



Haringey Council

Report for:	Corporate Parenting Committee	Item Number:	
Title:	Annual report of the Adoption Service		
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Ward(s) affected: All	Report for Key/Non Key Decisions: N/A		

1. Recommendations

This report is submitted to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee (CPAC) for information. The Committee and other Council Committees are not required to make formal decisions based on this report.

2. Description of the service

The Adoption Service is located within the, Commissioning and Placements which principally provides placements for Children in Care. It is a critical part of the service whose purpose is to provide permanent placements through Adoption or Special Guardianship for children in the Council's care.

The Service functions are provided by two teams of social workers who undertake the range of activities and services delivered by the service, as well as by the Adoption and Permanence Panel constituted under the Adoption Agency Regulations. In addition to this, the advertising, communication and marketing functions for the recruitment of adopters is one of the responsibilities of the Senior Marketing Communications Officer. However it is important to stress that social workers from a range of teams in Children's Services also make a significant contribution to achieving adoption and special guardianship for a child, as do health and education partners. One of the principle aims of the service is to ensure that these specialist functions are integrated into the overall work of the team around the child through effective liaison and robust partnership working.



3. Background information

Purpose of the Report.

The Adoption Service is regulated by the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and the National Minimum Adoption Standards. The Service is inspected on a regular cycle by Ofsted. The last inspection, in July 2011, deemed the service as satisfactory. The Adoption Service is required to:

- A. Demonstrate that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance in the recruitment of staff, volunteers and persons on the central list (NMS21.2)
- B. Prepare children's permanence reports in a full and complete way to ensure the Adoption Panel and prospective adopters have all the information needed to make recommendations and effect sound matching in every case. (Adoption Agencies Regulations, 17 and 31)
- C. Ensure that all new staff, including agency staff, undertake the Children's Workforce Development Council's induction standards (NMS 23.3)
- D. Ensure that the executive of the local authority receives twice yearly reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency. (NMS 25.6)
- E. Ensure that staff is provided with regular supervision; a written record is kept by the agency which details the time, date and length of the session. (MNS 24.4 and 24.5)
- F. Demonstrate that written minutes of the adoption panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendations. (NMS 17.10)
- G. Demonstrate that life story work exists in a format appropriate to the child's age and understanding and its preparation is co-ordinated in a timely way (NMS 2.5 and 2.6)

An action plan was subsequently developed and implemented and was presented to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee on 31st January 2012.

This Annual Report document provides a description of services offered by the two principal teams, a brief analysis of performance and key issues for the future.

4. Recruitment

Recruitment advertising takes place in a range of different publications in order to make sure all sections of the community are reached. Adopters for specific children looked after by Haringey Council are routinely sought by advertising in specialist adoption publications such as "Be My Parent" and "Children who Wait". Children for whom an in house adopter is



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not immediately available are routinely referred to the Adoption Register. A particularly effective innovation has been the making of DVD recordings which showcase children waiting for permanent placement and providing greater insight for prospective carers. We have completed 11 of these since April 2011.

The Marketing and Communications officer has co-ordinated profiles of all children referred to this service for adoption placements and regularly distributes these profiles to all adoption agencies in the country. The staff team members attend Adoption Exchange Days facilitated by the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium (NLAFC) and the Adoption Register. In addition, the NLAFC hosts general adopter recruitment events throughout the year. The Consortium has recently set up a focus group to recruit a higher volume of black and ethnic minority adopters. The Haringey Service has developed a recruitment strategy to do this also, as this is a deficit in our service.

The overall aim is to recruit a pool of adopters to enable matches with specific children to be made as quickly as possible, thus minimising any drift and delay in securing permanency. It is only when the service is unable to place with Haringey approved families that inter-agency placements are sought.

5. Preparation

The formal application to adopt is taken up before the preparation group as required by guidelines. Applicants are expected to attend the preparation and training course as the first stage of the assessment process. Inter country adopters attend the preparation courses run by the Norwood Adoption Agency, which also undertakes their assessment on behalf of the NLAFC. In addition each member of the NLAFC offers places to applicants on their preparation groups. Each preparation group is run over 4 days. In 2011 – 2012 this Service ran 2 preparation groups. This was as a result of staff shortages and high staff turnover which has now been addressed.

In 2012 – 2013 the service plans to hold 4 preparation groups, one of which has already taken place on 20 February to 1 March 2012 of which there were nine households consisting of 7 couples and two single applicants.

Further preparation training groups are planned in 2012- June, September, November and February 2013.

6. Assessment

Our aim is to complete assessments in 8 months, which includes the preparation period, in line with the Adoption Agency Regulations. However, due to a range of factors including staffing changes, the average length of time was 10 months. The service approved 11 adoptive households in the last year, and 3 inter-country adopters were approved by Norwood Adoption Agency on behalf of Haringey. Despite the staffing issues referred to above, this was more than a 40% increase on the previous year's performance when only five adoptive parents were approved.

7. Panel



Haringey's Adoption and Permanence Panel meets twice monthly. As per regulation and considered good practice, we have an independent chair that has substantial professional experience of adoption. There are 4 independent members, 2 of whom are adoptive parents and 2 of whom were adopted. In the last year Panel considered 39 adoption plans, 40 long term fostering plans, 12 approvals of new adopters, 16 matches for adoption, and 5 matches for long term fostering. Six adoption plans were rescinded. There have been no referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism, the regulatory body which hears appeals of applicants who were not approved by the Agency Decision Maker.

The service has introduced a system whereby the Panel chair feeds back to the Agency Decision Maker on cases which were presented, in particular where there are possible concerns about practice.

The Panel plans to have 2 business meetings a year.

8. Placements for adoption

The service placed 16 children for adoption, 8 children placed were from BME groups. The average age of children at placement is 3.2 years the average is increase due to the age range of children being placed. 8 of the children were placed with LBH adopters.

The timeliness of adoptive placements has been measured through national statistical returns for many years, and a national indicator since 2008. The performance indicator looks at the placement history of children adopted each year and measures the percent placed for adoption within 12 months of the agency decision that Adoption is the plan. The average length of time to adoption is 18 months. 50% of children were placed within 12 months of the adoption plan decision, 36% were placed within 24 months of agency decision and the remainder within 3 years, there are very case specific reasons for this length of time and our current tracking arrangements would ensure that individual cases are closely monitored.

There is no comparator data available in relation to 2010 – 2011 for the indicator in relation to adoption orders, nor is there comparator data for children placed in the year. The Adoption and Permanency Service has introduced monitoring systems for the different components of the process, which will enable us to determine whether we are on target, and to take corrective action when we are not. In addition, we have introduced fortnightly link meetings which focus on making links between children referred and families approves at the earliest possible stage. The aim is to make formal matches as soon as possible after the granting of the Placement Order, which gives the local authority legal permission to place for Adoption. There is a renewed focus on achieving Adoption Orders in a more timely fashion, and the development of holistic assessment of children's needs and robust support plans for adopters to assist them in meeting these needs is an integral part of the process.

The above mentioned systems are part of the service improvement planning and underpin the awareness that significant improvements in performance are necessary.

9. Children waiting



There are currently 58 children on referral for adoption placements. Links and matches have been identified for 21 of those children. A further 11 children's plans for adoption have not been presented to the Adoption Panel as yet. The introduction of fortnightly linking meetings as well as tracking meetings overseen by Service Heads, and a strong focus across the Children and Families Division on achieving permanency will have a positive impact on improving performance in this area.

10. Adoption orders granted

Over the past year Adoption Orders have been granted on 14 children. This includes 3 sibling groups.

11. Support

The support an adoptive family may need over time is carefully considered as part of the assessment and approval process which then contributes to the Adoption Support Plan for the individual child/ren to be placed. The assessment for support will include the following areas:-

- a) Financial support and ongoing allowances.
- b) Support Groups through the NLAFC
- c) Contact arrangements.
- d) Accessing local health and education services.
- e) Services to prevent family breakdown; and
- f) Counselling, advice and information.

The vast majority of support services are delivered through the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortia (NLAFC), and there is a contract between the NLAFC boroughs with the 'Post Adoption Service' a specialist charity, to deliver parenting support and therapeutic services. In the event of a child with particular emotional and behavioural difficulties there is the provision to deliver specific therapeutic parenting packages.

12. Disruptions

There have been no disruptions of Adoption Placements made by Haringey in the last year. However, one match did not go ahead to placement and the family withdrew. Where we have received referrals re possible placements on the verge of disruptions from adopters who live within the Borough and where LBH did not assess or place the adoptees the adoption support Team will coordinate support services available that are deemed appropriate within LBH and North London Consortium to support adopters in maintaining the placement.

13. Other areas of work

The 'support' arm of the Adoption and Permanency Service offers a service to adult adoptees living in the Haringey area who are seeking support and advice in relation to their own adoption and adoption history. This work is important in terms of providing learning from past practice and feeding the experiences of adoptees for current service development. We are required to offer Adoption and intermediary Service-(pre commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005 (ISR) and the Disclosure of Adoption



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Information (Post Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005 (AIR) recognise the important role that counselling, support and advice can play for the applicant and subject of the application.

The Service also offers assistance to adult adoptees in tracing relatives. Letterbox contact between adopted children and birth relatives is managed through this part of the service, and direct contact in special guardianship cases. The team also undertakes special guardianship assessments and in the past year Assessments were undertaken.

14. Complaints

One complaint was received in relation to the adoption service, which was in relation to a contact arrangement.

15. Key Issues Going Forward

The main challenge for Haringey is in recruiting and assessing sufficient numbers of adoptive families to meet the needs of the diverse range of children requiring adoption placements and in making placements in a timely fashion. It is clear that improvement in performance in timescales from care to Adoption Orders is indicated and necessary if more children are to enjoy the security and stability of permanent placements. The report details the measures which are being undertaken to secure service improvements. In addition, the Service has set up a Service Improvement Multi Agency Development Group with the aim of service development to achieve service improvement and notably outstanding Ofsted inspection ratings. Another key initiative, in conjunction with the Children in Care Service, is the introduction of the Permanency Planning Strategy and Procedures to drive the permanency agenda.

16. Staffing of the service

The staff complement consists of the following:-

1 Deputy Head of Service,
2 Team Managers,
7 Adoption Social Workers
2 Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Social Workers.
In addition there are currently 2 social workers above establishment who undertake special guardianship assessments.

The Service has only been fully staffed since January 2012. It already noted that the new stability of the workforce is beginning to contribute to improved outcomes and will continue to do so.



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