



Haringey Council

Report for:	Corporate Parenting Committee	Item Number:	
Title:	Adoption Performance Report.		
Report Authorised by:	Libby Blake		
Lead Officer:	Lesley Kettles		
Ward(s) affected:	Report for Key/Non Key Decisions:		
All			

1. Describe the issue under consideration

1.1 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.

1.2 This report is to inform members of the progress made in the performance of the Adoption Service in placing children for adoption and special guardianship since the publication of the Adoption Scorecard and the Adoption Diagnostic Review in Summer 2012.

2 Cabinet Member introduction

2.2 There has been a rise in the number of Looked After children in need of permanent placements through Adoption or Special Guardianship in Haringey. The report will describe how there has been an increased focus on this work from government and the methods used by the Adoption Service and Children in Care Service to improve and monitor outcomes for Looked After Children.



3 Recommendations

3.2 It is recommended that elected members consider the report and support the ongoing actions described.

4 Other options considered

N/A

5 Background information:

5.2 The Adoption and Permanence Service undertakes the following:

- Assess prospective Adopters for Looked After Children
- Find Approved Adopters and match them with Looked After Children, including preparation and introduction
- Assess prospective Special Guardians
- Offer support and guidance to Adopter and Special Guardians, according to statute and regulation.
- Assess Adopters and Special Guardians involved in private proceedings
- Refer prospective Adopters who want to undertake inter-country adoption.
- Offers a comprehensive post adoption and special guardianship support service.

5.3 In the last two years within Children's Social Care there has been an increasing focus on adoption at a national policy and ministerial level and an increasing pressure on local authorities to speed up the processes of placing children for adoption and minimising delays in all parts of the system. The damaging effect of delay on children's life chances was highlighted in two key documents;

5.3.1 "An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay" which was published by the Department of Education in December 2011 and,

5.3.2 "Right on Time: Exploring Delays in Adoption" published by Ofsted, in April 2012.

explored the adoption process and in particular have highlighted some of the key reasons for delays.

The most significant issues identified are:

- a) Repeat/late assessments of parents or family members.
- b) Over reliance on independent experts.
- c) Differing quality of application of parallel planning.
- d) Staff recruitment/retention difficulties.
- e) Inconsistent influence of Independent Reviewing Officers on timely adoption outcomes.
- f) Varying effectiveness of performance monitoring systems.

5.4 In September 2012 Planned regulatory changes resulted from the government's review which included removing the responsibility of the Adoption Panel to make



recommendations on adoption plans; a radically redesigned 2 stage training and assessment process for prospective adopters with a timescale of 6 months from enquiry to approval. This consists of a 2 month information giving and initial preparation stage and a 4 month formal preparation and assessment stage; a requirement to place children within 21 months from coming into care; an “adoption passport” for adoption support services; the introduction of fostering for adoption to facilitate children being placed with the family who will go on to adopt them at the earliest possible stage and a 26 week limit on care proceedings.

5.5 In May 2012 the government published adoption scorecards which detailed local authority adoption performance. This revealed inconsistencies and variable performance throughout the country. Published data highlighted that the London Borough of Haringey was in the bottom quartile on a range of adoption performance indicators, principally the length of time to place children for adoption and length of adopter assessment process.

5.6 In June 2012, the London Borough of Haringey was subject to a Diagnostic Assessment which made a number of recommendations for improvement across all social work professionals involved in the adoption process. Also, additional support was commissioned to undertake a review to assess and identify improvements to be made to the adoption service and adoption processes.

6 Review of Adoption Service (2012):

The review had a focus on the following areas:

6.2 Reducing the time taken to identify an appropriate family for children with an adoption plan through more streamlined, effective and efficient processes. This involved a structured review of all the steps in both the adopter process and the child’s journey process.

6.3 Assessing what is the best structure and appropriate resourcing levels to ensure that the adoption service is fit for purpose, both in tackling the current high numbers of children referred for adoption and a longer term model where adoption numbers could stabilise.

A number of recommendations arose out of the review. As a result we have taken steps to improve every stage of the adoption process. These are:

- A review of roles and structures in the service.
- A plan to reorganise social workers into specific roles, such as family finding, assessment of prospective adopters and front end worker to process all enquiries.
- The development of workflow processes to speed up placement for adoption.
- Strengthened performance management.
- Strengthened scrutiny and profile of adoption at a senior level.



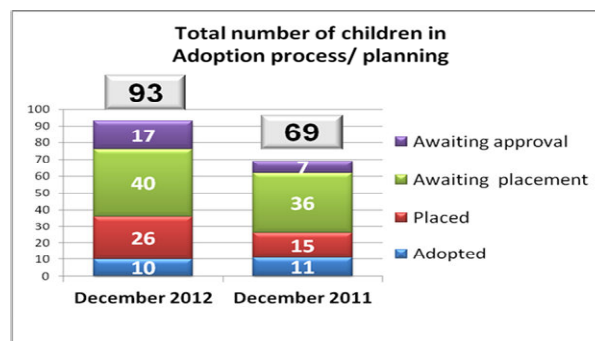
Haringey Council

In addition extra capacity was added to the service which consisted of a family finding social worker and 2 special guardianship workers. 15 adoption placements were identified for children; and 24 special guardianship orders have been achieved. The volume of special guardianship orders has more than doubled in this financial year to date.

7 Progress to date:

7.2 Total Number of children in Adoption process planning

The table below identifies the total number of children who are in the adoption planning process.



2

This compares favourably with 22 children placed in 2010/11 and 15 placed in 2011/12. This is a significant increase in activity outcomes.

Adoption placements have been identified for a further 12 children, 10 of whom are planned to be placed for adoption by the end of the financial year. Families are being explored for a further 9 children and all efforts are being made to achieve matches before the end of the financial year.

8 Recent Progress:



Since July 2012 the service has taken steps to improve every stage of the adoption service. The table below details the progress which has been made in achieving more timely placements.

Children currently placed	Days from taken into care to date placed	Days (LAC start to ADM decision)	Less than 12 months (BI to PfA)
Children placed before July 2012 (Pre Linking meetings)	799	464	60%
Children placed after July 2012	692	303	79%

8.2 The Permanency Tracking meeting has been enhanced to include the monitoring of the number of days children have been in care and targets of placing children within 3 months of placement order. This is helping to drive more child centred timescales but the large volume of children who have in the system for some time does affect the capacity to place within the 21 month period. The new style Linking Meetings are leading to higher volumes of placements, and for children entering the system more recently this is leading to more timely placements.

8.3 10 children placed this financial year have been placed in under 21 months, or 639 days and all of those children are in the more recent cohort of referrals to the service.

8.4 4 children placed before April 2012 were placed in under 21 months. Placements however are also being identified for children who have been longer in care and this means that there is less overall improvement in timescales. It is anticipated that the average number of days will not show substantial improvement for a further six months as a result of this factor, but the overall trend line will track improvement.

8.5 13 children were placed over the 639 threshold, including 6 who were placed over 1000 days from entering care. This distorts the overall performance and this is likely to be the position as we continue to place children who have been in the system for some time.

8.6 Adoption Orders:



8.7 There is a target of 15 adoption orders for this financial year, of which 10 have been granted to date. A further 7 applications have been submitted to the courts, and a further 7 sets of adopters are ready to submit their applications once the statutory 10 week limit has been elapsed. There are specific reasons for delay in submitting applications in 3 cases.

A comparison between the in year performance and the 2009 – 2012 performance is detailed in the table below. This indicates improvement, particularly for children who were placed for adoption with their foster carers.

Indicator	Performance now	Comparison
Average no. of days per child from entering care to placed for adoption (A1)	711 days (for children adopted between April and December 2012)	749 days (for children adopted between 2009 and 2012)
Average no. of days per child from entering care to moving in with adoptive parents – adjusted for foster carer adoption (A10)	455 days (for children adopted between April and December 2012)	647 days (for children adopted between 2009 and 2012)
Number of adopters approved	26 adopters approved in 2012/ 13	9 adopters approved in 2011/ 12

4

8.8 There is scrutiny of this part of the process via the Permanency Tracking meetings and the Deputy Head of Service, Adoption, ensures that the independent reviewing officers discuss adoption applications at statutory reviews and thus help in driving adoptions forward. Furthermore a measure has been introduced to speed up the process by which the Rule 29 (Annex A) court report are completed by the relevant social workers and submitted to the court with the adoption application. These measures mean that we are on track to achieve the target number of adoptions.

8.9 Special Guardianship Orders:

There is a target of 25 special guardianship orders and 24 have been achieved to date. The target of 25 is likely to be achieved. This does not include children who are not Looked After. This more than double the orders achieved in 2011 – 2012.

8.10 Prospective Adopters:

26 prospective adopters are on track to be approved by the end of the financial year. This compares with 9 for 2011/12 and 5 for 2010/11 but is less than our target of 30 for this financial year. 3 preparation groups have been delivered to date, and a further group is planned to take place in late February. An average of 10 sets of prospective adopters have attended each group.



- 8.11 An audit of the adopter assessment process was undertaken as part of the Review. Although discernible improvements to timescales were evidenced, further improvements are needed to meet national targets. This is an area of intense management scrutiny and reports on progress of assessments are submitted to the Deputy Head of Service on a monthly basis. Team managers have performance targets in relation to staff in their teams meeting targets and timescales. To further assist in meeting targets the plan is to allocate applicants to a social worker for assessment prior to the preparation groups. In addition, the realignment of staff to specific roles and functions as referred to in below is being introduced.
- 8.12 There have been no disruptions of adoption placements.
- 8.13 No complaints have been received.

8.14 Systems Development:

Work has commenced on development of management information systems by the Operational Systems Support Team. This will enable management to better monitor the timescales on the adopter's journey, as well as the child's journey, which will enable the service to more easily measure performance on national indicators, targets and timescales. It will be possible to run reports from Framework-I on a regular basis and to take corrective action where non compliance is noted. This will be further supported by management scrutiny of social workers in terms of volumes of assessments, family finding and timescales. It is intended that this system will be live by the last week of February 2013.

8.15 Restructuring of Adoption Service:

Work is being undertaken to assign roles and functions. This means specific workers undertaking family finding and others prospective adopter assessments to achieve maximum efficiency. There is scope for all workers to undertake the entire range of duties as volumes of incoming work demands. In addition we plan to have one of the social workers exclusively focusing on dealing with the front end processes, e.g. enquiries, initial visits, information meetings and preparation groups, in conjunction with the North London consortium. It is intended that the new structure will be in place at the beginning of March 2013.

9 Comments of the Chief Finance Officer and financial implications

- 9.2 Placing children for adoption reduces expenditure on children's placements and is an important activity in achieving savings going forward.
- 9.3 The costs of the adoption team and adoption support are contained within the base budget.



9.4 For 2012/13 the Adoption Improvement Grant has added a further £70k to the resources available. The grant has been fully committed to diagnostic work, system redesign, and the development of social worker capability and cannot be carried forward into 2013/14.

10 Head of Legal Services and legal implications

10.2 The Government has introduced and published the adoption scorecard for each authority to address the problems of delays in the adoption system and to improve performance. The Government has indicated that given the vulnerability of these children and the current levels of under performance in adoption, it will intervene where necessary to ensure local authorities are providing adequate services to children in need of adoption. In determining whether it is necessary to intervene, the Government advised that it will consider a range of information and not only the adoption scorecards. (*Paragraph 105 An Action Plan for Adoption*).

10.3 The Secretary of State has wide ranging powers to intervene where local authorities are failing to discharge functions relating to children services to an adequate standard (Section 50 Children Act 2004). The Government has advised that where performance remains poor and evidence suggest that the authority will be unable to improve its performance sufficiently, it will exercise its powers of intervention by, for example, issuing direction that the authority outsource all or part of its adoption service to another high performing local authority or a voluntary adoption agency with a strong record.

10.4 Underlying the adoption figures is the court process through which the orders are sought to bring about stability and permanency for looked after children. There are detailed rules and procedures that must be followed to obtain the orders. The local authority may only place a child for adoption if either each parent or guardian consents or a court has made a placement order authorising a local authority to place the child for adoption.

10.5 In care proceedings, where the care plan approved by the authority's decision maker is that the child should be placed for adoption, the local authority would usually apply for a placement order. This is in addition to the care order sought for the child. When the court makes the placement order, parental responsibility for the child is given to the local authority and to the prospective adopters (while the child is placed with them).

10.6 When the child has been placed by the local authority, the prospective adopter can make an application to the court for an adoption order once the child has had their home with them for at least ten weeks. The adoption order gives the adopters parental responsibility for the child and brings to an end the parental responsibility which any person had for the child immediately before the making of the order.



Haringey Council

11 Equalities and Community Cohesion Comments

N/A

12 Head of Procurement Comments

N/A

13 Policy Implication

The borough has developed a permanency policy which supports this work.

14 Use of Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary from Tracking Sheet [EXEMPT]

Appendix 2: Adoption Service Improvement Plan [Updated Jan 2013]

Appendix 3: Haringey's Adoption Service Power Point Presentation

15 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Wendy Tomlinson
Head of Service
Commissioning and Placements

Lesley Kettles
Deputy Head of Service – Adoption Commissioning and Placements