Notice of Meeting

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Monday, 20 March 2017 - 7:00 pm
Council Chamber, Town Hall, 1 Town Square, Barking, IG11 7LU

Members: Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe (Lead Member), Cllr Melanie Bartlett (Deputy Lead Member), Cllr Simon Bremner, Cllr Edna Fergus, Cllr Irma Freeborn, Cllr Syed Ghani, Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole and Cllr Danielle Smith

By Invitation: Councillor Maureen Worby

Co-opted Members (for education related matters):
Faith Representatives: Glenda Spencer (Roman Catholic Church) and Ingrid Robinson (Church of England)
Parent Governor Representatives: Ellen Grant (Primary) and 1 vacancy (Secondary)
Youth Representative: Camran Ditta (Chair, BAD Youth Forum)

Date of publication: 8 March 2017

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AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declaration of Members' Interests

   In accordance with the Council’s Constitution, Members are asked to declare any interest they may have in any matter which is to be considered at this meeting.

3. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2017 (Pages 3 - 9)


5. Draft Report arising from the Committee's Scrutiny Review on 'Improving the Council's Adoption Scorecard Performance' (Pages 23 - 53)
6. Any other public items which the Chair decides are urgent

7. To consider whether it would be appropriate to pass a resolution to exclude the public and press from the remainder of the meeting due to the nature of the business to be transacted.

Private Business

The public and press have a legal right to attend Council meetings such as the Children’s Services Select Committee, except where business is confidential or certain other sensitive information is to be discussed. The list below shows why items are in the private part of the agenda, with reference to the relevant legislation (the relevant paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended). There are no such items at the time of preparing this agenda.

8. Any other confidential or exempt items which the Chair decides are urgent
Our Vision for Barking and Dagenham

One borough; one community; London’s growth opportunity

Our Priorities

Encouraging civic pride

- Build pride, respect and cohesion across our borough
- Promote a welcoming, safe, and resilient community
- Build civic responsibility and help residents shape their quality of life
- Promote and protect our green and public open spaces
- Narrow the gap in attainment and realise high aspirations for every child

Enabling social responsibility

- Support residents to take responsibility for themselves, their homes and their community
- Protect the most vulnerable, keeping adults and children healthy and safe
- Ensure everyone can access good quality healthcare when they need it
- Ensure children and young people are well-educated and realise their potential
- Fully integrate services for vulnerable children, young people and families

Growing the borough

- Build high quality homes and a sustainable community
- Develop a local, skilled workforce and improve employment opportunities
- Support investment in housing, leisure, the creative industries and public spaces to enhance our environment
- Work with London partners to deliver homes and jobs across our growth hubs
- Enhance the borough’s image to attract investment and business growth

Well run organisation

- A digital Council, with appropriate services delivered online
- Promote equalities in the workforce and community
- Implement a smarter working programme, making best use of accommodation and IT
- Allow Members and staff to work flexibly to support the community
- Continue to manage finances efficiently, looking for ways to make savings and generate income
- Be innovative in service delivery
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Present: Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe (Chair), Cllr Melanie Bartlett (Deputy Chair), Cllr Irma Freeborn, Cllr Syed Ghani, Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole and Cllr Danielle Smith; Mrs I Robinson

Apologies: Cllr Simon Bremner Mrs Glenda Spencer

18. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

19. Minutes - 6 December 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2016 were confirmed as correct.

20. Social Care and Education Performance

Cllr Smith, Cllr Bartlett and Cllr Oluwole arrived during this item.

The Commissioning Director, Children’s Care and Support presented the report, which gave an overview of the Council’s performance for those service areas in children’s social care and education that were rated ‘Amber’ or ‘Red’, the details of which were set out in the report. The Director advised that there were two distinct periods of performance: the first covered the social care annual calendar reporting year and the second was the 2016 academic year. The performance ratings were based upon the analysis of the latest quartile benchmark position nationally, and where appropriate regionally, and the report also included the direction of travel towards improvement or decline in performance.

The Committee noted that the information in the performance reports was a tool to assist it to focus on the areas it should prioritise its future scrutiny work programme.

The Committee discussed a number of issues and attention was drawn to:

- Looked after children (LAC) with up-to-date health checks - (section 2.4 of the report)
  Achievement of 72% at end of November 2016, 77% at the end of January and the predicted 90% target end of year. Councillors requested clarification in how the Health Check results were benchmarked.

The Committee was advised that the assessment definition applied to all Councils and that the assessments process had two stages. The first part was the health check, which generally was undertaken before a child had been in foster care for five weeks, and the second stage was when the health check report itself was quality checked. The health check could not be counted as completed until both parts had been undertaken. There was a good working
relationship with local health partners and work was ongoing with the Director of Public Health and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to reduce any delays in the return of the paperwork. The quality checks were needed as the health visitors and school nurses were going through the learning curve which any new process brings. For LAC, the initial health checks are done by our own paediatrician. It was noted that despite encouragement some young people, especially the older ones, do refuse to go for a health check. Whilst health check refusals were recorded by the Council, the Department of Education only class them as being either done or not done.

The health checks and paperwork returns were also traditionally affected by peaks and troughs, such as the school / public holidays. Officers stressed that it did not mean that a significant number of LAC had not had their health checks, but that the paperwork follow-up was still in progress, and they did not have any concerns about the 90% target being achieved by the end of the year.

Health checks for LAC placed outside the Borough would be undertaken by the CCG where they were living.

It was noted that the health check indicators and CCG performance were being tracked and carefully monitored by the LBBD Health and Wellbeing Board.

- **Education performance**  
  (section 2.5 of the report)

The Commissioning Director Education commented that whilst the report centred on issues of performance concern, there were many areas where overall performance had shown improvement consistently over recent years or was good.

The Director drew attention to two key areas for improving performance; focus on reading at age 11 and mathematics at age 16.

In response to a question the Director advised that recruitment of Mathematics and Science teachers was particularly challenging, locally and nationally. Recruiting more experienced teachers was particularly hard, as the costs of living in the London area are becoming prohibitive, especially for teachers with families.

In response to a question about the literacy skills of parents, the Director advised that the Adult College offered some classes that could assist adults to read or build literacy skills. There were also some electronic software applications (Apps) that track a child’s reading progress and so would assist parents know how their child was progressing. The Director would circulate details of one example developed in LBBD to Councillors.

- **Average Progress 8 –**  
  (section 2.5 of the report)

In response to a question from Councillors, it was noted that the performance was not specifically LAC but for all children.

Officers explained how the ‘basket of 8’ subjects were made up and how it was
unclear exactly how they would be benchmarked against previous performance as the new measure were about the flight path of learning progress from the start point of each individual child and not against the average performance of their peers. The Commissioning Director, Children’s Care and Support advised that he would circulate further information to the Committee which explained this further. What was clear was that parents were having some difficulty understanding this new measure.

It was noted that many parents and employers also appear confused about the new 1 to 9 GCSE gradings, especially after many years of being converse with the A*-C etc. GCSE exam markings.

The Commissioning Director Education, reminded the Committee of the Virtual School for Looked After Children and its Virtual Head would support and challenge individual schools and would also put in additional tutoring, if required, to support young people to improve their grades.

- **GCSE National Performance Measures**
  (section 2.5 of the report)
  Councillors asked what was being done to help students understand the new grade changes.

  The Commissioning Director Education, advised that schools were trying to explain and inform children and parents of the changes. The Director also explained the impact of the grade changes, including how it appeared because the new Grade 5 is harder to get than the current Grade C this could result in a potential 20% drop in overall achievement on the headline performance under the new system. This is speculation though as there is still some uncertainty on how this new system would work.

- **The percentage of 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education employment or training (NEETS)**
  (section 2.6 of the report)
  Councillors asked officers to explain what was being done in this area to ensure we achieve national average performance and our target as a Council.

  The Commissioning Director Education, advised that the NEETs target was still a challenge, but stressed that progress over recent years had been significant and reminded the Committee that in Nov – Jan 2013 the NEET and Unknown average had been poor at 13.7%. The current performance at the end of Quarter 3 was of 8.2% but if performance continued to improve at its current pace achievement should be in line or close to the national average when the January 2017 figures are published. A workshop had been held with schools and officers to robustly look at what more could be done to target and reduce the number of potential NEETs. This had included consideration of what the Council could do to encourage participation in training or work. The Committee noted that Councillors were now asking in other arenas what the Council could do with regards to putting resources behind positive change, and Officers were now investigating a number of potential options.

  Councillors were advised that the Council was looking at how they can use the Apprenticeship Levy. The details on how the levy would operate in practice
was still being clarified. However, it was hoped that some apprenticeships could be held for LAC / care leavers.

- **The percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation**  
  (section 2.3 of report)  
  Councillors asked what support was given to care leavers moving into their own accommodation and if the accommodation was affordable and in which area it was provided.

The Director of Operations, Children’s Care and Support advised that young people advisors were in place to offer continued support to care leavers. One of the things the Director was keen to develop in the future was the provision of a training flat where the young person could live for up to three weeks before leaving their placement. The Director indicated that she believed this would help acclimatise the care leaver to independence and the issues of being in a home of their own, including practical things like energy meters and bill payments. When the care leavers are given a tenancy, it could be short-term but the Council do tend to provide longer-term tenancies. The Group Manager, Looked After Children, Adoption, Fostering and Prevention reminded the Committee that the Council had responsibility for LAC until they are 21 years of age, therefore, the Council tries to make connections with good landlords that can offer a secure longer-term tenancy. This was because the upheaval of moving every six to 12 months would be particularly difficult for LAC who need as much stability as possible as they step forward into independent adulthood. In some instances, any shortfall between benefits and market rents could be met until the LAC was ready and able to sustain a social tenancy.

It was noted that work was being undertaken, in conjunction with Officers in Growth and Homes, to identify and stimulate the local housing market for social tenancies for people with learning difficulties and LAC.

The Committee was advised that the majority of the accommodation would be in the Borough or in the immediate surrounding area. However, if a LAC had been fostered out of the Borough they may ask to be accommodated where they have friends or other ties, rather than return to the Borough, and this would be accommodated wherever possible.

- **Feedback from LAC about special treatment**  
  Cllrs asked if there was any feedback from LAC as to whether they were happy to be targeted and taken out of class / lessons for extra support or health checks etc.

The Director of Operations, Children’s Care and Support, explained the work being undertaken with social workers and independent review officers to reduce the children feeling uncomfortable and embarrassed in front of their peers. Whilst LAC clearly need support, the children themselves were indicating that they wanted to be treated the same as their classmates / peers and that they did not want to be pulled out of class differently. It seems that while children are not taken out of class for LAC reviews, they are being taken out for other purposes and example being for careers advice and support arranged by schools. The Director stressed that any incidents of this nature that are drawn to her attention would be investigated further in order to prevent
further incidents where possible.

The Committee asked for feedback on the work that was being done in this area in due course.

21. **Children’s Services Finance Update**

The Group Manager – Services Finance, presented the report which provided an update on the financial position of Children’s Services and the successful action taken this year to address long-standing pressures on funding, further details of which were set out in the report.

The Group Manager explained the risks and issues being faced in Children’s Services, including continued demand and demographic pressure. The Committee’s attention was also drawn to the risks and issues relating to schools and Education funding, including funding formula changes and academisation. The Group Manager advised that further savings had still to be delivered, and the effect of locality models and commissioning were still to be realised, however, overall the financial position was significantly improved.

The Department of Education had now recognised that the Borough had been underfunded in early years’ provision, which should result in additional money being provided for the Early Years services. However, schools in the Borough were likely to lose funding under the new funding formula and this had been recognised as a risk area.

Discussion was held in regards to:

- **Funding Children’s Care and Support**
  The Director of Operations, Children’s Care and Support explained how some of the pressures in Children’s Services and support were being managed down and stressed that £5.1m (the full year effect of this is £7.8m) has been saved, in one year, had been a significant achievement, especially when the service demands were continuing. The creation of Community Solutions, which would provide early intervention, advice and prevention to support families at an early stage, should reduce further the demands on statutory services later, and thus keep future costs down.

  The Group Manager – Services Finance, also explained the details in Table 1 (page 21 of the agenda), in regards to placement costs, the reason and type of transport provision, legal advice and court costs, no recourse to public funds (NRTPF) and unaccompanied asylum seeking children and the support for children affected by this. It was confirmed that the Borough transport service would be used wherever suitable for the child’s needs and / if it was financially appropriate.

  Councillors asked for the agency / staffing costs to be split for future meetings.

- **Schools Funding Formulas**
  Noted the work being undertaken with other local authorities and that the Borough and its schools were applying for all funding opportunities that were available. However, schools in London were generally losers under the new
funding formulas.

- **Academisation**
  The Government is still committed to academisation and it was expected schools would continue to be encouraged / pressurised by government agencies to become an academy during the life of this parliament. Whatever their status, the priority for the Council is to keep all schools engaged as part of the local education family. It was noted that whilst the Borough would have less direct involvement in an Academy the Director of Children’s Services still had some statutory responsibilities and other powers that would allow access to schools.

- **Funding for three / four-year old children**
  In response to a question in relation to how local providers would be chosen, it was noted that all providers would receive a set basic amount per hour, plus an opportunity to apply for supporting sums. The Council also has a duty of quality control and a commissioning role for early years and would continue to work with Ofsted on this.

The Committee:

(i) Noted the continued demand and demographic pressures facing Children’s Care and Support Services;

(ii) Noted the impact of the action taken this year to address those pressures and the significant savings that had been achieved;

(iii) Noted the remaining risks and issues set out in the report in regards to Schools and Education funding; and

(iv) Requested that in future reports the agency / staffing costs are split.

**22. Adoption Scorecard Performance 2013-2016**

The Group Manager Looked After Children Adoption, Fostering and Prevention, presented the report which provided a summary in relation to the Adoption Scorecard and the rolling three-year performance for the period 2013 to 2016.

The report and presentation highlighted the reasons for delay in placing children for adoption and summarised the needs of 66 children. The Group manager explained the process and the actions being taken to address delays and to find families for those children in the current cohort and the difficulties in finding families for the 48 harder to place children, who often have disabilities or multiple needs, which makes matching placements harder. The Group Manager stressed that those 66 children should not be seen as simply statistics on a scorecard and finding children permanent families was an ongoing quest. Matching a family to a child / children could involve a local, London or even an across the country search.

The Director of Operations. Children’s Care and Support explained that the Council’s adoption performance position could be improved if harder to place children were removed from the adoption register and placed into long-term accommodation. However, officers felt that rather than to achieve an adoption
target, it was much more important to achieve the best outcomes for the child and wherever possible try to find a family for every child that could be adopted. The Committee indicated that it supported the officers’ stance.

Discussion was held on several issues, including:

- **Advertising**
  Councillors asked about the level of advertising for adoption, as it did not seem as pronounced as fostering advertising locally or nationally and if there was anything that they could do to help advertise the services when visiting schools, attending religious venues and their surgeries etc.

- **Buying in adopters / matching services from across the country.**
  Noted that this could be more cost effective.

- **Regional Adoption Agency**
  Noted that a scoping exercise was currently being undertaken to look at one regional adoption agency for all London councils

The Committee:

(i) Noted the performance that will be reported in the Barking and Dagenham Adoption Scorecard for 2013 to 2016;

(ii) Noted the report would form part of the evidence for the Committee’s deep dive scrutiny on adoption timeliness and any recommendations arising and that this would probably include consideration of:

   (a) Local advertising of adoption.

   (b) Children should not be removed from the adoption register and placed into long-term fostering just to improve adoption performance.

   (c) The principle that the best outcomes for the child was paramount and, wherever possible, officers should try to find a family for every child that could be adopted.

(ii) Wished to place on record its thanks to the adoption teams and the honest and open way that officers have answered questions and provided updates and reports to date.

23. **Work Programme**

The Work Programme was noted.
### Title: Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Briefing

**Report of the**
Commissioning Director; Children’s Care and Support

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<td><strong>Report Author:</strong> Teresa DeVito; Group Manager for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance</td>
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<td><strong>Contact Details:</strong> Tel: 020 227 2318 E-mail: <a href="mailto:teresa.devito@lbld.gov.uk">teresa.devito@lbld.gov.uk</a></td>
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**Accountable Director:**
Chris Bush (Commissioning Director, Children’s Care, and Support)

**Accountable Strategic Director:** Anne Bristow, Strategic Director, Service Development, and Integration

### Summary:
This report provides the Children’s Services Select Committee (CSSC) with an overview and analysis of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in Barking and Dagenham. The report aims to bring to the CSSC’s attention the latest data relating to CSE, provide an overview of the context and challenges on this topic and outline activity that has been, and will be, taken.

### Recommendation(s)
The Children’s Services Select Committee is recommended to:

(i) Note content of the report and comment upon further action that they feel should be taken;

(ii) Identify any key areas of this report that they wish to see expanded upon in future updates to the Committee.

### Reason(s)
The Children’s Services Select Committee have requested a general briefing on Child Sexual Exploitation in Barking and Dagenham to develop understanding, facilitate meaningful challenge and determine any areas for future scrutiny.
1. Introduction and Background

What is Child Sexual Exploitation?

1.1 Defining child sexual exploitation (CSE) is difficult, as the boundaries between sexual abuse (which includes CSE) and exploitation are often hard to determine. As models of CSE have changed, definitions are adapted to reflect this. The following points show the factors that are common to all the definitions:

- It is a form of sexual abuse
- It involves under-18s
- It is an exploitative situation in which a young person is manipulated, coerced or deceived into sexual activity to receive something they want or need, or it is to the advantage of the perpetrator
- There is an imbalance of power
- The abuse does not always have to be physical and can be perpetrated using technology.

Who is at risk of child sexual exploitation?

1.2 The diversity of victims of CSE cuts across all cultures, social backgrounds, ethnicities, and gender identities. Victims come from different backgrounds and what makes one child vulnerable to CSE is individual to them. However, there are some factors that increase a child’s vulnerability, such as having a learning disability, or going online to talk to strangers. The first response to children, and support for them to access help, must be the best it can be from social workers, police, health practitioners and others who work with children and their families.

1.3 CSE victimisation is not exclusive to young females and can equally apply to males yet they are often not identified as victims of CSE. Whilst it is impossible to generalise, research indicates that male and female victims have a common range of factors that increase their risk of exploitation. Among these are:

- experiences of childhood abuse; poverty; family conflict; poor parental role models;
- an unsettled care history; a history of running away; homelessness; learning and mental health difficulties;
- drug and alcohol misuse; and financial problems caused by addictions.

1.4 However, children without any predisposing vulnerabilities or risk factors are also at risk of exploitation through use of the internet, social media, and gaming. Many children will experience multiple types of sexual exploitation, that are complex and overlapping. Perpetrators will often use a variety of ways to trap a child that limits their choices and their ability to exit the abuse.

1.5 Appendix 1 explains the most common methods of exploitation used.

Barriers to victims accessing support services

1.6 Sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse that raises unique issues for any agency involved in safeguarding children. Often, victims may be considered ‘hard-to-reach’ because they are not known to agencies. Where they are known, they may be
considered ‘challenging’, as they are often disengaged from services, or may not recognise the exploitative nature of their relationships. In some cases, young people will have emotional links with perpetrators, and with others in criminal networks, as well as personal involvement in criminal activity such as drug use and dealing.

1.7 Children and young people may exhibit extreme forms of defensiveness, demonstrated through anger and hostility if concerns about their lifestyles are expressed which will also serve to keep professionals away. Fear, stigma, and shame can often make it difficult for young people to disclose their experiences of sexual exploitation to support agencies and young men in particular may have experienced exploitation that presents challenges for workers. The indicators for child sexual exploitation can sometimes be mistaken for ‘normal adolescent behaviours’. It requires knowledge, skills, professional curiosity and an assessment which analyses the risk factors and personal circumstances of individual children to ensure that the signs and symptoms are interpreted correctly and appropriate support is given.

1.8 Some male victims describe having been attracted to the social aspects of relationships with older men, or the opportunity to explore their sexuality. In many cases, statutory agencies working within the remit of child protection may not always recognise or identify a young person over the age of 18 as a victim of exploitation often thinking a victim has consented, which can discourage anyone from seeking further support. In the absence of any police disruption or legal prosecution, perpetrators may continue to control children and young people – for example, via text and mobile phone contact. Children rarely self-report child sexual exploitation so it is important that practitioners are aware of potential indicators of risk.

1.9 Everyone should be alert to the potential signs and indicators of child sexual exploitation, as well as other forms of abuse, and exercise professional curiosity in their day to day work.

2. CSE in Barking and Dagenham

2.1 The Council has a local multi-agency plan to combat CSE which requires leadership across the partnership and meets the principles of safeguarding as set out in Working Together 2015. The plan requires the involvement of all multi-agency partners and is monitored by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. However, CSE is complex and children are often reluctant to disclose experiences of exploitation due to misplaced feelings of loyalty and shame. Many children and young people may not recognise what they are experiencing as abuse or that they require support or intervention, believing they are in control or in a healthy consensual relationship. Because of this there will inevitably be an under-reporting of CSE in Barking and Dagenham.

2.2 Barking and Dagenham has high scores on several indicators of potentially high numbers of vulnerable young people. This was due to the borough being in the most at risk 10% of local authorities in terms of its deprivation, its rate of repeat abortions and rate of substance abuse treatment. It also featured in the top 50% for its rate of mental health admissions.

2.3 While measuring the unknown number of CSE victims is challenging, Barking and Dagenham’s high scores on multiple indicators suggests there is potentially many young people at risk of CSE victimisation.
2.4 Of the 152 areas in England, Barking & Dagenham ranked joint 17th based on the victim based risk factors.

2.5 A Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was introduced to improve the way local safeguarding partners work together on the ground. MASH has well-established referral pathways for CSE and allows for timely intelligence-sharing which assists in the process of early identification, information gathering and the response to CSE. MASH across London are also helping to strengthen cross-borough information sharing. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has officers based in the MASH who have CSE experience and knowledge and who link with social work practitioners and managers to share information.

2.6 Through the London Child Sexual Exploitation Protocol, procedures are set out for the MPS and partner agencies for safeguarding and protecting children from sexual exploitation. There are also introduced monthly MASE (Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation) meetings chaired by the Police to determine local profiles of CSE.

2.7 MASE meetings bring together CSE leads to share information, review individual referrals, and ensure action is being taken – providing a coordinated approach with other London boroughs and an opportunity for professional challenge and learning. Intelligence from the MASE meetings is shared at a local level and across borough boundaries to inform both the operational and strategic response.

2.8 In November 2016, an HMIC inspection report on the MPS was published. This report severely criticised the police across London for their work on child protection,
including CSE. The report stated that “The MPS still needs to do more to understand the extent and nature of CSE locally within each borough, and particularly across London. At present, there is insufficient information and intelligence about CSE in London, especially in terms of knowing where perpetrators live and offend, and links to missing children. Furthermore, the information and intelligence about CSE that does exist is not used effectively to safeguard children. While some individuals in other agencies know about children who are at risk and the work the police may be doing to manage that risk, better analysis of all the information held by all relevant agencies could lead to more targeted and effective work to protect children and prevent offending. Such analysis would also help refine the requirement of what information should be gathered by which agency.”

2.9 One of the ‘immediate’ actions arising from the report is: “improving staff awareness of the links between children going missing from home and the risk of sexual exploitation, particularly where there are repeat episodes”. Staff from the council, across the LSCB and the police will be working to a plan to improve responses to CSE by the MPS and separately the MPS have in place a response to HMIC on improvements to the concerns raised in the report.

2.10 90% of all Local Authorities have seen rises in Police recorded child sex offences, however the rise in Barking and Dagenham has been relatively small compared to the national average. The issue of potential concern is that this small rise in an area scoring highly on multiple victim risk factors and may be indicative of victims not coming forward. However, it may also be the case that there are comparatively few being victimised in the area.

2.11 In 2015 the MPS featured among the forces with the largest discrepancy between overall crime rates and child sex offence rates (83.1 overall crime per 1,000 population vs. 3.6 CSE crimes per 1,000 population). This may have indicated an issue with under-reporting, under-recording or where this crime type is less of a priority, which seems to be borne out in the HMIC report published in 2016.

2.12 Missing and looked after children are proportionately more at risk of CSE. While most CSE victims live at home, children who go missing, from residential care, are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

During the year 2016:

- 31 children (8.7% of the total number of missing children) were considered to be at risk of CSE. Of that 31:
  - 18 children (5% of the total number of missing children) were in our care;
  - 7 children (1.9% of the total number of missing children) were placed in B&D by other authorities;
  - 6 children (1.6% of the total number of missing children) were not in the care of a Local Authority.

3. CSE Data

3.1 There is currently no national or regional dataset for Child Sexual Exploitation so at present we are unable to compare Barking and Dagenham’s performance against other areas. To provide a local understanding of CSE every area should have its own data and intelligence. The local multi-agency plan should be based on an inter-
agency assessment of the local profile of perpetration, and this requires effective local arrangements for sharing and collating intelligence and other information about communities, environments, perpetrators, and victims into a Problem Profile.

3.2 The key aim of the Problem Profile is to provide an analysis of child sexual exploitation locally, the characteristics of CSE i.e. who are the victims, who are perpetrators. It also seeks to identify existing and emerging trends in child sexual exploitation and make recommendations thus. The profile includes a 12-month snapshot and uses individual data from Police and Social Care cross referenced with education, youth offending, substance misuse, and access to children centres, Tier 2 services, SEN, and domestic violence to build up a local profile. However, a singular area focus cannot adequately capture patterns of harm and risk as cases of child sexual exploitation frequently cross local authority, police force and even country boundaries in terms of the movement of both perpetrators and victims.

Key Messages: Victims/At Risk

95 children in total were flagged as at risk of or subject to CSE by either the Police, Children’s Social Care or by both agencies;

82% of the children and young people were female

85% were teenagers

15% were aged under-12

51% were white British

47% open to Children’s Social Care (statutory service)

25% were reported missing/absent at some point during the year

Key Messages: Perpetrators

21 out of 23 suspects were male

The age of perpetrators ranged from 15 – 62

72% of perpetrators aged under-30

63% of perpetrators lived in-borough

Most perpetrators were classified as white European
Linking, Risk Factors and Themes

High proportion (15%) of victims experienced **school exclusion** with the majority being female and white British.

Attendance data was variable for victims, ranging from 22% to 100%

**Very low** numbers were SEN

**Educational attainment** levels of victims are **low** at all Key Stages

20% of victims had been **reported missing** with a high number of instances of ‘repeated missing’ reports

10% of victims known to **substance misuse** (drug and alcohol) services and 12% known to **Youth Offending**

66% of victims had accessed **Children’s Centres** in early years, with 34% having been subject to a **CAF**

37% were known to **Victim Support Services**

**Police CSE Data**

**3.3** The graph below illustrates the different stages of CSE used by the Police across London - Suspicion, Crime, Detections, and Interruption/Disruption. Overall Barking and Dagenham holds the fourth place after Redbridge, Havering, and Hackney. Looking only at the number of committed crimes, Barking and Dagenham with 24 cases holds the 5th highest place after Westminster (with 29 cases), Hounslow and Havering (both with 27 cases) and Lambeth and Haringey (both with 26 cases).
4. What are we doing?

4.1 Tackling CSE requires all partners to understand how to identify victims and children and young people at risk of CSE. A range of work is taking place to increase understanding of CSE and training is being delivered across partnerships to enhance knowledge.

1. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) delivers a multi-agency annual training programme which includes CSE and there are online training modules that can be accessed for staff unable to attend training in person.

2. The CSE Co-ordinator has a network of CSE leads from a range of agencies who act as ‘CSE Champions’ and who meet on a quarterly basis.

3. There is a CSE ‘surgery’ held for social workers and managers on a fortnightly basis and discussion with the Police via the MASH.

4. Daily review of the Missing Children list with the Police to co-ordinate upon any children where there are CSE concerns.

5. Quarterly attendance by the CSE Co-ordinator at operational team meetings to update on CSE.

6. The Young People’s Safety Group, a subcommittee of the LSCB, has CSE as a standing item on their agenda.

7. We have been successful in a bid for Barnardo’s to provide a specialist worker in CSE and Child Trafficking to support families who engage with and are known to the Private & Voluntary sector (specifically Carers Association, Young carers, Sycamore Trust- Mencap and PACT) to educate vulnerable young people around CSE. The project will provide 12 families with direct work around CSE and
keeping safe and provide the voluntary sector with training to increase the knowledge of CSE and staying safe, to include online safety.

8. Last year we held a range of events to commemorate ‘CSE day’ which falls on the 18th March. This year we plan to hold:
   a. Community events in Sydney Russell school, Dagenham and Gascoigne Community Centre, Barking.
   b. A business breakfast at Care City on ‘Operation Makesafe’, a police operation targeted at hoteliers and taxi drivers who may witness concerns around CSE but not be clear what they are seeing or who to report to.
   c. CSE awareness material will be displayed in libraries, schools, and Children’s Centre’s.
   d. During the week, Youth workers will arrange focused sessions around CSE/online grooming/ healthy relationships.
   e. It is hoped that the ARC theatre will perform at Sydney Russell school and Barnardo’s will provide an information stall.

5. Challenges: Common Themes

5.1 Some of the themes that have arisen as part of national reviews and learning from Child Sexual Exploitation are:

- Lack of understanding about the impact of CSE, its effects on victims and their ability to protect themselves.
- Lack of understanding about the nature of grooming, the degree of control exerted by perpetrators.
- Children often did not recognise they were being exploited.
- Professional misunderstanding about consent and view of victim’s credibility.
- Weaknesses in engaging with and understanding young people.
- Inadequate understanding of family and social context or history.
- Assessments not involving the young people themselves.
- Focus predominantly on dealing with the young people’s ‘difficult behaviour’, not enough consideration as to what was behind it.
- Failure to understand the needs of adolescents and the impact of adolescent neglect.
- Attitudes towards the young people and assumptions about ‘lifestyle’ choices.

6. Next Steps

6.1 There are some key next steps that need to be taken to strengthen our approach to CSE in Barking and Dagenham. As a priority, an update to the ‘Problem Profile’ is required to ensure that we continuously have the most current understanding available to us. This should include contributing to the work going on across London to formulate a common dataset.

6.2 Work to educate children, young people, parents and professionals about the nature and risks of CSE (both online and offline) must continue. This includes how to access support. More focus must be brought upon online protection.

6.3 As part of the programme of ongoing education we will be providing training for GP’s with information to be displayed in surgery’s and to work with hospitals and clinics to ensure that staff are up to date with CSE information with clearly displayed
information in areas young people may attend such as clinics, providing support and advice on STD’s and abortion.

6.4 More work needs to be done with local schools to support them in identifying, and protecting, children at risk of, or who have suffered from CSE. This will be a key role of our new CSE Co-ordinator who will also visit all care homes and semi-independent housing providers in the borough to discuss CSE preventative measures.

6.5 We also must ensure that we have a coordinated approach to managing CSE by linking with other strategies, including violence against women and girls, and youth violence and gangs.

6.6 A robust response from the MPS is required to the recently published HMRC report, replete with a clear indication of how the deficiencies identified will be addressed as a matter of urgency.

7. Recommendations

7.1 The Children’s Services Select Committee are requested to consider the contents of this report and challenge the effectiveness of work on Child Sexual Exploitation in the borough. The Committee may wish to focus on the following themes:

- How well children at risk of, or suffering from, CSE are identified in the borough;
- The effectiveness of the response in the borough from both the Council and the Council’s partners in responding to CSE;
- The approach that is being taken and the efficacy of the key next steps highlighted in the document;
- Any areas that the Select Committee feel could/should be expanded on for future or interim updates.

List of appendices:

i) Appendix 1 – Common Methods of Child Sexual Exploitation
Appendix 1

Common Methods of Child Sexual Exploitation

Peer exploitation - This form of exploitation usually takes place within peer or friendship groups. For example, a young person being given alcohol or drugs in exchange for sex. Peer exploitation sometimes occurs concurrently with peer domestic abuse, although it can also be linked to gang involvement. Although the age of the perpetrator and victim might be the same or similar, there will inevitably be a form of power control, manipulation, or coercion.

Gang involvement - Gang exploitation is very broad in nature, and used within an internal gang hierarchy and as a weapon of retribution against other gangs.

The sexual exploitation of children can involve significant sums of money. Some gangs may use the sexual exploitation of children, to make money along with other criminality such as drug-growing, drug-running, drug-selling, forging money, trafficking, benefit fraud, etc.

Trafficking - Children can be trafficked internally, within the UK, and internationally, into and out of the United Kingdom. Children are passed through networks of perpetrators, across and between towns and cities where they may be forced or coerced into sexual activity with multiple perpetrators.

Boyfriend model - The perpetrator befriends and grooms a child into a ‘relationship’ whereby the child believes them to be their boyfriend or girlfriend. The child is likely to believe they are in a loving relationship initially. The perpetrator may then coerce or force them to have sex with friends or associates.

Online exploitation - This model uses technology to target and exploit young people alongside grooming and exploitation through texts and picture messages. Perpetrators can...
use the internet to commit offences internationally, as young people can be accessed through apps, sites, and games. Anywhere a child could have contact with a risky adult is a location where they are at risk of CSE.

**Sharing of indecent imagery** - Images are sent from one person to another using channels such as email, instant messaging, and social networking sites. Once shared, these images remain in the public domain forever. Children are targeted by perpetrators and coerced to take pictures or videos of themselves, often with promises that the image won't be shared and is part of developing a relationship. The images may be used for distribution or sale to other perpetrators and they may be used to blackmail the victim to do further sexual acts or to threaten the child to keep quiet or risk the images being distributed to friends, family, or the wider public.

**Street based exploitation** - The commercial or ‘street based’ sexual exploitation of children was previously referred to as ‘child prostitution’ and still takes place on the street and in private and public places. A young person exchanges sex for money or drugs – often a ‘transaction’ which does not involve being groomed by the abuser. A young person may become involved in commercial sexual exploitation because of ‘survival’ when they are homeless or because someone is controlling them – even when the young person feels they are doing it out of ‘choice’, it is only because of constrained choices and is still a form of exploitation.

**Parties/hotels** - Parties in flats, hotels, squats, warehouses are established to lure children into places, where they are targeted, groomed, and then coerced into sexually exploitative situations. Sometimes, a network of abusers operates within an area and moves children around different venues to exploit them. Usually, drugs and alcohol are present and used to lower inhibitions and ensure compliance.
Title: Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance: Draft Scrutiny Report

Report of the Commissioning Director, Education (Scrutiny Champion for the Children’s Services Select Committee)

Open Report For consideration

Report Author: Masuma Ahmed, Democratic Services Officer

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Accountable Director: Ann Graham, Director of Operations, Children’s Care and Support

Accountable Strategic Director: Anne Bristow, Strategic Director, Service Development and Integration

Summary:
The Children’s Services Select Committee (CSSC) has undertaken an in-depth scrutiny review of ‘Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance’. Appended to this report is a draft scrutiny report, for members’ consideration.

Recommendations of the CSSC as an outcome of the scrutiny review are key to changes leading to improvements in the Adoption Service. The draft report contains the findings of the scrutiny review and possible recommendations, which members are asked to analyse and discuss in order to give direction to officers in producing the final version of the report.

Recommendation(s)
The CSSC is recommended to review the draft scrutiny report and recommendations and provide its comments on the report in order to give direction to officers in producing the final version of the report.

Reason(s)
The topic ‘Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance’ relates to the Council’s priority to ‘enable social responsibility’ and the objective to ‘protect the most vulnerable, keeping adults and children healthy and safe’ and the priority to ‘encourage civic pride’ and the objective to ‘narrow the gap in attainment and realise high aspirations for every child’. 
1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Every year each of the Council’s Select Committees agrees a work programme which lists the areas it wishes to scrutinise in the municipal year. As well as one-off agenda items, the work programme often includes a more-in-depth investigation into an area of concern that is relevant to the committee’s remit, which usually involves members attending sessions outside of the standard evening meetings scheduled for the year.

1.2 For 2016/17, having received an ‘options report’ providing information on the issues a scrutiny review would involve for three different areas, the CSSC agreed that Adoption would be the topic on which to undertake a scrutiny review, due to the Adoption Service’s performance, in relation to the government’s key adoption scorecard measures.

2. Proposal and Issues

2.1 The key issues that arose as part of this review are in the body of the draft scrutiny report at Appendix 1. Members are asked to consider the draft report and discuss its findings and the potential recommendations put forward. Members will wish to comment on the draft report and assess whether they are in line with their views arising from this review, and comment on whether there are any gaps which need to be addressed prior to the publication of the final version of the report. Members are asked to note that officers will continue to work on the layout, wording and overall presentation of the report between this meeting and the publication of the final version of the report towards the end of April 2017.

3. Title, Terms of Reference and Key issues explored in the report

3.1 The title of the Scrutiny Review is “Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance” and the following four key questions form the Terms of Reference for the scrutiny review:

1. What is adoption and why is this a good outcome for some children in care?
2. Why is the Barking and Dagenham Adoption Scorecard performance off target and are officers taking the right action to address the issues?
3. How might the views and experience of those adopted and those who adopt help improve our practice?
4. How might the views and experience of others involved in the adoption process help improve our practice?

3.2 The key issues explored in the report are:

- Adoption as an outcome for children;
- The Service’s performance measured against the government’s adoption scorecard targets over the past five years;
- Processes within the service that impacted on historical performance and how the Adoption Action Plan has/is addressing these problems;
The proportion of ‘harder to place’ children in the borough and the Service’s aim to continue family finding for children who are harder to place and the impact of this approach is having on the Service’s Adoption Scorecard performance; and

- The current cohort of children whom the Adoption Service has been notified of as potentially needing adoptive placements and how this will impact upon the Service’s future Scorecard performance.

4. **Next steps**

4.1 Officers will make changes to the scrutiny report as agreed by the Committee at the meeting and produce a final version of the report for consideration by the CSSC at its on meeting on 24 May 2017. After this, the decision maker will be asked to respond to the recommendations, develop an action plan to monitor the implementation of the recommendations, and present progress on the action plan to the Committee in approximately six months' time.

5. **Implications**

5.1 Legal and financial implications will be sought in relation to the final scrutiny report.

**Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:**

Final scoping report for this scrutiny review, available at:


**List of appendices:**

Appendix 1  Draft scrutiny review report on 'Improving the Council's Adoption Scorecard Performance'.
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Appendix 1: Draft Report

Report of the Children’s Services Select Committee:
Improving the council’s adoption scorecard performance:
Scrutiny Review 2016/17

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Lead Member’s Foreword

This year, Barking and Dagenham Council’s Children’s Services Select Committee (CSS) agreed to undertake a Scrutiny Review on ‘Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance’.

Children who are looked after by the local authority, or are in need of an adoptive family, often come from difficult backgrounds or face complexities which make them very vulnerable, and are in great need for stability, love and affection. There is evidence to show that adoption is a good outcome for these children, and that the earlier they are adopted, the better the outcomes for them and their families. As the Council’s performance in the two key indicators for measuring how quickly local children are adopted is below the London and national average, we wanted to find out what the reasons were for this, what the Council was doing to address these challenges and what more could be done.

As well as looking at the data and speaking to various professionals involved in the adoption process, we received a presentation from Professor Julie Selwyn, an expert in the field, to help us understand what questions the Council should be asking to challenge itself and improve practice. We also talked to residents who have been through the adoption process to gain their personal insight.

We learnt that when compared to London, the borough has a higher than average number of children who are in a sibling group, are from an ethnic minority, are older, or have a disability, which can mean that they are ‘harder to place’. In the past, the Adoption Service has successfully placed children considered ‘harder to place’ which has been a good outcome for those children. However, this good practice has had an adverse impact on the Service’s Scorecard performance, which indicates that the Service is far from meeting the timeliness targets for finding children an adoptive family. We therefore feel that the Scorecard performance measures do not accurately portray the true picture, in that these children may have waited longer to be placed, but the Adoption Service’s decision to continue to look for an adoptive placement for these children, rather than deem them not suitable for adoption, turned out to be in their best interests.

However, we recognise that the delay in finding adoptive families for children cannot always be attributed to the fact that the cohort of children looking for adoptive families includes a high number of harder to place children. It is very important that the Council’s Action Plan for the Service is closely monitored to ensure the changes to the culture and practices within the Service to improve timeliness do not lose momentum and are having the right impact. More can also can be done to improve the recruitment of adopters, and the timeliness of finding adoptive families for children, and so we have made a number of recommendations which we hope will help address these issues. We also recognise that there are areas for good practice. For example, in recent years, there has been a low adoption disruption rate, there has been good joint working within the East London Consortium on recruitment and matching and, Special Guardianship support and training has been introduced in recognition of the significant increase in activity in this area of permanency planning for children.

Councillor Elizabeth Kangethe
Lead Member, Children’s Services Select Committee 2016/17 – 2017/18
Members of the CSSC 2016/17

The CSSC members who carried out this Review were:

Councillor E Kangethe (Lead Member)

Councillor M Bartlett (Deputy Lead Member)

Councillor S Bremner

Councillor E Fergus

Councillor I Freeborn

Councillor S Ghani

Councillor A Oluwole

Councillor D Smith
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Recommendations arising from this Review

For ease of reference, the recommendations arising from this Review are provided below.

The CSSC recommends that:

1. All children, who may potentially be placed for adoption, continue to have adoption plans made by the Local Authority and that these are advocated for during care proceedings;

2. The Chair of the Committee and the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration write to the Department for Education to make representations regarding changes needed to the way performance is measured to take account of the local context and challenges so that there is a fairer representation of performance;

3. All children have the plan for adoption formally reviewed at 12 months, 18 months and 2 years after the granting of the placement order by the Adoption Improvement Group (AIG) to ascertain whether or not family finding should continue, or whether there should be an application to revoke the placement order. If family finding is going to go beyond two years the rationale for this should be formally recorded;

4. The AIG continues to be held at the current frequency of bi-monthly and the challenge to timely performance remains a focus; and

5. The Strategic Director for Service Development and Integration oversees the implementation of the Committee’s suggestions to improve the recruitment of adopters at 6.2 of this report.
1. Background to the Review

Why did the Children’s Services Select Committee (CSSC) choose to undertake an in-depth review on Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance?

1.1 The Council’s scrutiny committees decide what topic to undertake an in-depth review on based on the ‘PAPER’ criteria. The section below explains why according to these criteria ‘Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance’ was a good topic to review.

PUBLIC INTEREST

Successive governments have been concerned about the low rate at which children in care become adopted because these children generally have poorer life outcomes than other children. For example, they are more likely to be unemployed, or to become homeless. Members felt that reviewing the rate at which children are adopted in the borough, and the reasons for this, was clearly in the public interest.

ABILITY TO CHANGE

Members felt by reviewing the actions being taken by the Adoption Service and talking to others involved in the adoption process, they could make recommendations that would help improve outcomes.

PERFORMANCE

The Council’s performance for two key measures on the Adoption Scorecard was below the national and London average. Members heard that there were a number of complex factors behind this, and felt it was necessary for the Committee to fully understand the reasons for the delay in some children being adopted and analyse whether the actions and approach taken by officers, to respond to this, were the right ones.

EXTENT OF THE ISSUE

As of the end of January 2017, there were 426 children in the care of the local authority, therefore, making adoption a significant issue to undertake a review on.

REPLICATION

Members were aware that the Adoption Service had set out its action plan to improve performance to the Council’s Corporate Performance Board. Members were clear that a review on Adoption performance would not look to replicate this work, rather it would seek recommend additional areas of action to influence the Service’s outcomes positively.
2. **Scope & Methodology**

2.1 This section outlines the scope of the Review which includes the areas the CSSC wished to explore and the different methods the CSSC used to collate evidence for potential recommendations.

### Terms of Reference

2.2 Having received a final scoping report at its meeting on 19 September 2016, the CSSC agreed that the Terms of Reference for this Review should be:

1. What is adoption and why is this a good outcome for some children in care?
2. Why is the Barking and Dagenham Adoption Scorecard performance off target and are officers taking the right action to address the issues?
3. How might the views and experience of those adopted and those who adopt help improve our practice?
4. How might the views and experience of others involved in the adoption process help improve our practice?

### Overview of Methodology

2.3 The Review gathered evidence during the Committee’s meetings held between 19 September 2016 and 8 February 2017. Details of stakeholders and their contributions to this Review are outlined below.

### Scoping Report and Overview Presentation

2.4 On 19 September 2016 the Council’s Adoption Service delivered a presentation to the CSSC to provide an overview of adoption, including what it means, the government’s agenda around adoption, the key measures of the Adoption Scorecard, the Adoption Service’s performance, issues impacting on performance, and action being taken to improve performance.

**Presentation by Professor Julie Selwyn PhD, CBE**

2.5 On 25 October 2016 Julie Selwyn, a professor of Child and Family Social Work at the University of Bristol, delivered a presentation on ‘The Adoption of Looked after Maltreated Children: Challenges, Opportunities and Outcomes’ which covered a range of areas including:

- The policy framework for permanence in England;
- Adopted children in England,
- Adoption reform;
- The complex needs of children;
- Why adoption and what do we know about adoption outcomes;
- The sense of belonging and permanence,
- Stability and safety;
- Avoiding delay; and
- Early permanence, and the challenges remaining.
Appendix 1: Draft Report

Interviews with an Adoptee and an Adopter

2.6 On 21 November 2016, members carried out interviews with a resident who was adopted and a resident who had adopted to gain an understanding of their perspectives of the adoption process and experience.

Session with Others involved in the Adoption Process

2.7 On 6 December 2016 the CSSC met with the Chair of the Adoption Panel, the Council’s Senior Solicitor for Safeguarding, the Group Manager for Looked after Children, Adoption and Prevention Services and a Social Worker to discuss various aspects of the adoption process.

Presentation on the Adoption Scorecard

2.8 At the CSSC meeting on 8 February 2017, the Group Manager for Looked after Children, Adoption and Prevention Services provided a report and delivered a presentation to members on the Adoption Scorecard Performance for 2013 – 2016, which included:

- An overview of the Adoption Scorecard performance;
- The key factors which have contributed to the 2013 -2016 under performance;
- What the Service is doing to improve performance;
- The challenges to being successful;
- An analysis of performance for the 2013-16 cohort;
- Children due to go onto Scorecard for 2014-17;
- Children who are currently awaiting an adoptive family; and
- What the Council could do to promote adoption.

Documents

2.9 During the Review, Members and Council Officers considered the following documents:

- Adoption: A Vision for Change, March 2016, Department for Education
- BAAF Advice notes – if your child is being adopted (and you don’t agree)
- BAAF Advice notes – If your child is being adopted (and you don't agree)
- Blogs from First4Adoption website - [http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/blog/](http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/blog/)
3. Introduction

What is Adoption?

3.1 Adoption is the only legal arrangement where parents lose parental responsibility and the adopters become the legal parents of the child. It can be achieved in the following circumstances:

- Babies relinquished by mothers who do not wish to or are unable to care for their child, and give them up for adoption;
- Care proceedings where children are removed from their families due to safeguarding concerns and the court agrees that adoption is the best care plan for the child;
- Step-parent adoptions to enable the step parent to become the legal parent to the child alongside the birth parent; or
- Family members or foster carers making private applications to adopt children, following, for example, the death of birth parents, or, the child has been under the care of the foster carer for over a year and the foster carer now wishes to adopt the child.

Is Adoption a Good Outcome for Children?

3.2 Care regulations state that social workers must consider permanence, the long-term plan for the child’s upbringing, to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity, and belonging. Permanence can be achieved by reunification with the birth family, family and friends’ care, a special guardianship order, adoption or long-term foster care.

The CSSC heard evidence from Professor Selwyn that permanence for children via adoption can lead to good outcomes for children, particularly if they are adopted at a young age. Children report a greater sense of belonging in adoptive placements when compared to children in foster care. A study by Selwyn et al found that longer term foster placements were more likely to disrupt than the adoptive ones in their sample (the caveat being that the foster children were on average older at placement that the adopted children). The rate was much lower for children who were known to the foster carer and, disruption in both foster and adoptive placements tended to occur in the early stage of the placement1.

There is research that shows that adoption provides greater stability than foster care, although this is influenced by factors such as age at placement and the child’s background2. Studies also show that once children have been in care for some time, reunification with the birth family is the least successful option of adoption,

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foster care and returning home\textsuperscript{3}. Younger children are more likely to return home successfully than those who are older\textsuperscript{4}. A US study comparing children who entered care before the age of one, who returned home, were adopted or remained in foster care, found that the children in foster care has the poorest developmental outcomes on nearly all measures, even though the reunified children had less responsive parents and were in significantly greater poverty. However, children in permanent foster care placements can also do well. \textsuperscript{5}

### The Importance of Avoiding Delay

3.3 Graphs 1 and 2 below show comparative data on outcomes for children who were adopted with other children and outcomes for adopted children according to the quality of the start of their life and the timeliness of their adoption.

#### Outcomes of infant adoptions at age 33

(NCDS data)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{Comparison of outcomes for adopted and general population children at age 33.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{3} Thoburn, J and Courtney, M.E (2011) A guide through the knowledge base on children in out of home care, Journal of Children's Services Services, 6, 4: 210-277


\textsuperscript{5} Selwyn, J et al (2006) ibid
3.4 This data shows that adoption can be a good outcome for children, particularly if they are adopted early. Children who have a poor start in life, for example, due to abuse and neglect, and are adopted late, have much poorer outcomes, which is why timeliness in adoption is of crucial importance.

What is the Adoption Scorecard?

3.5 The Coalition Government published ‘An Action Plan for Adoption, Tackling delay’, in March 2012 which introduced a performance scorecard to allow adoption agencies (including local authorities) to monitor their own adoption performance and compare it with that of others.

The Adoption Scorecard is used to measure performance in the timeliness of achieving adoption for children reported as a three-year rolling average and published by the Department for Education (DfE). The two key adoption indicators are:

- **A1** - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted, in days; and
- **A2** - Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and the local authority deciding on a match with an adoptive family, in days.

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Selwyn, J. Charts taken from Presentation to the CSSC, 25 October 2016
The Impact of Caselaw on Timeliness

3.6 Changes in the Family Courts mean that there is an expectation that all care proceedings will be concluded within 26 weeks. It is only in exceptional circumstances that the Courts will allow a case to last longer than 26 weeks.

There has been a series of cases reported in the law reports in 2013 and onwards that has caused the Courts to change the way that they consider care cases where the care plan is adoption. The most important of those cases is Re B-S where the Court gave direction that a care plan of adoption should only be endorsed if the Court was satisfied that “nothing else will do”. This case has had a substantial impact on Placement Order applications (the Court order that allows social workers to begin looking for a new family for a child) and the challenges to Placement Order applications by birth parents. This decision has resulted in extended family members coming forward at a late date to be assessed as alternative carers for a child. This creates delay and impacts upon local authorities’ adoption scorecards as the Courts feel there is no option other than to assess those extended family members, due to the decision in Re B-S.

The decision in Re B-S and the direction that at the end of the care proceedings all Courts have to advise the parents that they have a period of 21 days to appeal any order means that there are an increasing number of appeals by the birth parents. These appeals are often unsuccessful, but once an application has been made to appeal, if the child has not already been placed with prospective adopters, the local authority is unable to place the child until the Court determines the appeal as unsuccessful.
4. What is Barking and Dagenham’s Adoption Service’s Adoption Scorecard Performance?

4.1 This section will discuss Barking and Dagenham’s Adoption’s Service’s performance on the A1 (the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted, in days) and A2 (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, in days) measures, compared with the performance of our statistical neighbours, the London and England average, against the DfE’s thresholds. The DfE’s threshold have reduced between 2008 and 2016, making the targets more challenging. There is no indication that there will be a further reduction for 2017.

A1 performance over the last five years

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<td>628</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2015</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2016</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>To be published March 2017</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A1 - LBBD performance compared to the National, London, statistical neighbour and the DfE threshold averages

[Graph showing A1 performance over the last five years]
4.2 As shown in the above table and graph, our rolling three-year average for 2012-15, as published on the Adoption Scorecard, is 658 days; 171 days above the DfE performance threshold of 487 days and 40 days above the London three-year average of 618 days. Barking and Dagenham’s performance is also worse than the national average of 593 days. It is in line with the performance of our statistical neighbours, which have a three-year average of 655 days. In 2013-16 our three-year rolling average had increased to 721, which is 295 days above the DfE threshold of 426 days. Comparator data for 2013-16 is due to be published in March 2017. Commentary on the reasons for this is provided in Section 5.

A2 performance over the last five years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>LBBD</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>London</th>
<th>Statistical Neighbours</th>
<th>DfE Threshold</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-11</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-12</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-13</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-14</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-15</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-16</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>To be published March 2017</td>
<td>121</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A2 - LBBD performance compared to the National, London, statistical neighbour and the DfE threshold averages
4.3 As shown in the above table and graph, our rolling three-year average for 2012-15 as published on the Adoption Scorecard is 236 days, 115 days above the DfE’s performance threshold of 121 days, and 31 days above the London three-year average of 205 days. Barking and Dagenham’s performance is better than our statistical neighbours, which have a three-year average of 250 days, and broadly in line with the national average of 223 days. However, in 2013-16 our three year rolling average had increased to 309 days, which is 188 days above the DfE’s threshold. Comparator data for 2013-16 is due to be published in March 2017.

Commentary on the reasons for this is provided in Section 5.

4.4 Given that approximately two thirds of the three year rolling cohort fall into harder to place categories (these categories are discussed further in the next Section), family finding for some of these children has exceeded 18 months. 18 months of family finding is the current measure for the DfE for local authorities to apply for interagency fee reimbursement in recognition of the additional assistance required to family find for complex children. The extension of the interagency fee for children waiting 18 months or more indicates that the DfE are aware that some children will need an extended period of family finding. There is no formal consequence imposed by the DfE for exceeding 18 months, but there is inevitably an impact on the Scorecard and the DfE may make further enquiries regarding performance. Placement Orders, whilst having no expiry date until the child reaches the age of 18, should be formally reviewed at one year to confirm whether or not family finding should continue. There is a tension between the desire to exhaust all family finding options over a prolonged period for harder to place children and the recognition of the impact of this on the Scorecard.
5. Why is the Barking and Dagenham Adoption Service not meeting the DfE’s A1 and A2 Targets?

5.1 In this section we explore the reasons why the Adoption’s Service is behind the DfE’s targets on the A1 and A2 measures.

**Delays relating to Care Proceedings**

5.2 As discussed in the Introduction, there can be lengthy delays in care proceedings due to the courts requesting further assessments of family members. Sometimes work is undertaken prior to a court hearing in line with good practice (such as, pre-proceedings work by social workers, as is legally required) which may then be marginalised by the Court. The Court then requests further assessments to be done, which is costly, as well as adding delay. There can also be difficulties in obtaining dates for cases to be heard at Court due to the demand for hearings.

Previously, there were internal delays, such as delay in the submission of social workers’ reports and other paperwork to our Legal Department and the lodging of the application, which may be attributed to the Services’ workload being disproportionate to the resources of the Council. It is positive that these internal issues have now generally been resolved; however, they do account for some delay in previous years that will impact on the Scorecard. These improvements can be partly attributed to the Adoption Action Plan, particularly the implementation of the Adoption Improvement Group (AIG) where there is ownership of the plan across Children’s Services and the Legal Department. However, work has been taking place to improve performance generally within Children’s Care and Support Services, which has also had an impact. The Adoption Tracker is a tool used by the AIG, the Adoption Team and the Court Progression Officer to monitor and drive the issues of timeliness. The tracker also records reasons for delay.

There appears to be an increase in parental legal challenge to placement orders resulting in delays placing children with adopters. This is an increasing but relatively new practice. A challenge will impact on A2 as despite having a placement order we will be unable to match or place the child with an adoptive family until the appeal has been resolved.

Delays can also relate to the issue of children’s guardians and courts having a say in what course of action should be taken, for example, that social workers should provide further evidence of how many adoptive families and type of families are available for the child, rather than ratifying the social worker’s care plan for adoption and allowing the local authority to progress the placement. Appropriate matches are not always available at the conclusion of care proceedings, particularly for harder to place children and the family finding can take some time.
Delays in Social Care Teams

5.3 Previously, there were sometimes delays when transferring cases between social care teams that undertake adoption work and delays with Independent Reviewing Officers raising permanency planning (including adoption) at the relevant review for children in care. There were also delays which related to the Adoption Team prioritising family finding in a timely way and managing high caseloads. It is important to note that these issues have now been resolved, but have impacted on historical performance. Again, these improvements can be partly attributed to the Adoption Action Plan, and partly to work aimed at improving performance generally within Children’s Care and Support Services.

Delays relating to ‘Harder to Place’ Children in the Cohort

5.4 ‘Soft’ evidence suggests that there is a high number of children in ‘harder to place’ categories in Barking and Dagenham, compared to other London boroughs, which means that family finding takes much longer. Harder to place children include older children, disabled children, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children and children in sibling groups.

This is the issue that impacts most on delay and our Scorecard performance and will continue to do so as there is no evidence that the children currently subject to family finding are considered any easier to place (see 5.6 of this report).

Of the 66 children in our current Scorecard cohort (2014-16), 48 fall into harder to place categories – 72.7%, which is a very high proportion of the cohort.

- BME - 5
- Special needs - 7
- Siblings - 26
- Multiple categories – 10

Whilst it is difficult to benchmark harder to place children from other local authorities as this data is not currently available, anecdotal evidence suggests that other local authorities are not considering adoption for many children who fall into this category. If these children were not adopted, their care plans would be to remain in long term foster care.

As stated previously, the outcomes for children in care are generally poorer than those who are adopted. A further issue to consider is that whilst there has been a change to the Care Planning Regulations 2010, which states that long term foster care should be viewed as an equal option for permanency, we have significant experience of foster carers committing to children and being formally matched at Fostering Panel as a long term placement, but when challenges arise in later years, they end the placement. There are no additional safeguards to ensure the stability of children in long term foster care to short term placements, despite the formal matching process having taken place. Adoption provides a much more secure form of permanency than long term fostering, particularly for children who may present with challenges as they grow older.
5.5 Below is a summary of the amount of children adopted in LBBD in 2015 compared to other local authorities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>Number of Adoptions - raw numbers (Comparator data rounded to nearest 0 or 5)</th>
<th>% of children leaving care who are Adopted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LBBD</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical Neighbours</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>390 (Average of 39 per authority)</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>4690 (Average of 31 per authority)</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>460 (Average of 14 per authority)</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tower Hamlets</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newham</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havering</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waltham Forest</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redbridge</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data indicates that LBBD is adopting a significant number of children in comparison to our Consortium partners and London. In 2015-16 LBBD was the third highest in London with regards to the actual amount of children that were adopted. The table above indicates that other local authorities’ timeliness performance is better and a possible explanation is that they are only finding adoptive placements for children who are less challenging to place, as anecdotal evidence would suggest.

The reality is that family finding takes much longer for harder to place children and careful consideration must be given to the robustness of adopters to cope and sustain more challenging placements to prevent placement breakdown. Given the significant number of children who fall into harder to place categories in Barking and Dagenham, achieving adoption for them has been a successful outcome albeit that it has taken much longer than the government prescribed timescales. This notion is backed up by the fact that:

- No children have had a placement breakdown in the last three years post the adoption order being granted.
- Only two children have had a placement breakdown in the last three years prior to the adoption order being granted – both broke down during introductions and did not disrupt during placement.
Commentary on Potential Future Performance

Children due to go onto the Scorecard for 2014-17

5.6 These are the children who are currently placed with adopters and will go onto the Scorecard once the adoption orders are granted. These are 10 children which include eight harder to place children:

- 2 sibling groups of 2 (1 group was aged 8 and 10 at time of placement);
- 1 eight-year-old child who is visually impaired;
- 1 young child who has Downs Syndrome; and
- 1 child who may possibly have developmental delay.

The current DfE target is 426 days for A1 and 121 days for A2. However, this target is not achievable for a number of years given the current performance of the Scorecard. Once these children are added to the Scorecard we expect that our performance will worsen as follows:

- A1 – will increase from 783 to 802 days, and
- A2 – will increase from 357 to 371 days.

The case study below attempts to illustrate the issues which may arise when attempting to place a child for adoption and explain why we expect performance in relation to the above cohort, as measured against the DfE’s Scorecard, to decline.

Case Study

**Sibling Group A**

A sibling group of two, one boy and one girl of White British descent with no special needs, were granted a placement order in 2012. They were 4 and 6 years old at the time that the order was granted. Family finding took place and included exploring LBBD approved adopters, Consortium adopters, advertising in printed publications, searches on the Adoption Register, and considering adopters in assessment who might be an appropriate match. However, no families expressed an interest.

In 2015 the children attended an Adoption Activity Day after intensive preparation to ensure they understood the purpose of the day and that there was no certainty about a match. They thoroughly enjoyed the day and one couple in particular showed a lot of interest in them during the event. The Adoption Team followed this up with the Agency of the couple but after a couple of weeks, they informed us that they were not pursuing a match.

The children had been placed with their foster carer for some years by this time who then put herself forward to be assessed as a special guardian and therefore family finding ceased. The assessment took longer than expected as she met a new partner during this period and although he was not living in the home, he had to be considered as part of the assessment.
5.7 This sibling group’s scorecard figures are 1829 days for A1 and 1715 days for A2. The placement arose as a result of the Adoption Service deciding to make one last attempt at family finding after the placement with their foster carer broke down. The family finding that took place between 2012-14 had not been successful despite attendance at an Adoption Activity Day where interest was shown by a couple of families. They have now been matched with a couple who are supportive of direct contact with their birth family and have many interests in common and are thriving in their placement. The plan for adoption was progressed, having taken account of the children’s wishes and feelings for a permanent family whilst wanting to maintain links with their birth family. Whilst this was a very positive outcome for the children, the impact of the length of time it took to find a family on the Scorecard will remain until the end of 2019.

5.8 The cohort of children for whom there is a possible plan for adoption, whom the Adoption Team have been notified of, appear to be a more mixed cohort (harder to place and easy to place children), compared to previous cohorts. However, this must be viewed with caution as we have experience during 2016/17 of a number of babies and young children whose needs appeared to be relatively straightforward early on, but who later developed complex health or developmental needs. There were also adopters who were concerned about committing to taking on children with backgrounds involving parental substance misuse or learning disabilities, until they had a clearer view from the Medical Adviser that there was no apparent impact on the children’s development.

Unfortunately, the foster carer experienced some personal issues that led to the breakdown of the placement in early 2016 and the children were moved to a new foster placement.

The Adoption Service discussed the children and how they would benefit from a permanent family and took into account that they did not present with any additional needs despite their experiences. The view was also taken that some potential adopters had changed their views with regards to the children they would consider adopting over the last year, as there were not many very young children were not available for adoption. Given that these children had no additional needs, the Team decided to have one last attempt at family finding after consulting the children.

Two families expressed an interest once the children’s profiles were put onto the Adoption Register and Adoption Link. These were both pursued and one family was chosen as the most appropriate match. These adopters were also supportive of direct contact with their birth family given the ages of the children at the time of placement (8 and 10).

They were placed in the summer of 2016 and are awaiting the granting of the adoption. They have settled well and are extremely happy.
6. What is Working Well and What More Can be Done?

What is working well?

6.1 The Adoption Service has in place an Adoption Action Plan that sets out the actions required for improvement (to be appended). The Action Plan was reviewed by the DfE in June 2016 and was positively received. The points below summarise the progress made as a result of actions in place for improvement:

- There has been a change in culture within the Service which has taken time to embed and staff are now very much aware of the Scorecard performance and how their actions, and delays impact on the timely placement of children. Systems and processes within the Service have improved and there is now a culture of urgency to progress placements whilst remaining aware of the need to ensure that the quality of the placements remains high, with an excellent prospect of success. There is concern that speed of placement should not lead to an increase in placement breakdown, which is particularly important for older children, sibling groups and children with additional needs. Despite the change of culture, the Service is still trying to find adoptive families for a significant number of harder to place children, which inevitably takes longer. Going forward, it will be important to monitor whether targets of all children who are not considered harder to place are achieved and if not, to be clear about the reasons for delay. Historically, there were performance issues within the Adoption Service that impacted on timeliness, but these have now been addressed. We have introduced individual summary sheets for every child which, provides a pen picture of their needs, family finding activity and any barrier, and their Scorecard performance.

- There has been the introduction of the Adoption Improvement Group in 2016, who meet on a bi-monthly basis to track performance of all children who are being considered for adoption, who have Placement Orders, to ensure that actions to find adoptive families are robust. The Adoption Action Plan is also reviewed at this meeting. This Group is chaired by the Director of Operations for Children’s Care and Support and is attended by the Group Managers for Care Management, Adoption, Child Protection and Review Service and the Legal Department.

- All children that we are actively family finding for are discussed at fortnightly Adoption Team Meetings to ensure activity is taking place to find families for children outside of the borough and to identify possible in-house families, including those currently undergoing assessment.

- There has been attendance at specific events aimed at finding families for harder to place children, for example, a national event held Walsall in December 2016 and Adoption Activity Days. The latter are ‘play days’ for children with prospective adopters in attendance. Prospective adopters have an opportunity to meet children in person rather than just see a picture or DVD. The events aimed at harder to place children can encompass all categories that are considered harder to place or can have a focus such as children with a disability or children who are BME. This gives potential
adopter, who are specifically interested in adopting harder to place children, the opportunity to view profiles of children and discuss their needs with social workers of children to assist with decision making regarding possible matches.

- There has been attendance at all East London Consortium family finding events. Working in this way enables Barking and Dagenham to draw from a wider pool of prospective adopters.

- There has been closer working with the relevant children’s social care teams for early notification of children who may be considered for adoption. These notifications are used to explore potential matches within LBBD and Consortium approved adopters and to conduct initial searches on the Adoption Register and Adoption Link so that early matching and placement can progress once the placement order is granted.

- All adopters in assessment are approached for consideration of approval for Fostering to Adopt. This means a child can be placed with prospective adopters while a court hearing is planned or taking place, therefore improving timeliness.

- Lifestory work is an essential part of an adopted child’s journey. All children should have a lifestory book which summarises their history with their birth family, significant events, the reasons why they have been adopted and the period of time between being introduced and being placed with their adoptive family. Older children benefit from direct work to understand their lifestory in order to make sense of it and assist them in settling into their life with their new family. There has been a backlog in the production of lifestory books due to limited capacity within the Adoption Team, which is being addressed by dedicating one member of staff to the production of lifestory books and undertaking lifestory work, in conjunction with the children who are of an appropriate age and understanding. In addition, applications have been made to the Adoption Support Fund for an independent social worker to undertaken therapeutic lifestory work with identified children who require this intervention as a priority.

What more can be done?

6.2 The CSSC endorses the Adoption Action Plan and the Adoption Service’s approach to finding adoptive families for the children in its cohort, despite the negative impact this approach often has on the Service’ Scorecard performance. The Committee, however, felt that more can be done to promote adoption in the borough and surrounding areas, which may help improve the timeliness of adoption of children in some harder to place categories, for example:

- The use of in-house newsletters and other media to promote adoption for harder to place children and the type of adopters we require for our children;

- A focus on the promotion of adoption in Council buildings and events;
Appendix 1: Draft Report

- An internal campaign to include the promotion of adoption within extended family and friends’ networks that may be outside of LBBD, given that we require many families outside of our locality for safety reasons;

- The Council could identify a dedicated resource from the Communications section to specifically support the recruitment of adopters for BME children;

- Training for social workers on understanding the barriers preventing BME groups from adopting and how they can clear misconceptions around Adoption in these communities; and

- Members could be briefed on borough-specific issues regarding adoption so they can promote it to constituents where appropriate.

6.3 The current cohort of children that are subject to family finding all fall into harder to place categories and the cohort of notifications of potential children whose care plan may be adoption are a mixture of young children, some with no identified needs and some in harder to place categories. The Adoption Service will continue to access events for harder to place children and have already booked to attend an event in Manchester in March 2017. The profiles of all children subject to placement orders will be actively pursued and profiles of adopters who may be suitable for other children notified will be collected. Whilst those adopters might not be available in the future, it is important not to miss out on any opportunity to pursue a potential match.

6.4 The continuation of the AIG is essential for the ongoing monitoring and challenge to all teams linked to adoption and to provide detailed evidence of progress and the issues for individual children.

6.5 The challenges within the Court arena are much more difficult to influence. There are continued attempts to keep the dialogue open with Courts and guardians regarding adoption, particularly in relation to the impact of delay regarding parental challenges to placement orders.

6.6 The CSSC had the opportunity to have discussions with an adopted adult and an adoptive mother, both of whom presented a balanced view about adoption, outlining both the challenges and positives of their journeys. There are plans to undertake a specific training session with all team managers in Children’s Care and Support in the summer regarding permanency, and there will be the opportunity for managers to have feedback from these adults. The session will also present the opportunity to hear from a birth mother who has had children adopted and the impact this has had on her life. This will assist managers in considering all aspects of adoption when assisting social workers with care planning. It is hoped that these individuals may be prepared to do further work with social workers in a larger group to enhance their practice with regards to the complex issues of permanency going forward.

6.7 Post-adoption support works well within the Adoption Service, but there are issues of capacity to manage the range of responsibilities within this part of the Service with only 1.5 staff. This leads to waiting lists for the work with adopted adults as the children in placement are prioritised for intervention and support when required. This includes applications to the Adoption Support Fund where criteria is met.
7. Conclusions, recommendations and next steps

7.1 LBBD have successfully adopted a significantly higher number of children compared to London, Statistical Neighbours and East London Consortium members, a substantially large proportion of whom fall into harder to place categories. However, this has had an impact on the Adoption Scorecard performance. The performance was scrutinised by the DfE last year who were satisfied with the action being undertaken by LBBD to maximise the amount of children adopted. There is also evidence that the outcomes for children who are adopted are positive and that breakdown of placements for our children is minimal.

The CSSC recommends that All children, who may potentially be placed for adoption, continue to have adoption plans made by the Local Authority and that these are advocated for during care proceedings;

7.2 The Committee believes that the timeliness performance measures in relation to the Scorecard do not portray the true picture in terms of the local context, or and the outcomes for the children, in that adoption is a better outcome, even though they may have waited longer to be placed.

The Committee recommends that the Chair of the Committee and the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration write to the Department for Education to make representations regarding changes needed to the way performance is measured to take account of the local context and challenges so that there is a fairer representation of performance;

7.3 There has been significant delay with regards to some children being placed with their adoptive families 18 months plus after the granting of a placement order which further impacts on the Scorecard performance.

The Committee recommends that all children have the plan for adoption formally reviewed at 12 months, 18 months and 2 years after the granting of the placement order by the Adoption Improvement Group (AIG) to ascertain whether or not family finding should continue, or whether there should be an application to revoke the placement order. If family finding is going to go beyond two years the rationale for this should be formally recorded;

7.4 The Adoption Improvement Group (AIG) is scrutinising the care plans for all children where adoption is being considered or is the plan, and is assisting in maintaining a focus on the urgency of placing children with their adoptive families.

The Committee recommends that the AIG continues to be held at the current frequency of bi-monthly and the challenge to timely performance remains a focus; and

7.5 Given the number of harder to place children with adoption care plans, there is a need to increase the pool of adopters who have the skills and motivation to meet these children’s complexities.
The Committee recommends that the Strategic Director for Service Development and Integration oversees the implementation of the Committee’s suggestions to improve the recruitment of adopters at 6.2 of this report.

Next Steps

7.6 This report will be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration and the Strategic Director for Service Development and Integration, who will be asked to respond to the recommendations. If the recommendations are accepted, the Strategic Director for Service Development and Integration will be asked to draw up an action plan describing how the recommendations will be implemented. In six months’ time, the CSSC will request a monitoring report explaining the progress of the implementation of the recommendations and whether anything could be said of the early impact they have had on the Service’s outcomes.
The CSSC would like to extend its thanks to the following for contributing to this Review:

- Professor Julie Selwyn
- Roy Stewart, Chair of the Adoption Panel
- The Adopter and Adoptee who met with the Committee on 21 November 2016

Members also thank the following Council officers for their support during this Review:

- Joanne Tarbutt: Group Manager, Looked After Children, Adoption and Prevention Services
- Ann Graham, Director of Operations, Children’s Care and Support
- Jane Hargreaves, Commissioning Director for Education and Scrutiny Champion for the CSSC
- Masuma Ahmed: Democratic Services Officer
- Mary Manual, Social Worker, Post Adoption team
- Exarchou Eirini, Senior Solicitor, Safeguarding
Appendices

Appendices will be added for the final version of the report
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