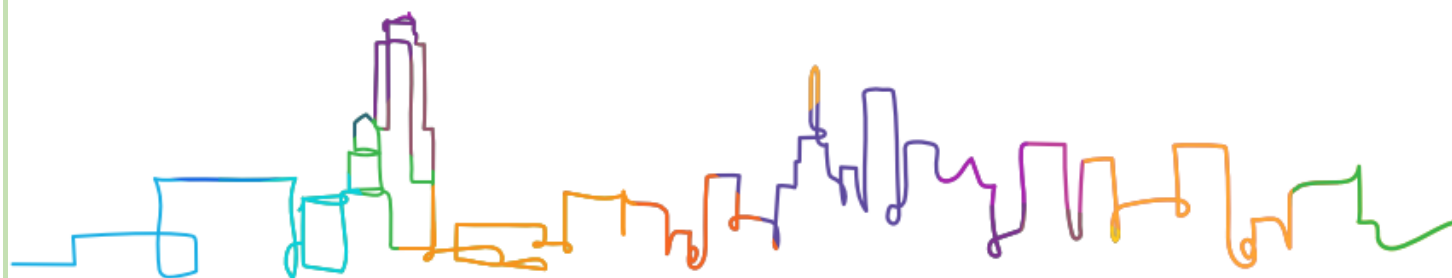
This annual report for Adopt London North (ALN) covers the period from its launch in October 2019 until March 2021, the end of the 2020/21 reporting year.

It has been a roller-coaster period! We were live for just six months prior to the global pandemic hitting the UK in March 2020. In our first week we had 38 members of staff arrive from teams across the six member boroughs, all set up on new IT equipment and working from our brand new office space created from training rooms in Islington. Staff brought live caseloads with them which needed to continue to receive their attention and in total we transferred in around 400 active cases across the service, all of which had to be loaded onto our new specialist case recording system. Staff were working in new teams with new managers, and also adapting to covering a much wider geographical area, working across six boroughs each with their own culture and ways of practicing. We struggled without a full set of established working procedures and with what to prioritise, and those first six months were both exciting and exhausting for everyone. We focused on team and whole service time together, getting to know one another, and establishing a strong, supportive culture. In early March 2020 we were fortunate to be able to celebrate our launch properly with our other Adopt London RAA partners at a wonderful event at the Islington Assembly Halls, cheered on by David & Carrie Grant, who are north London adoptive parents to their son.



Along with the rest of the country we moved primarily to virtual working later in March. We were grateful for our new IT equipment which coped relatively well with enabling this change. One of the biggest challenges and frustrations for us created by the pandemic hitting early in our development is that we do not have strong comparative data to show clearly pre and post covid-19, and therefore to separate out the changes that have arisen from the RAA creation. With that in mind, we set out in this report the background to ALN and information about our ways of working, activity and development work over our first 18 months.

**Lydia Samuel, Head of Service**



## ADOPT LONDON NORTH BACKGROUND

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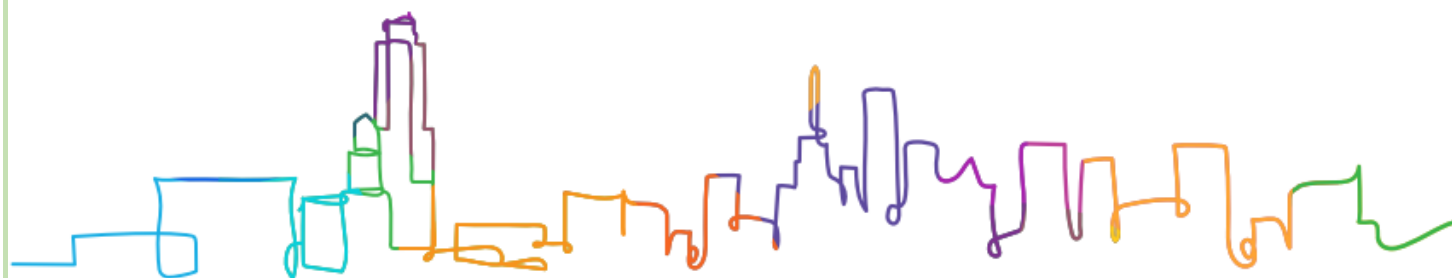
### 1. National Regional Adoption Agency development

In 2015 the Department for Education (DfE) proposed that all local authority adoption services move into Regional Adoption Agencies [RAA] in order to:

- Speed up matching
- Improve adopter recruitment and adoption support
- Reduce costs
- Improve the life chances of vulnerable children.

Supporting legislation was passed in 2016 in the Education & Adoption Act, requiring local authorities to create RAAs by 2020. The DfE has continued to drive forward the regionalisation programme since. Nationally the first RAA's launched in 2017 and London RAAs launched in 2019, around the middle of the change programme. By April 2021 only a few local authorities in the country were not yet part of a live RAA. Appendix 1 shows a national map of RAAs.

Early feedback from RAAs in operation for 2½ years or more is positive. Adopters report some improved services and staff report improved job satisfaction. Ofsted reports for Local Authorities with adoption services delivered regionally have generally been positive to date. The government commissioned an evaluation of live RAAs which is ongoing, but has noted in early findings the tentative progress in cutting the time children wait to be placed with their adoptive parents as well as innovations and improvements in adoption support services. The evaluations also note the significant disruption to services caused for a period before and after an RAA is launched, and many of the challenges that RAAs face in their first years. National data shows that the majority of RAAs experience a significant drop in some areas of performance and recruitment levels in the lead up to and for a period after launching. Benefits are more clearly seen once the RAA is well-established.



## 2. Adopt London North development

The six partner agencies of Adopt London North are the London Boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, and Islington. The boroughs previously worked together successfully for over a decade as the North London Adoption & Fostering Consortium to provide some adoption services in partnership, whilst retaining separate local adoption teams.

The adoption functions of the six boroughs officially became part of Adopt London North on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019, hosted by the London Borough of Islington as the lead partner. The ALN Partnership Agreement covers legal and financial terms of the arrangement.



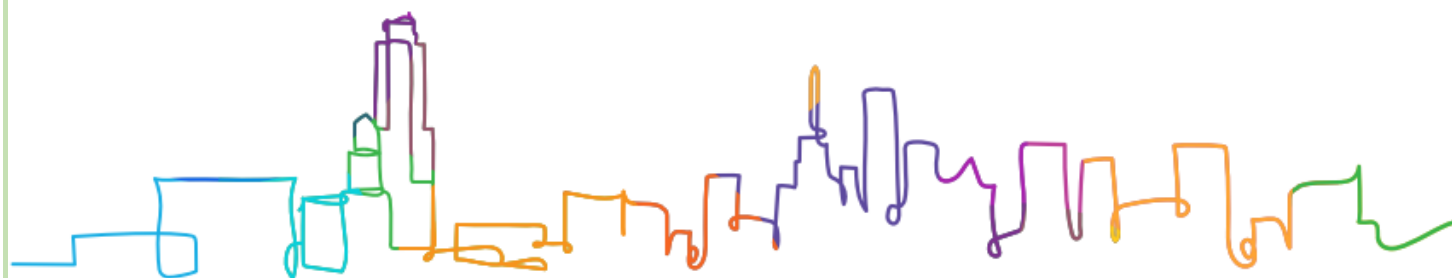
## 3. Scope of service

Adopt London North has responsibility for all adoption led services, delivering these on behalf of the local authority. This includes:

- Recruitment and assessment of adoptive parents
- Family finding for children in need of adoptive parents
- Adoption support to adoptive families, adopted adults, and others impacted by adoption

Responsibility for the child (including corporate parenting responsibilities) remains with the local authority. The borough is therefore responsible for the progress of the child's case through the court system and for final decisions in respect of care and adoption planning.

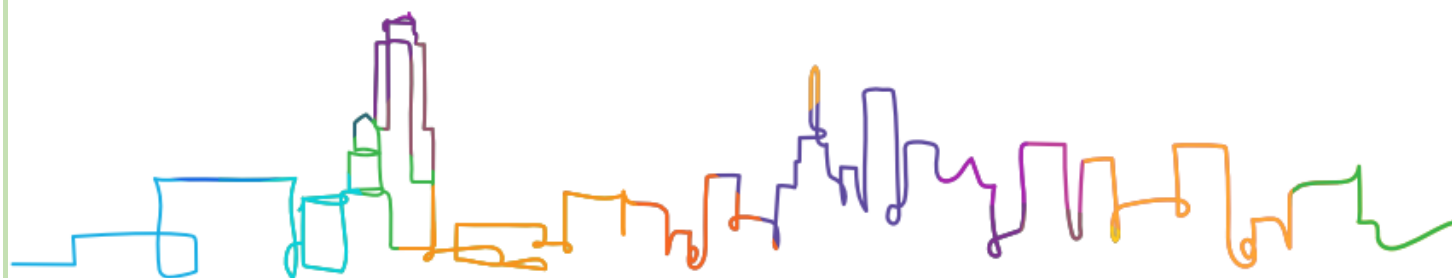
ALN has a responsibility to support the local authority social workers in their adoption work, including information about adoption regulations and best practice.



#### 4. Outcomes

Adopt London North aims to improve outcomes for children who have a plan for adoption and those living in adoptive families in the following specific ways. We will report on these changes as we build up our data over time and will develop strategies to target different areas of improvement.

<b>Finding prospective adoptive parents</b>
Increase the proportion of prospective adopters who are of black and dual ethnicity
<b>Preparing and approving adoptive parents</b>
Improve timeliness in matching approved adopters
Reduce the number of prospective adopter approvals that are later rescinded
<b>Planning for children</b>
Ensure all children who would benefit from adoption are identified appropriately
Ensure that all children who would benefit from an early permanence placement are identified early and matched with adopters prepared for early permanence
<b>Placing children with adoptive parents</b>
Improve timescales for placing children with adoptive families
Increase the proportion of in-house and local placements
Reduce the number of children for whom the permanence plan has changed away from adoption primarily because adoptive parents could not be found within the child's timescales
<b>Providing support to adoptive families and others</b>
Improve consistency and timeliness in providing support for adoptive families
Increase awareness and uptake of support services amongst adoptive families in order to build resilience and reduce the need for crisis support
Provide specialist and targeted support to adoptive families with the most acute needs in order to reduce disruption in these families



## SERVICE STRUCTURE

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### 5. Governance arrangements

All service functions and partnership arrangements are detailed within the partnership agreement. The agreement includes:

- Governance
- Finances and budget setting
- Data sharing agreement
- Dispute resolution
- Termination of agreement

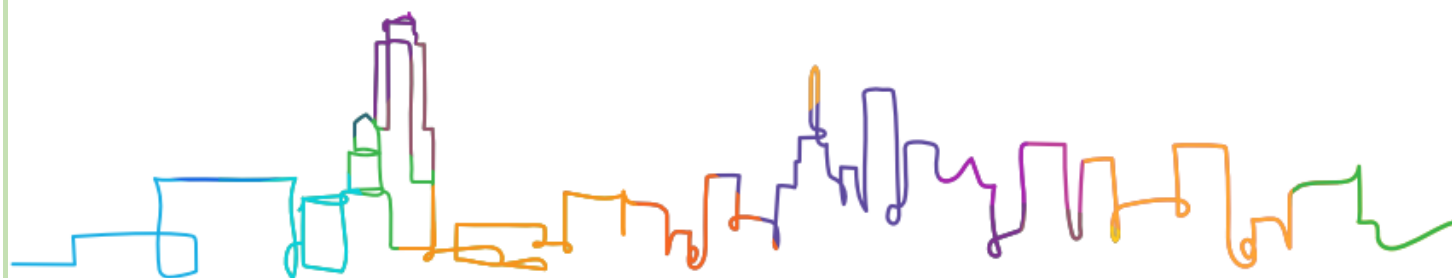
The ALN Governance Board has Director level representation from each of the six partner boroughs. Directors of Children's Services are invited to specific issue meetings if required. The board meets every two to three months and has met virtually since March 2020. The Governance Board has responsibility for all partnership decisions that need to be made above Head of Service level, and for monitoring the performance and budget of ALN.

A Quality Assurance Board (QA Board) meets monthly with membership at Head of Service and Service Manager level from each partner borough. The QA Board has responsibility to monitor and improve partnership working across the boroughs and ALN, including making decisions and proposals about practice and procedures that relate to adoption work across the agencies. The QA Board also considers emerging information about differences in practice between the six boroughs, and where best practice can be implemented across all partners.

Additional meetings are held less formally at Service Manager and Team Manager level between ALN and partner boroughs focusing on specific practice issues, disseminating information and problem-solving.

### 6. Service delivery arrangements

ALN have one central office space at the Laycock Centre in Islington close to Highbury & Islington station. This is a well-connected location which enables travel by public transport to adoptive families across north London and beyond.



An RAA-specific case recording system was purchased and installed during the development of the RAA with all active cases from partner boroughs being transferred and uploaded to the system. Over 400 active cases were manually transferred onto the system during September and October 2019. The data sharing agreement allows for ALN staff to access local case recording systems to improve joined up working and access to historical files, however in practice this has been challenging to implement and work is still underway to find a technical solution that works for all partner boroughs.

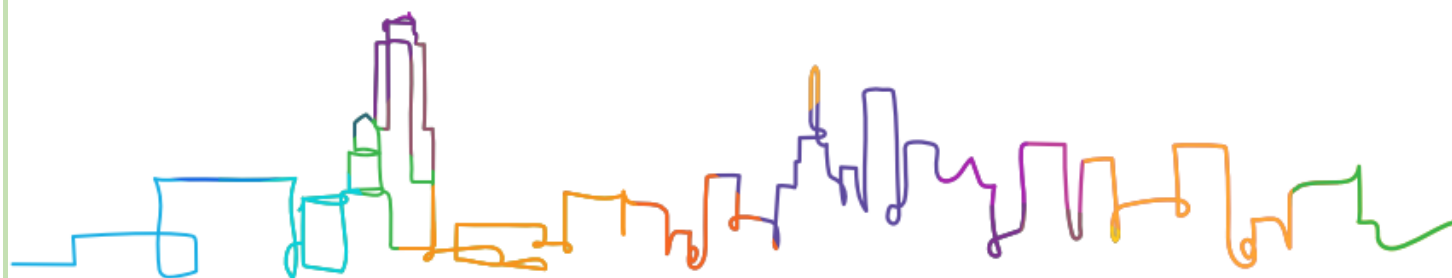
## 7. Adoption Panel

The Adoption Panels continued to run locally in boroughs initially for three months post-launch and from January 2020 all cases were phased into a central ALN Adoption Panel, meeting in Islington. From January 2020 to March 2021 an interim panel chair and panel members were in place until recruitment to a permanent panel could be completed (postponed until early 2021 due to the pandemic).

The ALN Adoption Panel operates centrally and considers all adopter approvals and reviews, adoption matches, and plans for relinquished babies. The ALN Head of Service is the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for approvals, and the borough ADM approves matches for children from their own borough. The Panel normally meets twice per month, with provision to meet three times in a month if required.

## 8. Staffing arrangements

ALN's initial staffing group was constituted almost entirely of staff from the adoption teams in the six partner boroughs. The Head of Service and all Social Work and Team Manager positions were filled directly from previous teams with the exception of one vacant social work post. A Service Manager (who historically worked in the adoption teams in Haringey and Enfield) was recruited externally, and a Business Manager and Business Coordinators (administrative staff) were recruited from different teams and service areas within the six boroughs. Two development posts were left vacant during the first 18 months as a result of the pandemic. A strong emphasis has been placed on building the values of the new service and establishing strong working relationships between staff. ALN has benefited from good relationships between individuals who previously cooperated as part of the consortium, however moving from well-established teams in boroughs into one agency has still been significantly disruptive to staff and they have required support throughout the process.





ADOPT LONDON

9. Adopt London structure

Adopt London North is part of Adopt London, working in close collaboration with three other RAAs in London and together providing services for 23 London boroughs. Adopt London is unique nationally in our close, consortium approach. Through this partnership, we aim to develop a London-wide profile, improve services that benefit from economies of scale, and share best practice. The host boroughs are Islington, Southwark, Havering, and Ealing.

The four Adopt London Heads of Service work together closely to progress shared priorities and identify areas where there is potential to improve practice together. Marketing and communications leads from each of the RAAs also work closely as one team to oversee work relating to the Adopt London brand and online reach.

Heads of Service and the host borough Directors and Assistant Directors meet quarterly as the Adopt London Executive Board chaired by a non-host partner Director. The Executive Board oversees the joint project work of Adopt London, supports with problem solving, and considers Adopt London issues that need the support of Directors to resolve.

Early in 2021 the Executive Board wrote to all 23 member boroughs to request agreement to work towards an Adopt London legal partnership agreement linked to local agreements. This will formalise the responsibilities of the Executive Board and protect the ownership of our shared brand and online resources. This work is being progressed and we hope will be completed during 2021/22.



## FINDING PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

### 10. Adopt London brand

Having a single brand identity and one entry point for prospective adopters covering the 23 Adopt London boroughs is transformative for the way in which prospective adopters are recruited within London. Those considering adoption can now find Adopt London easily through most related search terms online and only need to decide between adopting through a local authority-based agency (Adopt London) or through a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA). Previously many of the Adopt London boroughs were competing with one another for adopters within close geographic spaces. Pooling resources also means a greater budget for marketing and communications spend, resulting in a more professional, creative and up to date online brand.

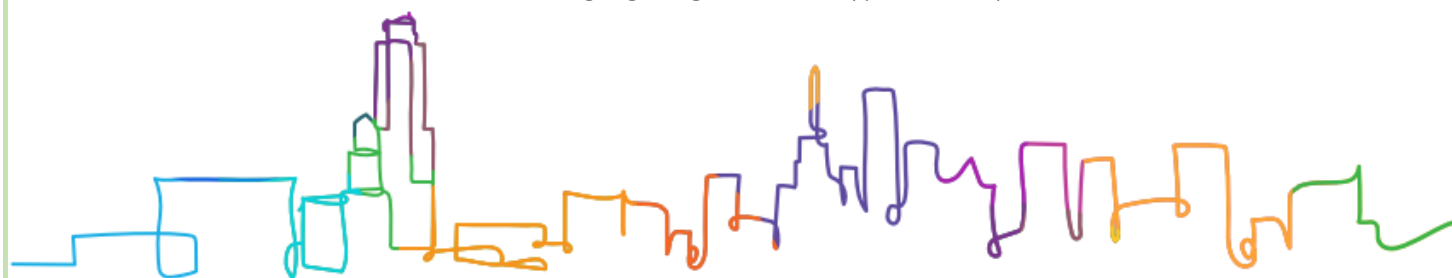
Through the Adopt London brand we aim to highlight these messages to prospective adopters:

- *'The heart of adoption in London'*
- London children are at the heart of what we do
- Celebrating London's diverse adoption community
- Experts in adoption
- Supporting you throughout your adoption journey
- We are stronger together.

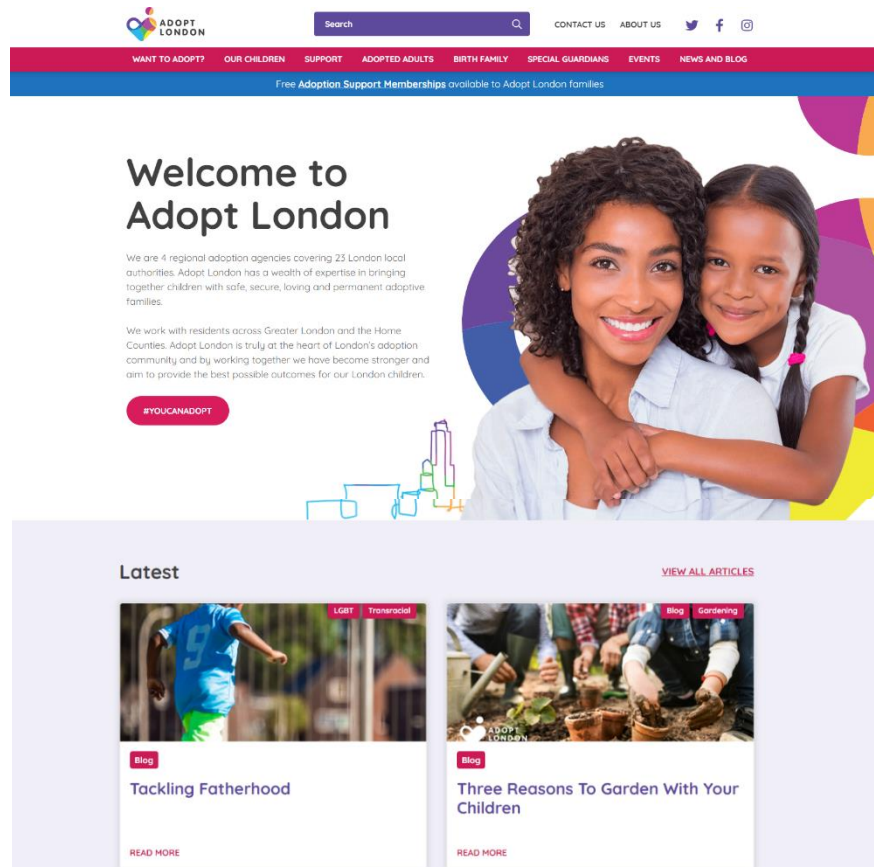


### 11. Adopt London website

The website aims to provide information about adoption and about Adopt London for prospective adoptive parents with news, blogs, and adoption stories being uploaded regularly to encourage people to return to the site and spend time browsing. The website also has a growing range of information for those seeking adoption support, with pages aimed at families, adopted adults, and the birth family of children who have been adopted. The website content promotes a range of perspectives and experiences of adoption, and images are selected to realistically represent the ages and ethnicities of children, as well as highlighting different types of adoptive families.



The website was launched in October 2019 and has progressed from being a new site with no prior views to receiving an average of **3600 visitors per month**, with a total of **40,416 unique visitors during the 12 months of 2020/21**. No direct paid advertising for Adopt London has been undertaken during this time but there has been careful attention paid to search engine optimisation and to growing our use of social media to bring people to the website. **Around 50% of visitors come to the site from an organic search on Google**. Specific digital campaigns launched by Adopt London have created website visit increases of **25% - 40%**.



## 12. Adopt London social media

Adopt London has successfully developed an identity and following on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, with Instagram growing particularly fast in 2021. Social media provides an opportunity for prospective adopters to get to know our brand, and keeps us connected with them over long periods of time whilst they are considering adoption. Even once they have contacted us to get basic information about the adoption process, the majority of prospective adopters do not start an assessment immediately and may take years to consider their decision and prepare practically and emotionally. This makes it important for us provide ways to keep in touch and support them as they learn and prepare, with the hope that they return to Adopt London when ready to go forwards.

We currently have **over 1400 followers** across social media platforms.



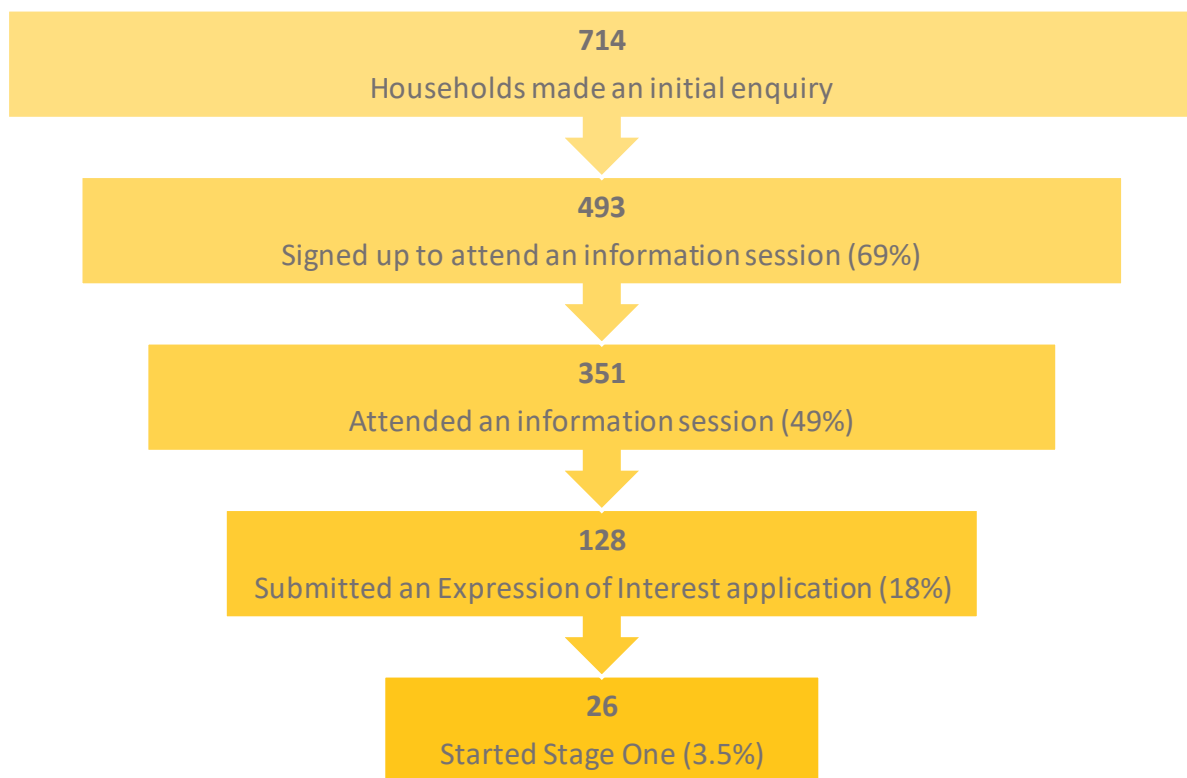
Rather than paying for advertising, the Adopt London strategy is to create original content that will be viewed and shared online with the aim to build our social media reach and the numbers of individuals visiting and revisiting our website. Adoption stories, inspirational or informative quotes, and entertaining posts that individuals want to share, are most successful at reaching our audience.

In 2021/22 we aim to continue to significantly increase our presence and engagement with prospective adoptive parents online. We want to better engage all of our partner borough communications teams to maximise the local reach that they have and to strengthen the connection for residents between their local borough and Adopt London.



### 13. Enquiries and providing information

A small number of in-person information sessions were held in the last part of 2019/20 prior to the pandemic. These were suspended in March 2020 and we launched virtual sessions from June 2020 once it became clear that we would be able to continue to process new applicants remotely. From June to March 2020 we ran **21 virtual information sessions**. Attendees make an enquiry and sign up to a session of their choice through the website. Information sessions run twice monthly, many of them in the evening, and are hosted by an ALN senior manager.



2020/21 enquiry levels have been high, representing a **50% increase** for north London from 2018/19, when 486 enquiries were received (2018/19 was the last full year of the consortium). We do not know how many households attended information sessions during that period. The proportion of households who make an enquiry who later go on to submit an Expression of Interest application is high at 18%, suggesting satisfaction with the information received and a positive perception of the agency. The rate of those who submitted an application then proceeding through to stage 1 is low at 3.5%, believed to be due to the pandemic creating instability in people's lives.



For some people the pandemic has provided an impetus and opportunity to find out more about adoption, possibly leading to the increased enquiries seen. However there also appear to be a greater proportion of prospective adopters who although committed are not yet ready to proceed to an assessment, some due to instability with work or housing, and others who have very recently stopped fertility treatment due to disruption caused by the pandemic. By staying connected to these households we may see them returning ready and well prepared in significant numbers in future years.

In October 2020 in anticipation of a potentially high number of enquiries during National Adoption Week we launched virtual 'Meet the Adopter' sessions monthly. We welcome anyone interested in adoption to attend these sessions and have three sets of adoptive parents online to answer any questions put to them about their experiences. The questions and responses are wide ranging and every session has been unique. The experienced adoptive parents have consistently spoken with such honesty and warmth that they are able to relay really



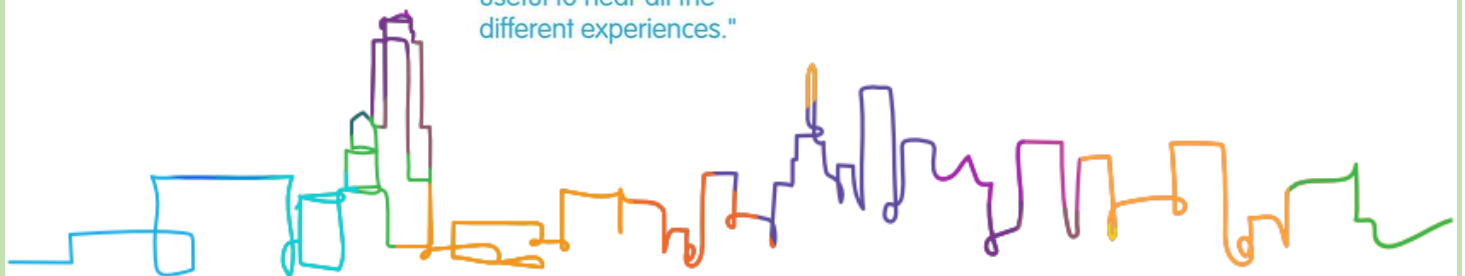
difficult and challenging information, always balanced with visible love for their children, and joy about being an adoptive parent. The sessions being online in the evening have meant a wider range of parents have been able to speak regularly than would be able to at an in-person event, including single parents and both partners in a couple. Some of our recently approved adopters have attended Meet the Adopter sessions most months throughout their entire adoption assessment, and this has broadened their understanding and increased their openness when considering potential children.

"I thought it was great that there was a variety of adopters from different backgrounds to hear from."

"We attended your information session and were very impressed with the energy and knowledge of your team."

"My husband and I attended the 'Meet The Adopter' event recently and found it incredibly useful to hear all the different experiences."

"We hadn't seriously considered adopting siblings before, but now we are excited to talk to a social worker and think we can do it."



PREPARING AND APPROVING ADOPTIVE PARENTS

14. Assessments of prospective adopters

The number of approvals of new adoptive families has been lower this year for several reasons. The team were working through a number of complex and delayed legacy cases that came into ALN from the boroughs at launch when the pandemic began. Our prospective adopter assessments became virtual, however it was necessary to slow down many of the assessments that were not already nearing conclusion in order to ensure the assessment could be carried out safely and robustly. Each assessment was carefully assessed to consider how many in-person meetings would need to be undertaken alongside virtual visits. Preparation training for prospective adopters was re-written from being a four day in-person group training, to a modular virtual group training delivered live over video call.



Table: Adoptive family approvals by year for all six boroughs / ALN

2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
41	31	27	33	19	12

The team have completed a number of high quality assessments leading to the approval of prospective adoptive parents who are more open when considering children, and better prepared to manage challenges.

There are positive trends in the assessment pipeline, indicating that there are likely to be a significantly higher number of approvals in 2021/22, with the potential for further growth in 2022/23. **15 - 19 households are predicted to be approved within the first half of 2021/22.**

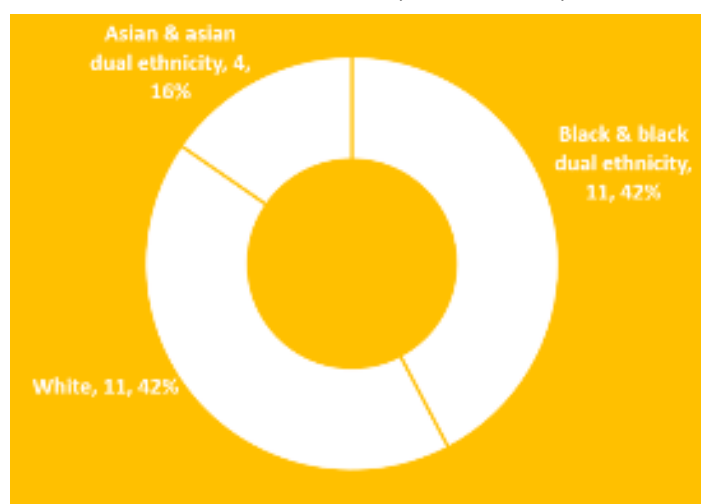
Table: Recruitment activity completed in 2020/21

Started stage 1	Completed stage 1	Did not progress to stage 2	Started stage 2	Approved	Withdrew after approval
20	17	0	19	12	1



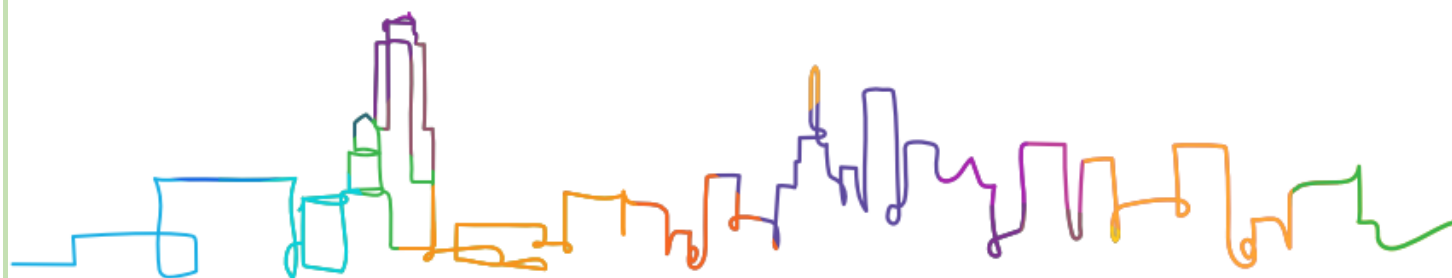
## 15. Proportions of black and black dual ethnicity prospective adopters

We have looked at ethnicities of the 26 households entering the formal start of the adoption process in 2020/21 and grouped them into broad categories to show the proportion of households approved from black, and black dual ethnicity households (for example where there is a couple and one individual is from a black background but the other is not). These figures give us an estimation of the number of households who might be able to adopt a child from a black ethnic background without the placement being fully trans-racial. Adequate availability of these placements is crucial to reduce delay for black children in the care system. This shows that **42% of prospective adopters** starting their adoption assessment in 2020/21 were from a black or black dual ethnicity family. Proportionately this is very similar to the **40 – 45% of black or black dual ethnicity children** known to ALN who had a Placement Order or were matched in 2020/21. However recruitment levels are not yet at a high enough level for ALN approvals to meet the needs of all children waiting for an adoptive placement and ALN therefore need to further increase the number of black and black dual ethnicity prospective adopters entering assessment in 2021/22 in order to prevent delay for children.



## 16. Increasing the number of black adoptive families

As part of Adopt London, ALN will be launching a long-term project in summer 2021 with the oversight of an external consultant to better understand our data around ethnicity across Adopt London, to reach out and listen to those with a broad range of personal and professional experiences of the adoption system in London, and to use this information to plan and implement changes that will improve the ways in which we recruit, train, assess and support black and black dual ethnicity adoptive families. This project is a long term commitment aimed at building a strong reputation with black adoptive and prospective adoptive families by genuinely improving service delivery and their experiences throughout the adoption process.





## PLANNING FOR CHILDREN

### 17. Arrangements for adoption permanency planning

Each partner borough is responsible for permanency planning and tracking of their children. A lead Family Finder from ALN for each borough attends planning meetings and is able to provide advice and guidance about adoption plans. Referrals for children are made to ALN when the plan is likely to be adoption and the case is allocated at the point that early Family Finding work can begin, usually around the time the Best Interests Decision is made by the borough Agency Decision Maker. The table shows an increase in referrals of almost 50% in the last quarter of 2020/21, reflecting an increase in care proceedings beginning to reach a conclusion for children in the local authorities in January – March 2021.

*Table: Family Finding referrals into ALN, by borough*

	Cases at launch Oct 2019	2020/21 Q1	2020/21 Q2	2020/21 Q3	2020/21 Q4	Total for borough 2020/21
Barnet	14	4	7	4	10	25
Islington	7	2	0	7	3	12
Camden	8	6	6	7	2	21
Enfield	12	5	5	6	10	26
Hackney	24	2	2	4	14	22
Haringey	29	15	13	8	13	49
Total for Q	94	34	33	36	52	155

### 18. Numbers of children with a plan for adoption

Figures on page 18 provided by the national adoption data returns show levels of decisions made for care plans of adoption and how many plans resulted in Placement Orders at the end of proceedings over the last three years (a Placement Order is an endorsement by the court of the care plan for adoption). Whilst there has been a significant drop in 2020/21 in both plans for adoption and Placement Orders made, practice information tells us that this is largely as a result of delays to care proceedings during the pandemic, and particularly delays to courts making final decisions in cases where adoption is the plan as a result of concern for due process. At this early stage in 2021/22 we are expecting numbers to rise again this year as courts begin to function more normally.

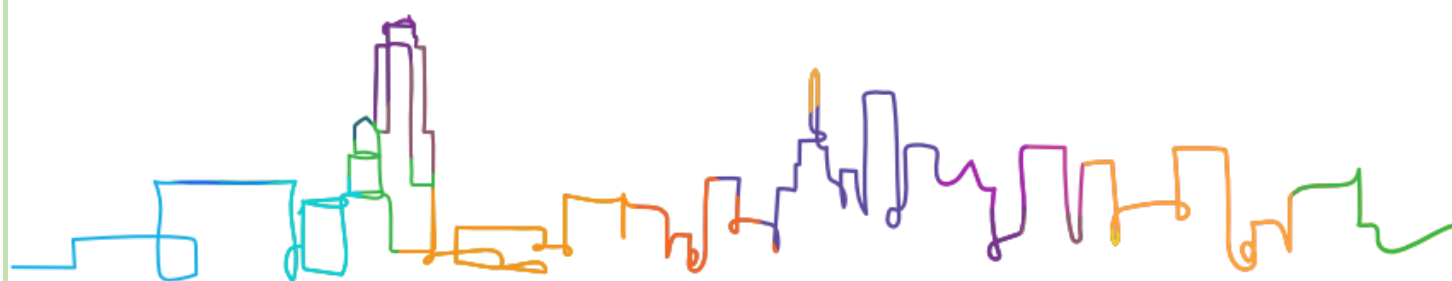


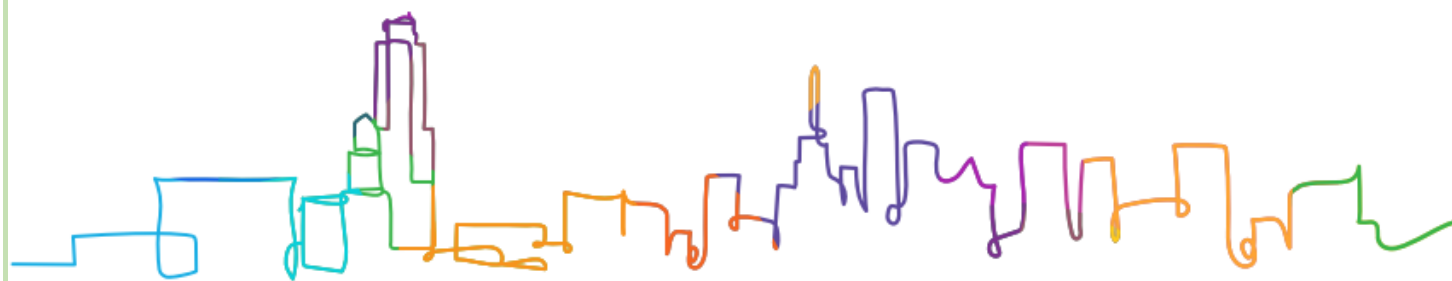
Table: Best Interest Decisions, by borough and in comparison to population size (red) – provided by ASGLB national adoption returns

Agency	Total ADM BIDs between			ADM BID rate per 10,000 *		
	1-Apr-18 to 31-Mar-19	1-Apr-19 to 31-Mar-20	1-Apr-20 to 31-Mar-21	1-Apr-18 to 31-Mar-19	1-Apr-19 to 31-Mar-20	1-Apr-20 to 31-Mar-21
<b>Adopt London North</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>1.67</b>	<b>2.18</b>	<b>1.42</b>
Barnet	10	28	12	1.08	3.02	1.29
Camden	10	9	5	1.96	1.77	0.98
Enfield	15	13	15	1.78	1.54	1.78
Hackney	18	18	10	2.83	2.83	1.57
Haringey	7	13	11	1.16	2.15	1.82
Islington	6	5	3	1.43	1.19	0.71

Table: Placement Orders made, by borough – provided by ASGLB national adoption returns

Agency	Total POs between		
	1-Apr-18 to 31-Mar-19	1-Apr-19 to 31-Mar-20	1-Apr-20 to 31-Mar-21
<b>Adopt London North</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>40</b>
Barnet	10	12	7
Camden	7	7	2
Enfield	7	11	7
Hackney	11	14	9
Haringey	10	9	14
Islington	8	2	1

It is worth noting that overall numbers for ALN provide a stronger indication of a trend in the data, as individual borough's figures alone are low and therefore do not show trends reliably.

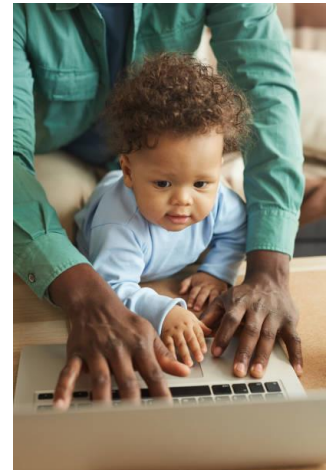


## PLACING CHILDREN WITH ADOPTIVE PARENTS

### 19. Family finding

Our Family Finders are tenacious and use a wide variety of methods to identify potential placements for children, relying on a mixture of in-house, Adopt London, and other RAAs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs). Our pooled Inter-Agency Fee budget (the costs paid for placements that are made externally) means that placement decisions about children can be made quickly without the delay that would be caused by decision making by boroughs. Prior to the pandemic, Family Finders and children's social workers visited every potentially strong link for a family in their home at an early stage of consideration. As a result of virtual working this initial linking meeting now takes place online and is followed up with an in-person visit to the home if successful. This reduces Social Worker time and increases scrutiny around placement decision making because additional staff such as managers can join a virtual linking meeting at the early stages to add an additional perspective, something harder to accommodate with long distance visits in person.

The Family Finding team have been pioneers in rolling out regular **virtual activity mornings** for children who have a plan for adoption. Children join the activity morning virtually from home with their foster carer and are entertained by a professional children's entertainer. Prospective adopters join the meeting without their cameras on and so are able to observe the children interacting without causing the child any stress or uncertainty. Foster carers have commented on how successful these events are compared to in-person activity days which can be stressful and exhausting. One of our foster carers has provided this feedback after attending a virtual event with her child:

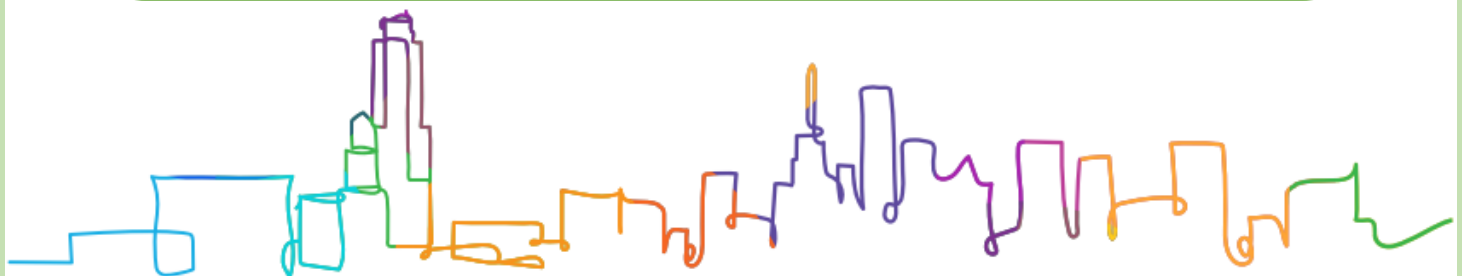


#### For [the child]...

"The day was much easier for her. She remained in the comfort of her own home in a safe space to watch something fun. Although the entertainment was not at her level she had toys around her to play with. It enabled her to be at her best, totally relaxed and engaging in playing as well as frequently watching all that was happening."

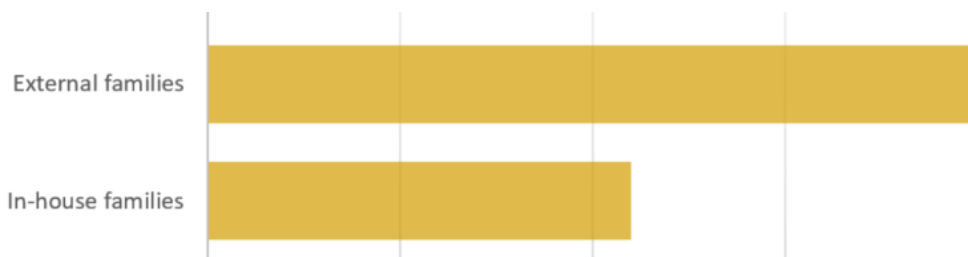
#### For me [the foster carer]...

"It was so much easier not having to take her anywhere. All the anxiety that I get about her being at 'her best' for the potential adopters was taken away as I knew in her home environment she would be relaxed. It also took away the sadness I feel at activity days when no one comes over to talk to us. It was really good to not be able to see any potential adopters. It was great to be able to see and hear the involvement of the other children."



## 20. In-house placements

The ALN Family Finding team and Recruitment & Assessment teams now benefit from sharing a pooled knowledge of all children and prospective adopters in north London. They meet regularly across teams to consider all potential matches and will take steps to initiate an early link prior to either the prospective adopters’ approval or the child’s Placement Order where there is a potential in-house link. We have seen success in these early in-house matches for children and predict increases in in-house placements in 2020/21. In comparison to external placements, in-house placements enable us to provide higher levels of support and scrutiny, and mean that we can quickly problem-solve and resolve issues with the child’s Social Work team if these arise. When children move to an adoptive family who are local it also means that it is much easier for us to visit frequently to provide support after their transition and it is easier for them to continue to have some contact with their foster carer. Around **a third of children (11)** in 2020/21 went to live with ALN families.



## 21. Specific-child publicity

We are undertaking trials to find out whether specific child publicity can be effective for some individual children who have been really hard to find adoptive families for through the usual routes. Careful and sensitive planning is undertaken in partnership with the child’s social work team in the borough, and then a plan prepared by our communications lead in ALN, taking into account the specific characteristics and needs of the child, and the best audience to target. In the two examples shown we have used an artist’s impression of the child and changed their name to protect their privacy. This work will be formally reviewed late in 2021.



## 22. Children waiting for an adoptive family

At the end of March 2021 there were 37 children for whom ALN were actively family finding. We are expecting a high level of new Placement Orders to be made in 2021/22 as a result of delayed proceedings last year, so this number may rise. Regular family finding review meetings are held for every child jointly between ALN and the child's social work team in the borough to closely monitor and review family finding activity and to ensure that the plan remains appropriate for the child. Tracking meetings take place between partner boroughs and ALN managers to monitor adoption plans for children.

*Table: Children with active family finding where there is a Placement Order in place, correct on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021*

<b>Barnet</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Camden</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Enfield</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Hackney</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Haringey</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Islington</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>

## 23. Moving children to adoptive families

Children have continued to transition into their adoptive homes throughout the pandemic, but moves have needed to be thoroughly risk assessed and planned in detail to reduce the risks of covid-19 transition. Many foster carers are older or have more vulnerable health and many have complex arrangements such as contact that they are required to facilitate. Prioritising the well-being of our foster carers whilst trying to ensure the transition takes place as close to our normal practice as possible has therefore required creativity. Wherever possible those involved have isolated prior to the introductions starting.

In autumn 2020 we started the journey towards implementing 'Moving to Adoption', the University of East Anglia's (UEA) research-based model for transitioning children to adoptive families. This approach emphasises the importance of a preliminary pre-introductions phase and a more formalised and supported post-introductions phase to sandwich the most intensive stage which takes place primarily in the foster home. The team have received very positive feedback from children's social workers, foster carers and adoptive parents about their experiences using this model. There is more information available on the Moving to Adoption website, available by clicking on the picture.



### 24. Placements made

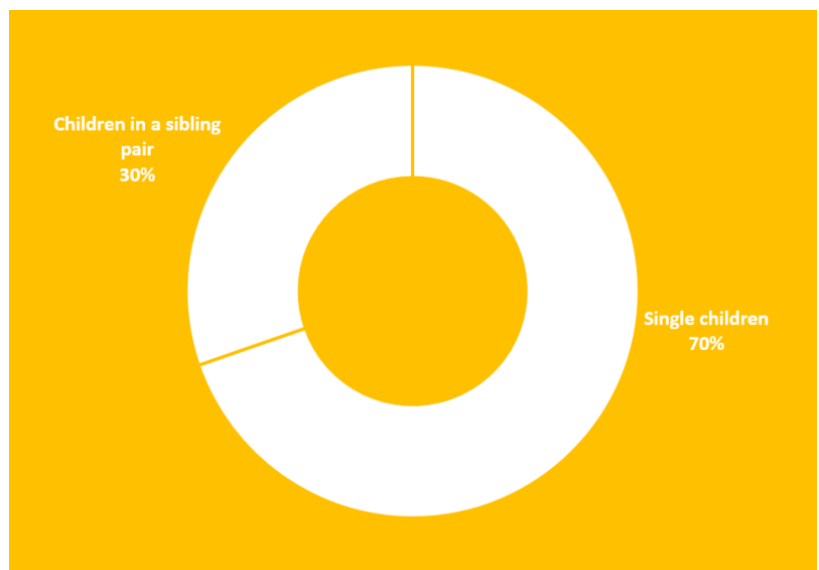
As shown in the table below, the number of placements made was lower in 2020/21 than in previous years, primarily due to the reduction in Placement Orders over the same period (paragraph 18). The reduction was particularly noticeable for Barnet, primarily as a result of pandemic-related delays in care proceedings and final decisions in court. We are expecting a much higher level of placements made for Barnet children in 2021/22 and have already seen many of these starting to take place in the first part of quarter 1.

Table: Placements made, by borough

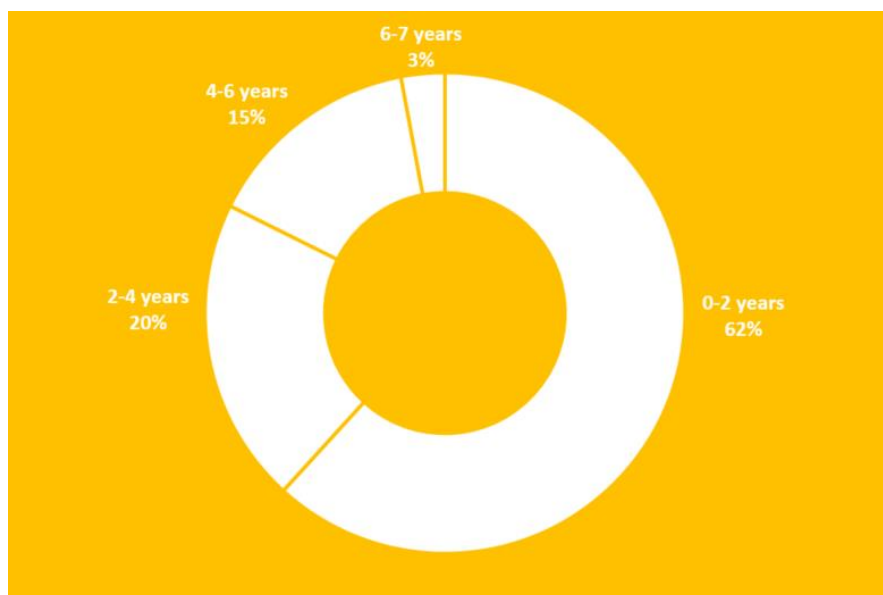
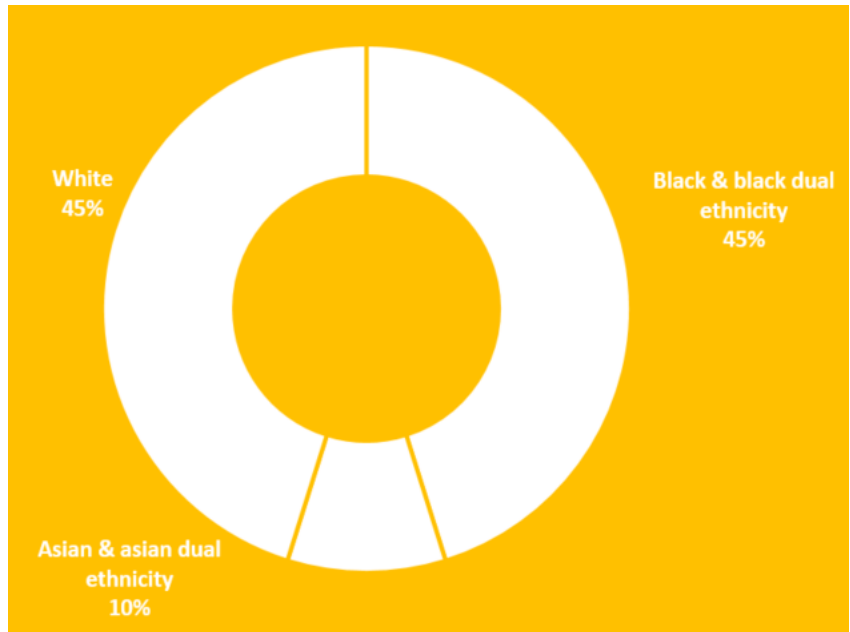
Agency	Total Placements between		
	1-Apr-18 to 31-Mar-19	1-Apr-19 to 31-Mar-20	1-Apr-20 to 31-Mar-21
<b>Adopt London North</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>33</b>
Barnet	14	15	4
Camden	7	4	7
Enfield	5	7	3
Hackney	12	9	7
Haringey	14	9	9
Islington	10	6	3

### 25. Characteristics of children placed

A third of children placed in 2020/21 were in sibling groups and moved to their adoptive placement together, whilst 70% were individual children. We have not placed any sibling groups larger than 2 children in 2020/21.



The 33 children placed for adoption in 2020/21 covered **12 different ethnic and mixed ethnicity official categories**. When these are grouped together into broader categories it shows that there were equal proportions of black and black dual ethnicity children and of white children, as well as a smaller proportion of Asian and Asian dual ethnicity children.



In 2020/21 the **majority of children placed were under 2 years old**, with 85% of those children being under 18 months (around 50% of all children placed). Some of these were placed through Early Permanence and so their adoptive family acted as foster carers whilst care proceedings took place. Just under **20% of children were over 4 years old** at the point of placement, with **the oldest child placed being 6 years old**.



## PROVIDING SUPPORT TO ADOPTIVE FAMILIES AND OTHERS

### 26. Support to families after the Adoption Order is granted

We have a large team of Adoption Support social workers providing support to all adoptive families living in our region and also contact support (between adoptive families and birth families) for all adoptive children and young people that have been previously placed by one of the six partner boroughs. In response to significantly increasing levels of demand for adoption support in 2020/21 we created a duty service to ensure that families can speak to a social worker quickly and that we can prioritise families with the most urgent needs. This arrangement has reduced a previous waiting list for support and is due to continue until at least the end of 2021 before being further reviewed.

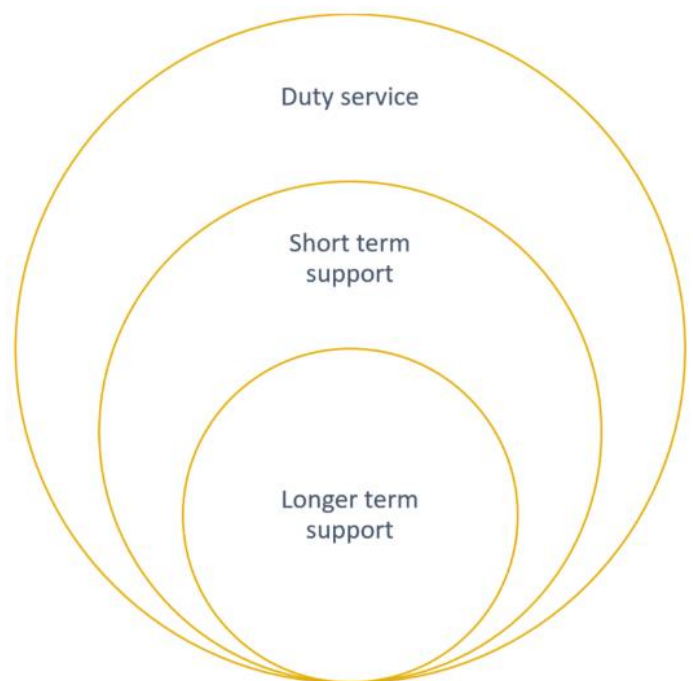
"I want to thank you for all your kindness and words of wisdom... Your advice and support was invaluable as it helped clarify what we, and [our daughter], actually needed."

Some families contacting ALN

need only advice or sign-posting, or have a simple request that can be completed by the duty social workers. Others need a greater level of support and may wish to access therapeutic support through the Adoption Support Fund (central government fund for adoptive families). Families needing more support are allocated to a social worker who completes an

assessment of their needs and recommendation for support, including arranging therapeutic support through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). Families with the most complex difficulties, who can often be at risk of family breakdown without support, are allocated for a longer term intervention with a social worker, who also coordinates a team around the child approach.

In 2020/21 **over £860,000** of specialist therapeutic support was provided to adoptive families through ALN.



"I really appreciate everything you and your colleagues have done to support us and all the work that has gone on... You have helped me to feel our needs/hopes are valid, and your kind and positive interactions with me have made a big difference."





The majority of families have welcomed the move to virtual working in Adoption Support as a result of the pandemic, as this is often more convenient and feels less intrusive. Although some visits are undertaken in person (especially when requested by the family), virtual visits to families are likely to remain the most common way of undertaking adoption support assessments in future.

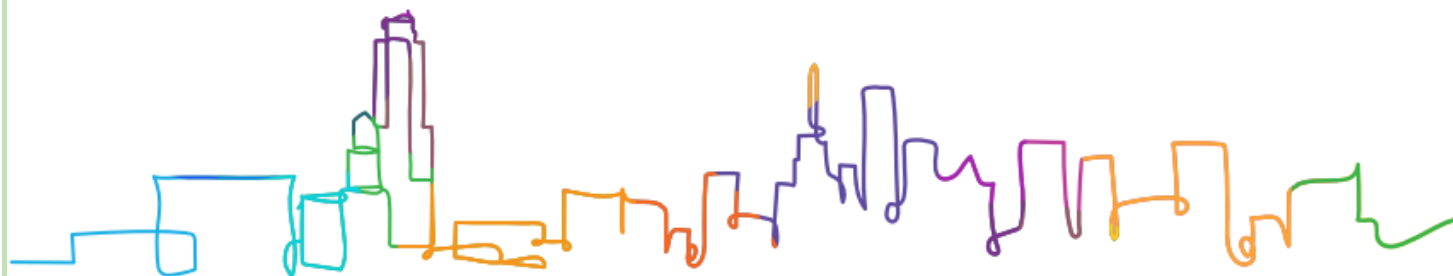


As a result of specific covid-19 support funds that were available to RAAs from central government in June 2020, the four Adopt London RAAs worked in partnership to design, commission and deliver almost **£1million** worth of specialist virtual therapeutic support to adoptive and Special Guardianship families and young people over a six month period. We commissioned an animated video to promote

the support that was available. Feedback indicates that our promotional efforts meant that families who had not previously accessed adoption support were encouraged to do so during the early stages of the pandemic. The support was strongly welcomed by families, who found it quick, responsive to their needs and easy to access. An independent evaluation was completed which highlighted the success of pooling resources and funds to commission services at this scale across London and we have since petitioned the Department for Education to consider allowing access to the Adoption Support Fund in a similar way in the future so that support can be delivered to families more quickly.

## 27. Peer support for adoptive parents

From April 2020 Adopt London entered into a formal partnership with **We Are Family** (WAF), an adopter peer support organisation and registered charity that started in north London but now covers the Greater London area. Our arrangement has been supported by a grant from Adopt London to WAF, enabling them to increase their administrative capacity so they can grow their membership and apply for charitable funding themselves. WAF operate through local groups but in response to the pandemic and with the support of Adopt London they have provided alternative support online.

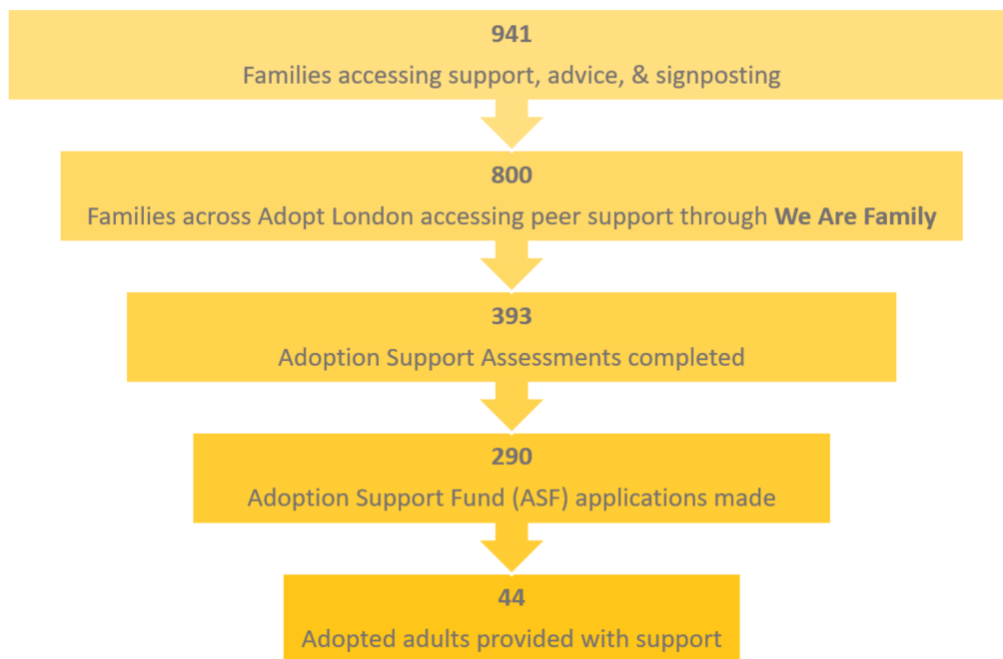


In summer 2020 WAF in partnership with Adopt London launched a regular expert webinar programme for parents ‘WAF Talks’, which offers talks twice a month on a wide variety of topics and access to watch these back through a new members hub. This has provided a lifeline of support for families struggling throughout 2020. Topics covered have been broad, including helping parents whose children are experiencing suicidal thoughts, hearing the perspective of a birth mother, and a research briefing about the importance of contact. Our partnership with WAF continues to grow and in summer 2021 we will be launching a new podcast series together.

“Thank you for putting on these talks. They have always been very helpful and tonight’s was fantastic. Thank the speaker from the bottom of my heart. She has helped to further my education and this will undoubtedly help my children with understanding the past and their birth mother’s journey.”

### 28. Demand for support

In 2020/21 our Adoption Support service delivered this support to our adoptive families and adopted adults in north London:



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2021/22

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### **Finding prospective adoptive parents**

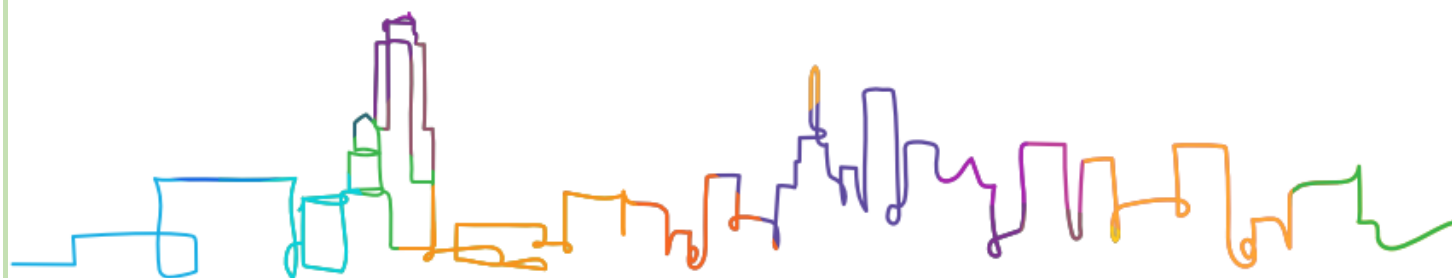
1. Launch and implement phase 1 of our project to better understand the needs of black and black dual ethnicity adopters, and to improve our services to them for the long term.
2. Build the Adopt London reach and reputation on social media.
3. Improve outreach to our local communities through borough communications teams.
4. Increase the rate at which those submitting an Expression of Interest go on to start their assessment.

### **Preparing and approving adoptive parents**

5. Increase the number of approvals whilst maintaining high standard of assessments.
6. Complete the launch of our permanent Adoption Panel.

### **Planning for children**

7. Complete a review of Agency Decision Maker processes in the boroughs to ensure these are robust.
8. Improve early referral rates for all children in care proceedings who may benefit from a plan for adoption so that there is time for careful care planning.
9. Increase awareness of Early Permanence in children's social work teams.



### Placing children with adoptive parents

10. Increase the number of children who move to in-house and local adoptive families.
11. Evaluate specific-child publicity work and roll out recommendations.
12. Support implementation of the Moving to Adoption model for transitions by providing training and support to children's social work teams.

### Providing support to adoptive families and others

13. Increase access to support resources for everyone impacted by adoption through development of the Adopt London website.
14. Launch regular drop-in support spaces for those children's social work teams that are working with adopted children and young people, and for social workers who are completing life story work with children placed for adoption.
15. Introduce tools to allow better recording and measuring of adoption support work and to capture feedback from those who have accessed services.

### Working as part of Adopt London

16. Strengthen arrangements through a legal partnership agreement for Adopt London.

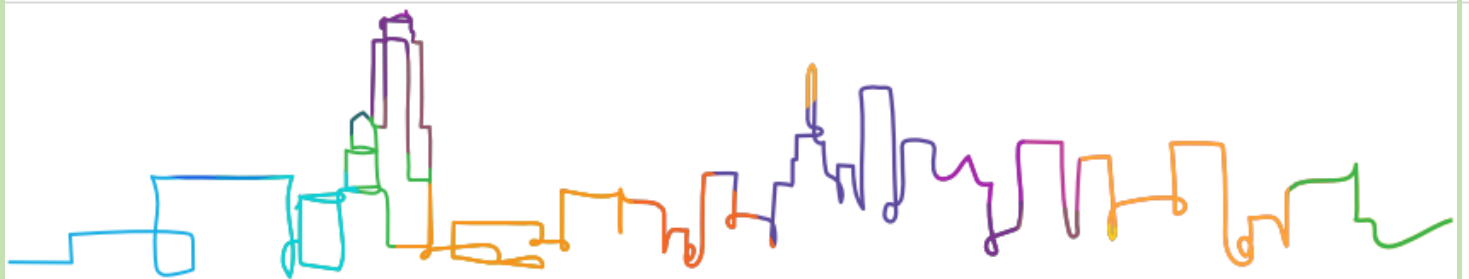
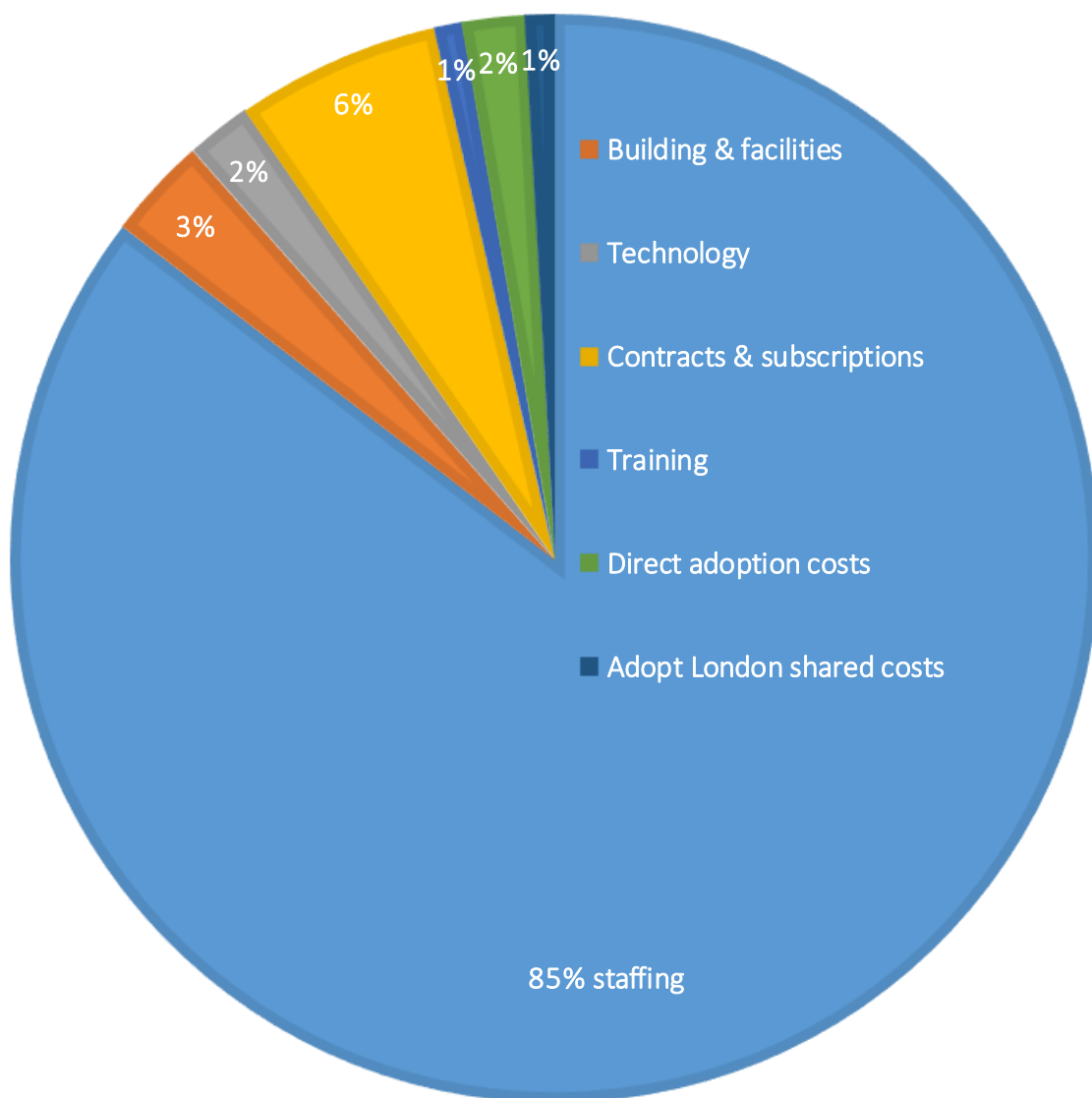




FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT 2020/21

The total budget for ALN in 2020/21 was £2,497,062. Of this, 85% (£2,097,155) was spent on staffing costs – including permanent and agency staffing, sessional workers and maternity costs.

AREAS OF SPEND IN 2020/21





# ADOPT LONDON NORTH

REPORT END

