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| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Annual Panel Report of the</b><br/><b>London Borough of Enfield Adoption Service</b><br/><b>April 2019 – March 2020</b></p> |
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**Report from Agency Decision Maker – Anne Stoker, Director of Children and Family Services**

It is my pleasure to introduce the annual report of Enfield Adoption Service.

Securing permanence for children who are unable to live with their birth parents has remained high on the political agenda at both local and national level, and the task of ensuring positive outcomes for society's most vulnerable children remains challenging for all concerned.

The requirement for all local authorities to progress plans for regionalisation of adoption services has meant considerable co working across London authorities. The six boroughs of the North London Adoption Consortium have been working closely together, at senior management, middle management and social worker level to progress the plans for a Regional Adoption Agency. Recruitment interviews for those Enfield staff interested in transferring over to the RAA took place in late June 2019 and three Enfield Adoption staff were successfully recruited to the RAA. The London North Regional Adoption Agency (RAA – Adopt London North) went live on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2018.

It has been a productive year for Enfield Adoption Service with children, whose care plan is adoption, being matched in a timely manner. Nevertheless, there have been an increase in the number of Enfield Children whose care plan was originally adoption, but who were subsequently placed under Special Guardianship arrangements. This has therefore had an impact on the number of Enfield children who went on to be subject to adoption orders. In this financial

year, there have been 5 adoption orders, compared to the 13 adoption orders made in 2018-19. There have been 6 sets of adopters approved at the Adoption Panel in 2019-20 (4 in 2018-19), which includes two sets of foster carers. Whilst this number is low, this has been offset by the increase in the numbers of special guardianship assessments being carried out by adoption team members. Furthermore, assessments of potential adopters transferred over to the RAA in October 2019. The system relating to the Agency Decision Maker decisions regarding adoption plans for children has continued to work well and where necessary, the flexible approach used to achieve timely decision-making has been very beneficial for children in care proceedings and at matching stage. Children who are relinquished continue to be presented by their allocated social worker to the Adoption Panel for approval.

In 2018-19, Enfield obtained 29 Special Guardianship orders for children that were previously Looked After. However, in 2019-20 there has been an increase – 37 in the number of Special Guardianship Orders being made of Looked After Children, with a total number of Special Guardianship Orders made equalling 42 orders. It is also pertinent to note that those children who are subject to placement orders and need adoptive families, continue to be children who are the most vulnerable, coming from abusive and challenging backgrounds, where drug and alcohol abuse are often a feature.

As a result of national changes, there are a greater number of adoptive families available than children waiting for adoption. However, there are still children with such complex issues that finding the right family to offer the skilled parenting required can take a considerable length of time. Furthermore, across the six boroughs now forming the RAA, around 75% of approved adopters are white, while around 75% of the children still awaiting placements are from a BME background. The Adoption Service has recognised the need for pragmatism in considering the ethnic and cultural needs of children, following government guidance about children waiting unreasonably long times for the perfect 'ethnic' match. However, the matching process needs to look for evidence to support how adoptive families can meet those particular needs.

Since November 2014, the six boroughs that delivered the Stage 1 process in the recruitment of prospective adopters were split into two teams to cover the north and south of the Consortium – Enfield, Barnet and Haringey cover the north of the Consortium and Camden, Islington and Hackney the south. This resulted in more families receiving an improved service from each of the recruitment teams. This arrangement remained in place until the end of September 2019 when the RAA took over recruitment responsibilities.

The recruitment of adopters has undergone a fundamental transformation with the development of a Regional Adoption Agency. This will change the way in which adopters are recruited. There remains a mis-match between the numbers of adopters waiting for a placement and the type of child they are seeking and the types of children requiring an adoptive family. More adoptive families are therefore required for the cohort of children requiring adoption. In Enfield, 6 sets of adopters were approved in the last 12 months, which is an increase on 2018-19 when there were 4 approvals. This needs to be offset with the increasing number of special guardianship assessments carried out by the Adoption & Special Guardianship Team.

I would like to thank all the professionals and panel members, who, under the able leadership of Yvonne Metcalf, the panel chair, provide a committed and conscientious approach to their work. Special thanks are also due to Debbie Michael - Service Manager for the Fostering and Adoption Service, Morris Linton, the panel adviser, who has provided sound advice and to Lynne Warner, the panel co-ordinator who has provided an excellent service in ensuring the smooth running of each panel meeting.

My thanks to all the staff and panel members involved in this crucial work and the difference they are making to the lives of vulnerable children.

## **The Adoption Panel**

### **Panel Meetings**

The Adoption Panel continues to meet on a monthly basis; In line with legislation, the Panel gives recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker about prospective adopters' suitability to adopt and matching for children with adoptive families. Reasons for the recommendation are given to enable the Agency Decision Maker to make a robust decision about each case presented. In the course of the year, the Agency Decision Maker was able to agree all recommendations made by the Adoption Panel. The Adoption Panel is also able to give advice about age ranges and any other matters the Panel sees as being appropriate, again to aid the Agency Decision Maker in her deliberations.

Some Panel meetings have been cancelled and some only half a day, as the number of children coming through for adoption and hence both approvals and matches have been fewer than previous years. Where there are 3 or less Panel cases to be heard, panel members are only paid for half a panel, in line with Enfield's need to ensure that the panel is cost-effective. Panel members take it in turns also to attend panel, thereby ensuring that quoracy is maintained, whilst at the same time keeping the number of panel members to a minimum. Feedback from adoptive families has been positive in terms of them reporting feeling less overwhelmed by the number of panel members in the meeting.

The process for care planning decisions about children, which has lain with the Agency Decision Maker now for over five years, continues to work well. Panel members are helped at the matching stage by having clear decision making and any issues identified in the care planning process, to ensure that they have sufficient information on which to base their recommendations.

The Adoption Panel continues to welcome observers, often either newly qualified social workers/newly appointed social workers, student social workers

or medical practitioners. Feedback from observers continues to be very positive and, given that adoption cases may be a small part of any social worker's caseload, it is helpful for them to understand the gravity of the decisions made about children's long-term welfare.

Foster for Adopt (early permanency care planning) presents some challenges in the matching process as the children may have been in placement for some months prior to being matched formally under the adoption regulations. Enfield has been keen to ensure that there is a larger pool of adopters to approach when Foster to Adopt placements are required, necessitating increased input and scrutiny from the adoption team and the adoption panel at the 'suitability' stage to ensure that prospective adopters have a full understanding of the implications of such placements. It is recognised that all the Consortium boroughs, including Enfield, have struggled to attract adopters who will consider early permanence. Enfield pro-actively looks further afield to other RAA's and Adoption Agencies across London and the South East to ensure children requiring early permanence are placed with suitable and appropriate adopters, approved as foster to adopt carers. It is hoped that the new RAA will have more success with recruiting more foster to adopt carers.

### **Conduct of Panel meetings**

To aid transparency of decision making, social workers and prospective adopters are invited in together once panel members have had an initial discussion about the case being presented. In general, the only time this would not be available to prospective adopters is if there is third party information which may affect the outcome of the case. The Agency has made a decision that prospective adopters should attend all of the meeting after the initial discussion, even in the case of a negative recommendation, to enable them to understand how the recommendation is arrived at. That said, the Chair reserves her right to ask prospective adopters to leave the meeting should this be necessary.

Feedback from both staff and adopters has been positive and panel members in general find this way of working helpful.

### **Panel membership and staff issues**

The panel has had a consistent panel membership over the preceding 12 months. Two Vice Chairs have now been appointed to chair the meeting if the chair is unavailable. Jenny Belsham is a registered social worker and has considerable professional experience in adoption as well as being an adoptive parent herself. Deborah Persighetti is an adoptive parent and has experience of recruiting adopters in a neighbouring local authority. One or other attends every panel. Enfield Adoption Panel has also recruited two new independent panel members in Christine Hamilton and Clare De Silva, who are elected members of the Council.

There is a requirement that panel members have an annual appraisal, conducted by the panel chair and the professional adviser to the panel. The outcome of these appraisals is then taken forward into the chair's appraisal, which is conducted by the agency decision maker.

Dr Oyetoro Enaigbe, a consultant paediatrician based within Enfield, sadly left her role as medical adviser to the adoption panel in Mid-2019. Dr Enaigbe had direct experience of the children being presented to panel and regularly having met with the child's social worker as well as prospective adopters to discuss the health-related issues of children requiring adoptive placements. Dr. Enaigbe's regular presence at Triangle House proved very effective in enabling social workers and prospective adopters to meet with her in advance of the adoption panel to discuss children's health related needs. Since this time, the role of Consultant Paediatrician / panel Adviser is now conducted by Dr Bellman, who assists the Adoption Panel with medical advice on the children and potential adopters.

## **Training**

Both the panel chair and panel adviser have noted the variance in quality of child permanence reports (CPRs) from cases being presented. This has identified the need for raising awareness towards the LAC social workers of ensuring that good quality CPRs are maintained. To this end, a meeting took place with a large group of LAC social workers in 2019 to discuss methods of improving the quality of the CPRs. This training was well received by the LAC social workers.

Panel members have also been offered opportunities to attend training offered across the council and through the North London Adoption Consortium.

## **Quality assurance**

Part of the panel remit is to monitor the Agency's performance in terms of timescales for the assessment and approval of prospective adopters. This is now being formally recorded in panel minutes as part of the panel's quality assurance role.

The quality of the paperwork in relation to prospective adopters' reports is generally good. Child permanence reports are perhaps more variable in their overall quality but generally are able to give the agency and prospective adopters a good understanding of the children's needs.

## **User feedback**

The panel is now receiving more formal evaluation sheets from attendees at panel. This is vital to ensure that Panel members can reflect on their performance. Panel attendees are encouraged to complete the evaluation forms on their panel experience prior to leaving the building following their panel

attendance and these are used as a source of learning for panel members and to improve in the delivery and performance of the panel.

### **Future Developments**

Enfield's Adoption Panel has continued to meet to consider adopter approvals and matches between Enfield Looked After Children and adopters approved either by Enfield, or external adoption agencies.

The new RAA came into being in October 2019, however, approvals and matches continued to be presented to Enfield's Panel until February 2020 when the new RAA adoption panel took over these responsibilities.

There remain a number of goals pertinent to the panel:

- To ensure there is statistically significant user feedback, to monitor the performance of the panel. This will be achieved by continuing more robust requests to attendees during the panel meetings.
- To ensure members' appraisals are current. This will be achieved by conducting appraisals on all members as soon as possible, and then having a regular appraisal period each year.
- To identify internally commissioned training for panel members, in conjunction with the adoption team and the fostering panel.
- To work with the adoption team in ensuring that the concept and the processes for Foster to Adopt are understood by all concerned.

### **Statistics and Progress of Cases Presented to Panel**

Panel business meetings were held every six months and these are chaired by the LAC head of service. The professional adviser continues to present



information in relation to the progress of children's care plans and adoptive families approved at panel.

### **During 2019-20**

6 sets of adoptive families have been approved. This is more than in the previous year (2018-19) when 4 families were approved. This is despite the backdrop of continued reform in the recruitment and assessment process necessitating changes in processes within the Consortium boroughs. Enfield is maintaining a more targeted approach in ensuring that recruitment matches as closely as possible to the types of children requiring adoption as their care plan, considering their range and level of needs. Equally, there is a need to also have a small pool of Enfield approved adopters that are regularly being approved for children with less complex needs, to ensure that some of these Enfield children have the potential for an in-house placement, if appropriate

5 Enfield children have been adopted in 2019-20. This is a decrease to last year (2018-19) when 13 children were adopted. This year's figure 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. As of February 2020, there are 7 children in adoptive placements.

### **Adoption Support Service:**

The complexity of the needs of adopted children and their families highlights the need for robust support packages, some of which may be ongoing for a considerable period of time and others intermittent. Increased understanding of the issues by both professionals and adoptive families alike has reinforced the need for detailed adoption support plans which deal with not only the initial stages of a placement but consider issues well into the future. The panel chair ensures that presenting social workers to panel are reminded that the adoption

support plan is a living document that remains active during the child's adoption placement and can be subject to review and amendment at any time.

- 43 families are currently in receipt of adoption support packages.
- 10 adopted adults are currently receiving an access to records service.
- 36 adopted adults and birth relatives received support and guidance with regards to searching for extended birth family members separated by adoption.
- To date, (March 2020), there are 62 (68 in 2018-19) adoption allowances and 221 special guardianship (SG) allowances being paid (208 in 2018-19). There has been a small reduction in the number of adoption allowances being paid but a continued, significant increase in the number of SG allowances being paid.

### **Staffing and Accommodation**

The day to day management of the Adoption Service continues to remain the responsibility of the adoption team manager who was appointed in February 2016 and, in his absence, the service manager for fostering and adoption. The deputy team manager, who was successfully recruited during 2016-17 retired in April 2019 and the post was filled by a Locum Deputy Team Manager between May – September 2019. The Head of Service has overall responsibility for the service and is also the designated adoption support adviser (ASSA), a required role under the adoption regulations. The service is staffed with experienced managers and social workers. Two new social worker positions were successfully recruited to in late 2016 and early 2017 to replace positions that were vacated due to established social workers leaving the

department. In May 2018, the one vacant social work post was also successfully recruited to and a further Special Guardianship social worker post was successfully recruited to and this worker started in March 2020. It is pleasing to note that the adoption service is now fully staffed again.

The areas of specialism within the team are three-fold: family finding for children where adoption is the agreed plan; assessments of prospective adopters; and adoption support services to all affected by adoption and special guardianship. Since October 2016, the adoption service has also taken over the commissioning of special guardianship assessments; this includes a considerable increase in the number of special guardianship assessments being carried out by social workers within the adoption service. This is aiding social workers with developing new assessment skills in undertaking special guardianship work. The adoption 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 adjustments being necessitated to the Stage 1 and Stage 2 processes in relation to the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters. A whole team approach from Enfield's adoption team was implemented as part of the tri-borough project with Haringey and Barnet in delivering the Stage 1 recruitment and assessment process (including information sessions and foundation training). Each of the tri-borough authorities undertook duty on a rolling three-monthly rota which helped to improve the quality of the recruitment of adopters. Designated social workers have been assigned to assess prospective adopters from the onset of Stage one and through stage two, thereby offering continuity of worker throughout the assessment process. As noted, recruitment is now the responsibility of the RAA as of October 2019.

## **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. In December 2019, social work professionals throughout the Council attended a conference where several 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.

## **The North London Adoption Consortium**

- The consortium (Barnet, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Camden and Islington) grew 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 matching service, Adoption Link Maker, is being used by all the consortium boroughs and has resulted in some successful links and matches being made. Enfield has found that this has been a particularly effective means of identifying suitable families for its most difficult to place children.

- A new service has been developed by Coram called Be My Family - Matching and Recruitment Network. This will assist social workers with family finding by offering direct, potential matches that can be followed up.
- Following the termination of Norwood's inter-country contract with the consortium in 2014, the Inter-Country Adoption Centre has now established the contract and is working well with the consortium boroughs. The Inter Country Adoption Centre offers valuable advice and guidance on all inter country matters, as well as undertaking assessments and approvals of Enfield families wishing to adopt from abroad. Enfield only has between a and 2 sets of adopted families per year who require welfare supervision once the child is in the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom. Enfield uses the services of an independent social worker with expertise in inter country adoption matters, rather than someone from the Inter Country Adoption Centre, as this is more cost effective. After October 2019, welfare supervision will be taken over by the RAA.
- 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. This contract enables the referral of families with complex adoption support needs for assessment and treatment. This service is available to all Enfield residents affected by adoption, as well as those affected by other forms of permanency such as special guardianship or long-term fostering. 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. In 2019-20, Enfield has seen an increase in the numbers of families affected by adoption taking up the offers of six sessions of free counselling. More adoptive families are also being referred to the Post Adoption Centre for comprehensive counselling and therapy. This contract will be reviewed in 2020-21 by the RAA.

- The Adoption Support Fund was introduced in May 2015 and since its inception, Enfield has made 180 applications on behalf of adoptive families and adopted children and families subject to special guardianship arrangements, requiring intensive therapy which have all been successful. In 2019-20 this equates to 47 applications ( 2018-19 29 applications), totalling £90,465) (£53,814 in 2018-19). At the end of 2019-20, the fund has paid out £395,610 since the fund's inception to Enfield Council so that these families can receive relevant therapy in accordance with their needs. The fund has now been extended to adopted adults up until they reach 22 years and 25 years if the adopted adult has special educational needs. The fund has also been extended to inter country adopters and children who are under a special guardianship order, where the child was previously looked after by the local authority.
- 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.

Enfield ran a well-attended support group for its adoptive families for over 13 years. However, the group was predominantly made up of an established membership of adoptive parents who had adopted some years ago. For newer approved adopters, they are more likely to access support groups in their area run by an independent group of adopters called We Are Family (WAF). As a result, the Enfield Adoption Support Group was disbanded and all adopters now have access to the WAF support groups running across North London. During 2018-19, WAF provided the consortium heads of service with extensive details on the range of services they provide, with the heads of service agreeing to provide a financial contribution towards the WAF services offered to adopters across North London.

- The North London Adoption Consortium Support Group for adopted adults continues to run on a bi-monthly basis. This group is now well established.

### **Adoption Support**

- Enfield is committed to offering adoption support packages to local families that need additional help, following an adoption support assessment. Enfield continues to have a low placement disruption rate; In 2018-19 there was one placement disruption of a relinquished child whose adoption order had not yet been granted. In 2019-20 there had been no disruptions of LAC children recently placed for adoption.
- The low breakdown rates are due to the robust support packages being flexible in order to meet the demands of the placements and includes easier access to therapeutic services which are tailored to the needs of the specific placement.
- 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.
- 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 (CAMHS) continues to attend the adoption team meetings on a regular basis which team members find useful, giving them the opportunity to engage in

reflective group supervision. This also enables team members to analyse the problems they encounter more clearly and consider the issues from varying perspectives, resulting in better support strategies being put into place. Team members take it in turns to present a case study and prepare for this beforehand, with shared learning opportunities for all team members through the group supervision process.

- Recruitment initiatives to meet the needs of our children continues to be a priority. During National Adoption Week, the consortium boroughs facilitated a large event in Hackney, also a part of Black History month, to raise awareness and the profile of adoption with the aim of attracting potential applicants for our black and dual heritage children in need of adoption. A further targeted recruitment event in March 2019 in Wood Green was also well attended.

### **Recent Developments**

- Enfield is committed to the government's plans to regionalise adoption by proposing a move to develop Regional Adoption Agencies. This is with the intention of speeding up the matching process, improving adopter recruitment and adoption support, reduce costs, and improve the life chances of London's most vulnerable children. A lead professional – Julie Lewis - was commissioned as the Project Manager North London Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) to steer Enfield and the 5 other North London Consortium boroughs through these changes. Her role has now ended as the moved towards the go live date of 2/10/19. As well as meeting with directors and assistant directors / senior managers, further implementation groups took place with the legal department, human resources and commissioning services. Importantly, the "task and finish" groups, which included managers and social workers in adoption teams, were established to progress planning and implementation of the family funding, recruitment of adopters and adoption support. The new RAA will be known as Adoption London North.



- The North London Adoption Consortium made a proposal to make an application to the Adoption Support Fund for a bespoke therapeutic service for adoptive families being provided by Adoption Plus. Funding was approved by the Adoption Support Fund in 2016, together with government funding for Adoption Plus to establish a bespoke therapeutic service for adoptive families connected to the North London Adoption Consortium. This new service is now being accessed by Enfield adoptive families in need, via funding from the Adoption Support Fund.
- 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 2019-20, assessments of adopters automatically consider their suitability to become foster to adopt carers, to ensure there is a pool of in house adopters to approach when the need for a foster to adopt placement becomes necessary. There does continue to be a reticence however of prospective adopters to consider foster to adopt as a permanency option, given the complexities of this arrangement. It is hoped that once the RAA is recruiting adopters, that more applicants will consider this option as a way of securing permanency.

- Enfield Adoption Team continues to work closely with an Enfield CAMHS psychotherapist to offer direct consultation, advice and strategies specifically to adopters with children placed in their care, where there is a need for direct therapeutic support.
- The Liquid Logic ICS pathways are being updated and refined during 2019-20 in the areas of adoption support, special guardianship assessments and special

guardianship support. This has led in the current year to increased transparency and clarity about the work being undertaken in these areas and improvements in the way these social work tasks are carried out.

- Closer links are being created with the new Virtual Head for Enfield to offer advice and guidance for social workers about ensuring services for adopted and children under a special guardianship order who were previously in care are met by the schools. The Adoption service has now met with the new Post Permanence Development Officer - Post Adoption who came into post in 2018-19 and who is responsible for advocating for the educational needs of adopted children (previously Enfield LAC) and ex LAC who are now subject to an SGO.

Family finding Exchange events take place regularly across the country to create potential matches between approved adopters and children waiting for placements. These are run by Coram. More recent consortium initiatives however include NLAC Family Finding Networking Event hosted by Haringey with the emphasis on quicker adoption matches and early permanence. These events take place every 3 months for both the boroughs of the NLAC, as well as any other adoption agencies and RAAs across London and the South East that wish to attend. The RAA is extending on these networking events by arranging for them to take place circa bimonthly with the other RAA's and adoption agencies being invited to attend.

- There is now a London run support group 'for adopters who wait' which has proved very popular and further meetings are planned. All the London consortia are assisting with planning and running these events.
- The Great Behaviour Breakdown (GBB) is an extensive training programme aimed at adopters who are in crisis. Enfield has referred a number of adoptive

families to this training, using the Adoption Support Fund to ensure this is accessed by as many adopters as possible.

- An initiative between the Consortium boroughs and a therapeutic service called Body and Soul has been set up and successfully established following a successful bid to the Adoption Support Fund in 2015-16. The partnership project between Body and Soul and the North London Adoption Consortium offers an 8-week programme for 8-12 year olds (Young Explorers) and 13-16 year olds (Teen Spirit) to enable adopted children to come together with others who have also been adopted and to provide a safe, emotional space for them to work on their feelings and emotions associated with having an adopted status. This year, Enfield has referred several of our adopted children to this project using funds agreed by the Adoption Support Fund. Plans are underway for Body and Soul to be established for child subject to special guardianship arrangements.
- Enfield, as part of the North London (SG) Consortium now routinely offers special guardianship training to those special guardians who are either in assessment or recently approved. This is compulsory and helps to ensure that the special guardians in assessment are better prepared for the task of providing permanency for children who Cannot return home. This training is facilitated by both Enfield special guardianship support social workers and assessing social workers, together with an experienced special guardian.
- A special guardianship support group for Enfield and Haringey guardians was established in 2015-16 and this continues to be well attended, with guest speakers coming along. This group is held on a bi monthly basis.
- A collaborative approach to producing a best practice model on transitions from fostering into adoption was led by John Simmonds

OBE, Head of Policy and Research at BAAF with social work staff from adoption and fostering teams in the consortium.

- A highly rated course, “Going Back to Go Forwards” run by Louis Sydney, a psychotherapist with lengthy experience of working in adoption and Zach Gomm, has been set up for access under the Adoption Support Fund as a rolling arrangement. Newly approved adopters are encouraged to attend this training which runs throughout the year.

### **User Feedback**

- Evaluations following adoption preparation training groups and post-panel attendance indicate positive feedback. However, it was acknowledged that the numbers of feedback reports need to increase. This was addressed through ensuring that all adopters and social workers coming to panel will be asked to complete their feedback reports immediately following their attendance at panel.
- The adopter preparation 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. This is then fed back to Dionne Grant in the Governance and Information Team where positive feedback is reported.
- 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.

### **Report from Panel Chairperson**

This year has again been set against the planning for the new regional adoption agency. Last year was to be my last report but the planning needed for the transition of such complex, legally regulated work to a new agency meant that there were a number of 'stops and starts' in regard to the panel functioning and so we continued to function as a panel until February 2020. I have maintained my decision not to apply to the new agency and so this report is written with a little sadness but also with a reflection of, I hope, being a positive part of making a difference to the lives of the children who have come through panel and of working with such committed social work staff, adoptive families and panel members.

This year has continued to see shorter panel meetings as the number of adopters coming through and the number of children requiring adoptive placements have declined. There continues to be uncertainty regarding adoption in the court arena, and social workers and adopters alike have to manage those uncertainties in terms of, for instance, appeals by birth parents. There remains continued pressure to ensure that planning for children happens in a timely manner and that prospective adoptive parents are given appropriate information, take the lead in the initial processes and are assessed in a fair way which takes account of their strengths as parents for the most vulnerable

children in our society. Expectations of any adoption agency are therefore high and the panel's contribution to the overall success of the agency is crucial.

The challenge for any agency is the placing of the children with more complex needs, particular ethnic, cultural and religious needs, and sibling groups. All the children requiring adoption, even the youngest of infants, have had an uncertain start in life and a major task for the agency is to ensure that prospective adopters have a full understanding of the lifelong challenges that many adopted children and hence their families face.

The role of the adoption panel in relation to matching children with adoptive families has been an item for discussion in many quarters, especially with the new changes in how adoption is managed in the new RAAs. There have been many changes in practice with adopters having much more contact with children and their carers prior to being presented for the formal match, as well as the concept of children being placed prior to the match under Foster to Adopt. Enfield has remained committed to ensuring that the adoption panel brings a level of scrutiny and quality assurance to matches to ensure that they are as safe as they can be.

Our experience is that matches are well researched and prospective adopters come to panel with the requisite information about a child which will enable them to understand the challenges ahead. Panel members are always mindful of the lessons learnt from disruptions and from their own many and varied experiences. This is helpful in considering not only the viability of the match but the adoption support plan, both now and in the long term, which panel members consider to be vital to the successful outcome of any match.

As ever, the quality of the discussion and the issues raised throughout the panel meetings evidence that all members take their responsibilities very seriously and papers are thoroughly read. I am always indebted to panel members for their support in panel meetings. I am confident that papers are read thoroughly and issues identified prior to panel meetings.

I would like to thank them all for their commitment to the task.

The year saw changes in the management of the service, and I have not been able to have a working relationship with the Head of Service in the same way as previously. However, I have continued to meet with Debbie Michael, the Service Manager, outside of panel meetings and she has ensured that I have had the requisite information to support me in my role as Panel Chair. My relationship with Morris Linton as team manager for the adoption service and panel adviser is well established and mutually supportive.

The thoroughness of the decision making in regard to plans for children is evidence of a thoughtful and robust approach to ensuring that all aspects of a child's journey are considered prior to a match being made.

Our medical adviser, Dr Oyetora Enaigbe, left her post with little notice and we have not had the benefit of a medical adviser present at panel meetings, although I have been confident that medical matters have been appropriately dealt with in the agency. We have been pleased to welcome 2 elected members to the panel this year and I hope it has been helpful for them to learn about the complex issues that adoption raises for all concerned.

I would to thank Debbie Michael and Morris Linton for their support to me personally as panel chair and also to the agency in general. Lynne Warner, the panel coordinator, has remained a stalwart of the panel process ensuring the smooth running of the panel . The administrative staff within the borough have continued to adapt to new ways of working in this last year, and it is to Lynne's credit that she has continued to ensure panel meetings are so well organised.

After our last panel meeting in February, we enjoyed afternoon tea (and cakes!) at a local café in Enfield Town. We were joined by 2 members of Enfield's legal team, who have supported us in the past, and it was a good opportunity for us all to reflect on what being a panel member has meant individually and collectively over the months and years.

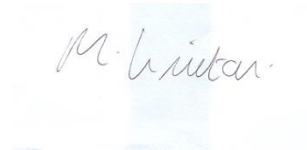
For the future, Enfield's panel has some very skilled and experienced panel members and my hope is that they will have the opportunity to apply to the new RAA to be considered as members of the new adoption panel.

Report compiled by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvonne Metcalf', on a light blue rectangular background.

Yvonne Metcalf

Independent Adoption Panel Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Morris Linton', on a light blue rectangular background.

Morris Linton

Adoption Team Manager