



Report for:	Overview and Scrutiny Panel 27 th September 2012	Item Number:	
Title:	Adoption Service – update		
Report Authorised by:	Libby Blake - Director Of Children and Young People's Service		
Lead Officer:	Wendy Tomlinson Head of Service Commissioning and Placements		
Ward(s) affected: all	Report for Key/Non Key Decisions:		

1. Describe the issue under consideration

The improvement of the Adoption Service; timeliness of decision making and planning for children in care for whom adoption is the plan.

2. Background information

2.1 The Government Adoption Action Plan was published in March 2012. This arose out of a national reduction in the numbers of children being adopted and a notable variation in performance on adoption between different local authorities. The Adoption Action Plan introduced a number of planned regulatory changes intended to speed up the process of placing children for adoption and in the recruitment, preparation, assessment and support of prospective adopters. The Adoption Scorecard was subsequently published which gave comparative data and introduced key indicators by which the performance of local authorities would be measured.

These are (children):

- The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family.



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- The average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family.
- Children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.

The number of older children and the number of black and ethnic minority children being adopted are also scrutinised.

The Scorecard also measures (Prospective Adopters):

- The time taken from registration of interest to decision of suitability to adopt.
- The time taken from receipt of application to suitability to adopt.
- The time taken from decision to approve adopters to matching with them with a child.

- 2.2 Where appropriate, and in the interests of children, the government intends to use statutory improvement notices to require local authorities to take specific action to improve their performance within set timescales.

A diagnostic assessment was developed to support local authorities to explore how delays can be minimised for children whose best interests for permanence are met through adoption.

Haringey Council was offered the opportunity to be part of the Children's Improvement Board initiative because of the timescales between children becoming looked after and their placement in adoptive homes are significantly higher than in comparable local authorities.

The Haringey diagnostic assessment was undertaken between the 25th and 27th June, 2012.

- 2.3 The Adoption Service, in conjunction with the Children in Care Service, has implemented a number of measures to address the issues arising out of the Haringey Adoption Scorecard position. There is a strategic and operational focus on moving children into adoption placement in a timely fashion which involves an organisational cultural change of systematic and whole system focus on minimisation of delay at every stage of the making and implementation of adoption plans.
- 2.4 An Adoption Improvement (Monitoring) Service Plan has been produced to provide a framework for management leadership and oversight of the improvement programme (See Appendix 1).



The key measures are described below.

- Introduction of the Permanency policy and procedures to speed up the process by which adoption plans are made are executed for children.
- A specialist social worker has been recruited to focus exclusively on family finding and executing adoption placements.
- Introduction of the Adoption Service linking meeting which promotes early matches between children on referral, Haringey approved families and those in assessment, as well as families referred to the service from other agencies. Timescales are identified and provisional bookings made for presentation to the adoption panel. The aim is to achieve a match prior to the placement order. Monitoring of process is presented to the fortnightly permanency tracking meetings.
- Profile, photograph and DVD completed on all children for whom we do not have in-house matches.
- The increased use of a wide range of family finding initiatives, including exploration with voluntary adoption agencies, adoption consortium partners, websites, adoption exchange days, distribution of children's profiles to every adoption agency in the country on a monthly basis and specific cultural and community events/press. A budget has been made available to facilitate increased use of inter-agency placements.
- Management information systems to track progress and increase accountability.
- Permission of the court sought to explore family finding with adoption agencies prior to care and placement order.
- Target of three months from placement order for adoption matches to be achieved, where no placement has been identified prior to placement order. A review to be chaired by the independent reviewing officer at the 3 month point and if no match has been identified further actions are to be identified and reviewed by the social work team at a minimum of monthly intervals.
- Children's advertisements uploaded within a maximum of 4 weeks of the placement order being made.

Actions to Strengthen Monitoring.

- The IRO Service to undertake an audit, led by Rachel Oakley, by 1st October 2012, of all children subject to placement orders.
- Formulae for spreadsheets to be devised, and investigation of framework I in being able to run appropriate reports for monitoring.
- Court team to start to prepare reports for adoption within 2 months of child entering care as parallel planning.
- Reorganisation of permanency tracking sheets to enable us to have an at a glance reference to progress, to identify difficulties and to agree corrective action.



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- Summary of progress on matches achieved, adoption and special guardianship orders completed to be presented to the permanency tracking meeting by the adoption service.
- Forty eight hour commitment to consideration of prospective adopters by placing social workers.
- Matches to be heard at the Adoption Panel within 4 weeks of matching meeting.

Prospective Adopters.

- Management of the initial screening, preparation and assessment process to ensure completion within statutory timescales.
- Adoption Panel dates booked at commencement of assessment.
- Pool of adopters increased to promote early matches.

3. Progress to date

- 3.1 There has been progress in the placement of children for adoption. 11 children have been placed to date and there are matches with a further 17 children in progress. A further 7 children are having families explored in respect of them. This is already an improvement on 2011 – 12 where 16 children were placed for adoption in total.

It is acknowledged that a number of children from whom placements have now been identified have had adoption plans for some time, which will negatively impact on scorecard performance. However this will be counter balanced by the early placement of very young children and relinquished babies; as well as the targeted placement measures introduced.

There have been 9 adoption orders to date this year, and 14 special guardianship orders. The Service is therefore on track to achieve the target of 15 adoption orders and 20 special guardianship orders.

There are 15 prospective adopters being assessed, which is already higher than those approved in 2011 – 12, which was 11. The preparation group being held at this time has a further 10 sets of applicants. A further preparation group is planned for November 2012.

4. Use of Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Adoption Service Improvement plan – update.
- Appendix 2 Adoption Scorecard