

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2014/2015 REPORT NO. 218

MEETING TITLE AND DATE:

Cabinet – 29 April 2015

REPORT OF: Andrew Fraser

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Agenda - Part: 1	Item: 9
Subject: Adoption Services in Enfield	
Wards: All	
Cabinet Member consulted: Cllr Orhan	

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report updates the Cabinet on the work of the Adoption Service since April 2014. It is a requirement of the National Minimum Adoption Standards that Members receive regular reports on the work of the Adoption Service.

- In 2014/15 19 adoptive families have been approved. This is slightly less than in the previous year (2013-14) when 23 families were approved but not surprising as recently, there has been a reform in the recruitment and assessment process necessitating changes in processes within the consortium boroughs which has had an impact on the recruitment of families. In comparison to its consortium counterparts, Enfield has done well with 19 approvals: Barnet approved 13 families, Camden 15 families, Islington 12 families and Hackney 10 families.
- To date, 18 children have been adopted in 2014/15. This is a slight drop compared to last year (2013-14) when 20 children were adopted but similar to two years ago (2012-13) when 19 children were adopted. This year's figure (18) needs to take into account the fact that nationally, there are fewer children with a plan of adoption as a result of a decrease in the number of Placement Orders granted by the judiciary. In comparison to its consortium counterparts, again, Enfield has done well with its 18 Adoption Orders: Islington obtained 9 Adoption Orders, Hackney 12, Camden 11 and Barnet 18.
- Currently, 16 adopted adults are receiving an access to records service (2 more than in the previous year).
- In 2014-15, 18 adopted adults and birth relatives received support and guidance with regards to searching for extended birth family members separated by adoption (7 more than in the previous year). 14 are currently still receiving this service.
- 46 families are currently in receipt of adoption support packages which is an increase from the previous year when 30 families were receiving support packages.
- There has been a minimal reduction in the number of adoption allowances being paid (currently 78 compared to 79 in the previous year) but an increase in the number of SGO allowances (currently 100 compared to 85 in the previous year).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet notes the findings of this report and, agrees that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet receive an annual report on the performance of the Adoption service.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 During 2014-2015:

18 Adoption Orders and 5 Special Guardianship Orders were made by the Court on children previously in care making a total of 23 Orders to date. The target for the number of Adoption Orders for 2014-15 was 20; had there not been a delay with two of the adoption hearing dates set by the court, this target would have been met. This performance also needs to be considered in the context of the significant national drop in the number of adoptions in 2013/14 following seminal case law which resulted in a 50% reduction in the number of children made subject to the legal orders allowing them to be placed for adoption.

Nineteen children currently have plans of adoption agreed by the Agency Decision Maker and are awaiting a match with an adoptive family. Out of these 19 children:

- 4 are in the process of being matched with their foster carers and will be presented to Enfield's Adoption Panel for match approval in the near future.
- 6 have had families visited for them and are in the process of being considered as potential links (including 2 sibling groups).
- 1 child has had a change of plan to SGO to maternal aunt and uncle.
- 1 child is being rehabilitated home, due to a change in mother's circumstances.
- 2 children (siblings) are subject to family finding processes.
- 5 children are still in court proceedings awaiting outcomes from the court process.

Thirteen children are currently in adoptive placements waiting to be legally adopted. Out of these 13 children:

- 3 of the adoptive families have lodged their adoption applications and are awaiting court dates.
- 1 adoptive family for 2 siblings have been receiving adoption support services and have stated their intention to lodge their application with the Court in the spring.
- 1 adoptive family is allowing an extended settling-in period for the child placed with them, due to his emotional needs, before making their application to the Court.
- 6 adoptive placements have been recent and require a 10-week period from date of placement before the adopters can lodge their applications.

Adoptive Families

Nineteen families have been approved in this financial year to date.

In total, there are currently 24 approved families in Enfield's pool of adopters. Out of these 24 families:

- 8 have been matched with Enfield children
- 3 have been linked and are in the process of being match with Enfield children (including 2 siblings)
- 1 is currently considering 2 Enfield children (siblings) with complex needs
- 1 was matched with an inter-agency child
- 1 is being visited for an inter-agency child

- 10 are still awaiting suitable links

Support to Families and Adopted Adults

- 16 adopted adults are currently receiving an access to records service.
- 18 adopted adults and birth relatives received support and guidance with regards to searching for extended birth family members separated by adoption. 14 are currently still receiving this service.
- 46 families are currently in receipt of adoption support packages.
- To date, there are 78 adoption allowances and 100 Special Guardianship Allowances being paid. There has been a slight decrease in the number of adoption allowances being paid and a significant increase in the number of SG allowances being paid.

3.2 Staffing and Accommodation

The day to day management of the Adoption Service is the responsibility of the Adoption Team Manager and, in her absence, the Deputy Team Manager. The Head of Service has overall responsibility for the Service and is also the designated Adoption Support Advisor (ASA), a required role under the Adoption Regulations. The Service is staffed with experienced managers and social workers.

The areas of specialism within the team are 3-fold: family finding for children where adoption is the agreed plan; assessments of prospective adopters; and adoption support services to all affected by adoption. The Team's proximity to the looked after children teams continues to be helpful in promoting timely care planning for permanency. The Adoption Team continues to deliver an exemplary service with its wealth of experience and knowledge.

Team members have managed well with the implementation of the new Stage 1 and Stage 2 processes in relation to the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters. A social worker within Enfield's Adoption Team is involved in a Tri-Borough project with Haringey and Barnet in delivering the Stage 1 recruitment and assessment process (including information sessions and foundation training). This system of joint working has resulted in a steady flow of families pursuing their interest in adopting for the Tri-Borough and a fair allocation process is in place to manage the equal distribution of families amongst the three boroughs.

3.3 Training

Staff training and development needs are met both through the Consortium and Enfield's Training and Development Service which offers a comprehensive programme. Team members are expected to attend training to ensure their ongoing development needs are met, as well as maintaining their social work HCPC registrations. On 7th November 2014, social work professionals throughout the Council attended a Conference where a number of impressive guest speakers attended and gave presentations. As well as training courses, annual Development Days are held covering different topics and attended by social workers, education and health professionals, as well as foster carers.

3.4 Ofsted

Council services to vulnerable children were inspected by Ofsted during January and February 2015; inspectors were very positive about the service that Enfield's Adoption Service provides to Enfield's children in care where adoption is the plan, as well as to prospective adoptive families. The adoption team manager provided a narrative report on the children that have impacted on the success of the national adoption score cards. Although one performance indicator has been satisfactorily met (from placement order to match being agreed), the second performance indicator was not met – this is true of the majority of local authorities (from date in care to

placement). However, the “story” behind each of the children where the score card indicated cause for concern was positively received by the inspectors as they were satisfied with the narratives given for each of these children and the outcomes achieved for them. The provisional Judgement for Enfield’s Adoption Service has been graded as “Good” by Ofsted.

3.5 The Adoption Panel

Enfield’s Adoption Panel is a group of people from varying backgrounds with considerable experience of adoption and childcare. The composition of the Panel is regulated by the Adoption Agency Regulations and includes four independent members.

The Adoption Panel is chaired by an Independent Adoption Specialist. Enfield’s Adoption Team Manager also has the role of Panel Advisor to the Panel and uses her expertise on matters relating to legislation and policy and procedures.

The role of the Panel is to provide quality assurance. Panel Members ask questions about assessment reports and matching reports when linking children to families, which they will put to the presenting social work professionals. After discussion, Panel Members will vote on their recommendation as to the family’s suitability to adopt and whether a match to a child is suitable to meet that child’s needs throughout his/her childhood years. The Agency Decision Maker will make the final decision as to whether a family is suitable to adopt and/or whether a match with a child is suitable.

3.6 The North London Adoption Consortium

The consortium (Barnet, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Camden and Islington) continues to grow from strength to strength with initiatives to benefit children and their families across all six boroughs, for example:

- The joint Stage 1 recruitment and assessment process with Enfield, Barnet and Haringey serving families from the north of the consortium boroughs and Camden, Islington and Hackney serving families from the south of the boroughs.
- The consortium family finders working group has worked well together in looking at the available families as potential matches for children within the consortium where adoption has been agreed.
- The new matching service, Adoption Link, is being used by all the consortium boroughs and has resulted in links being made between children and prospective adopters.
- The Adoption Preparation Group organisers (made up of senior practitioners from across the six boroughs) meet on a regular basis to review the training programme delivered to families and take into account feedback given in families’ evaluation forms.
- Following the termination of Norwood’s inter-country contract with the consortium, the Inter-country Adoption Centre has now taken over the contract and is working well with the consortium boroughs.
- The consortium contract with The Post Adoption Centre is proving to be a more cost-effective way of providing a range of services to all people affected by adoption. The new contract enables the referral of families with complex adoption support needs for assessment and treatment. The Post Adoption Centre provides outreach support to families across the consortium boroughs, including a monthly surgery in Enfield, which can also be accessed by professionals involved in making plans for children.
- Regular training courses are held throughout the year for adoptive families as well as groups for families and their adopted children. Training is delivered via

specialised trainers or through the consortium's pool of leaders from each of the consortium teams.

- Currently, the consortium is looking at the potential for merging the support groups from the north of the boroughs in the consortium – Enfield, Barnet and Haringey – in line with the new adoption recruitment process for families across the consortium boroughs.
- The North London Adoption Consortium Support Group for adopted adults continues to run on a bi-monthly basis. This group is now well established.
- A scoping exercise was undertaken in the consortium to review and analyse the adoption support services currently being provided by the six boroughs, to consider the future delivery of adoption support services.

3.7 Adoption Support

- Enfield is committed to offering adoption support packages to local families that need additional help, following an adoption support assessment. Enfield has a low placement breakdown rate with only two placement breakdowns in the last twelve years.
- The service continues to offer a range of support services to adults affected by adoption, including guidance, advice and support with accessing records as well as the provision of intermediary advice and support where adopted adults are wishing to seek reunification with members of their birth family.
- It has been acknowledged that there is a growing need for support to Special Guardians (SG); work around this is being developed and is ongoing, to ensure the needs of SG carers and the children placed with these families are being adequately supported. Support for SG carers is managed and delivered within Enfield's Adoption Service.
- A Child Psychotherapist from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service attends the adoption team meetings on a regular basis which team members find useful, as it gives them the opportunity to engage in reflective group supervision. This has enabled team members to analyse the problems more clearly and consider the issues from varying perspectives, resulting in better support strategies being put into place.

3.8 Recent Developments

- A number of babies in Enfield's care are unlikely to return home due to their parents' inability to provide the security and care that is needed for their child. Concurrent planning and foster to adopt placements provide potential permanency for babies at an early stage and avoid the need for further moves. In collaboration with Coram (the pioneering agency for concurrent planning and fostering for adoption), an experienced social worker within the adoption team has successfully developed this project, which has resulted in one baby being placed straight from a mother and baby foster placement at only 4 months old; and another 6-day old baby being placed straight from hospital following her birth. A further concurrent planning family has been assessed and approved and is currently in the pool of adopters awaiting a suitable placement.
- London local authorities and the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies have established a London Adoption Steering Group (LASG) to help improve adoption services within the capital. This forum meets on a regular basis to share and discuss issues with the aim of improving services at a strategic level. This work has primarily focussed on increasing the number of adopters from BME groups. As part of this improvement, there was a programme of sector led activity involving a series of 4 showcase events to share learning from best practice.

Practitioners and managers were invited as delegates from London adoption agencies to hear from key speakers and take part in the workshops.

- Following feedback from adoptive families of the difficulties relating to their children in the school setting, an Education Project was developed via grant funding by the DfE to the Post Adoption Centre. This involved training for schools on meeting the educational and emotional needs of adopted children. Three schools from each of the boroughs were identified and professionals from the Post Adoption Centre Project were involved in delivering this. Feedback from all involved has been extremely positive.
- The recently developed Consortium Adopters Forum provides the opportunity for adoptive families to give their views on adoption support needs. The aim of this group is to enable “the voice of the adopter” and identify gaps in service provision.
- A Special Guardianship Working Group has recently been set up also involving two Enfield SG families, to look at the support needs of carers for children subject to SGOs.
- An experienced adoption support social worker and the Child Psychotherapist have developed a project to deliver workshops to the Looked After Children professionals on life story work for looked after children, as there was a recognised gap in the consistency of this work. This has been very well received by the LAC professionals who are clearly benefitting from these workshops. The good working relationship that has developed between CAMHS and the Adoption Service has resulted in a more coherent service offer in the support services being delivered to children and their adoptive families.

3.9 User Feedback

- Evaluations following adoption preparation training groups and post-panel attendance indicate positive feedback. The training is reviewed after every session and comments from participants noted and acted upon. The training provides a wide range of speakers such as adopters, foster carers, professionals from CAMHS and the designated nurse for Looked After Children.
- In line with the ethos of the consortium, the team has been able to accommodate adoptive families from consortium boroughs on Enfield’s preparation training programme. The feedback from these adoptive families has been positive.
- Feedback from adoptive families is also received via letters and cards praising the social workers that have assessed, approved and supported them throughout the process.
- The recently developed Adopters Forum (made up of families across the consortium boroughs) is an excellent way in which to obtain feedback. This forum is adopter led and gives families the opportunity to voice their views and suggest ways in which to improve services where there are gaps.
- The number of adopters that expressed their concern about their children in the school setting was taken seriously and acted upon. This resulted in a project being developed to address this. A Helpline number is now available to adoptive families experiencing problems with their children in the school setting; this is a service provided by the Post Adoption Centre.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

This report is for information.

5. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To report to Cabinet Members on the work and performance of Enfield's Adoption Service.

6. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, RESOURCES AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS

6.1 Financial Implications

The Adoption Service budget and projected outturn for 2014/15 is shown in the table below:-

	2014/15 Budget	Projected 2014/15 Outturn
	£'000s	£'000s
Employee Costs	553	600
Adoption Allowances	680	660
Special Guardianship Allowances	584	689
Inter-Agency Adoption Costs	95	212
Other Adoption Costs	129	100
Inter-Agency Adoption Income	(62)	(132)
Net Expenditure	1,979	2,129

The service is projected to report an overspend of £150k in 2014/15 mainly as a result of the growth in SGO's.

The service is also part of the CIPFA Adoption Benchmarking Club. The latest statistics show that our services unit costs per 1000 population are average compared to the 45 other members of the club.

6.2 Legal Implications

Section 3 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires all local authorities to maintain a service to meet the needs, in relation to adoption, of children who may need to be adopted, persons wishing to adopt a child, people who have been adopted, adoptive families and birth parents of adopted people. In addition there are regulations and guidance setting out specific requirements. The matters set out in this report are covered by this legislation.

6.3 Property Implications

There are no property implications.

7. KEY RISKS

Any operational risks are minimised by attention to good practice in recruiting and preparing adopters, good preparation for children, attention to detail during the introduction process and continuing support post placement. In Enfield this has resulted in only two disruptions to pre adoptive placements for the last 12 years.

8. IMPACT ON COUNCIL PRIORITIES

8.1 Fairness for All

To deliver high quality, affordable and accessible services, tackling inequality and serving the Borough fairly.

8.2 Growth and Sustainability

To help the Council deliver services that will bring growth, jobs and opportunity to the Borough.

8.3 Strong Communities

To encourage active citizenship, listen to the needs of local people and be open and accountable, provide strong leadership and work in partnership with other to achieve the Council's aims.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

Children are only matched with adopters who can meet their needs, including gender, culture, ethnicity and disability. Enfield Council has been assessed against the requirements the Equality Framework and was accredited at the excellent level. This award has inspired the Council to continue to tackle inequality in the Borough and continue to build on the strengths of our diverse group of councillors and staff groups that reflect the wider community to promote positive dialogue with our residents and service users. The Council is committed to being an exemplar of best practice in all equalities work.

10. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Monthly monitoring takes place of performance against indicators.

The national adoption scorecard process was designed by the DfE to benchmark performance and the indicators below were introduced to measure this:

- **LAC51 Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted.**

Out of the 18 children that were adopted in this year, 6 children were placed within timescale since being received into care.

Over an average of a 3-year period, the DfE expressed some concern that this key performance indicator was poor. As a result of this, a report was provided to

senior officers giving narratives on each child evidencing the valid reasons for the delays and the good outcomes achieved, irrespective of this. This report was also shown to the inspectors during Enfield's recent Ofsted, who were satisfied with its contents and the outcomes achieved.

- **LAC52 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.**

Out of the 18 children that were adopted in this year, 16 children were matched within time scale from date of the Placement Order.

Over an average of a 3-year period, the DfE was satisfied that this key performance indicator was successfully met.

11. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

The Council Health and Safety Unit comprises of four teams who provide a wide range of advice, guidance and assistance on matters of Asbestos Management, Fire Safety and Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare across the Council. The Looked After Children Service has an individual Health and Safety Procedure in place which all staff members have been sent. It is the responsibility of the Management Group to ensure that staff members adhere to the procedure as and when issues relating health and safety arise.

12. HR IMPLICATIONS

Enfield Council is committed to applying equalities when recruiting and is proud of a staff group that is represented of its community and the customer they serve. The Council has a number of Policies in place so that all staff members are aware of their rights and the expectations required of them in carrying out their duties. Any misconduct and performance issues are dealt with robustly and all Council employees are required to work within the remits of the Dignity at Work Principles and the Employee Code of Conduct.

13. PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Adoption provides a permanent home for children who cannot live within their own family. Adopters are supported to access both universal and specialist health services

Background Papers

None.