Notice of Meeting

CHILDREN’S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 12 July 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 Syed Ahammad, Cllr Simon Bremner, Cllr Josephine Channer, Cllr Irma Freeborn, Cllr Syed Ghani, Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole and Cllr Danielle Smith

By Invitation: Cllr 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 Dr Johanna Finch (Secondary)
Youth Representative: Camran Ditta (Chair, BAD Youth Forum)

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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 20 March 2017 (Pages 3 - 7)


5. Improving the Council's Adoption Scorecard Performance - Proposed Final Scrutiny Report (Pages 25 - 67)
6. Work Programme 2017-18 (Pages 69 - 87)

7. Any other public items which the Chair decides are urgent

8. 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.

9. 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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MINUTES OF
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Monday, 20 March 2017
(7:00 - 8:40 pm)

Present: Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe (Chair), Cllr Melanie Bartlett (Deputy Chair), Cllr Simon Bremner, Cllr Irma Freeborn, Cllr Syed Ghani, Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole and Cllr Danielle Smith

Apologies: Cllr Edna Fergus Mrs I Robinson

24. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

25. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2017 were confirmed as correct.


The Chair asked those in attendance to introduce themselves and welcomed everyone to the meeting, including the new Chair and Deputy Chairs of the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum.

The Chair stated that the Commissioning Director for Children’s Care and Support (CDCCS) was due to present the report on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE); however, due to an urgent matter arising, he could not attend, and the Director of Operations for Children’s Care and Support (DOCCS) would present the report instead.

The DOCCS delivered a presentation on CSE, which covered the following issues:

- What do we know about CSE;
- What is CSE;
- Who does it happen to;
- Who does it;
- How does it happen;
- Warning Signs;
- Vulnerability Factors;
- CSE in Barking and Dagenham;
- CSE Problem Profile – At Risk;
- CSE Problem Profile – Perpetrators;
- Linking Risk to Themes;
- Response; and
- Challenges.

A member commented that the CDCCS should have been present at the meeting as well as the DOCCS, to present the iem. The Commissioning Director for
Education (CDE) clarified the reason for the CDCCS’s non-attendance, which was that the Council had been informed that Ofsted would be undertaking an inspection of its services for children with special educational needs and disabilities, imminently. She apologised for his non-attendance but hoped that members would note the exceptional circumstances. The DOCCS added that CSE was an area that also fell under her responsibilities, so hoped that she would be in a position to answer most of members’ questions.

A member stated that the report said that the borough’s scores on multiple indicators suggested that there are many young people potentially at risk of CSE, ranking it joint 17th out of 152 areas; however, it also stated that the rise in recorded child sex offences has been relatively small in the borough compared to the national average. He asked officers to explain the apparent discrepancy. The DOCCS stated that later in the report, there was information on Police CSE data which included a graph that showed that the borough was the fifth highest in London for suspicion of CSE and CSE related crime. She added not all CSE crime against the borough’s children would occur in the borough, which added complexity to the issue. For example, if a child was exploited in Hackney, Hackney would record the crime, which would be reflected in their statistics and they would inform the Council of the offence so it could take steps to safeguard the child. She stated that the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) mechanism included consideration of cross-boundary issues; however, more needed to be done to improve cross boundary working.

A member asked what support was given to children and their families, once agencies were aware that a child was a victim of CSE. The DOCCS stated the child’s safety would be the focus and there would be efforts to support the child understand that they were a victim of exploitation. There would be a child protection process and a plan for the child. It was important to note that not all cases of CSE involved parents who had failed their child; many victims were from loving homes. It was therefore important to tailor the response to the circumstances of each case.

A member asked whether there was anything locally to address the behaviour of perpetrators, such as rehabilitation, so that they would not re-offend. The DOCCS stated that the rehabilitation of offenders was an area outside of the scope of child protection services. She added that it was not possible to stop offences from taking place unless the relevant agencies had certain information. All local agencies worked together to share information and would act on that information to stop offences from taking place where possible; however, the young person may find it very difficult to move away from the perpetrator and report them.

A member asked what the Council and its partners were doing to address the potential concern that CSE was not being reported in the borough. The DOCCS stated that the representatives of governmental departments after their visit last year, fed-back that they felt the Council does take CSE seriously. She stated that the borough’s approach was not akin to that of Rotherham where officials were in denial of CSE. One hypothesis to explain the potential under-reporting was that the Council has a strong approach to children going missing, and may therefore be slightly ‘ahead of the game’. She added that the report listed many of the actions the Council was taking to address the potential issue of under-reporting, including meetings between CSE Champions and ‘Operation Makesafe’, aimed at raising
awareness of CSE amongst hoteliers and taxi drivers and informing them of how to report any concerns.

A member asked whether the Council had a CSE Strategy and Action Plan and who was responsible for monitoring them. The DOCCS stated that there was a local CSE Strategy and Action Plan which the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was responsible for overseeing. It could be found on the LSCB’s website. The feedback from representatives of the governmental departments after their visit also reflected that the Council’s Action Plan was of a good standard.

A member stated that due to work in schools and communities, teenage pregnancy rates were the lowest they had ever been locally and nationally. She asked what similar was being done in schools to raise awareness and understanding of CSE, to prevent more children from becoming victims. The CDE stated the borough’s schools delivered Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons; however, the extent to which schools cover CSE in these lessons, may vary. She would undertake some work to find out the extent to which it varied in order to report back to members.

A member asked whether the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) produced reports. The DOCCS stated that the MASH comprised of well trained individuals from different local agencies who used a tool to assess the risk to children and young people and take decisions on the course of action to take protect them.

A member asked how long typically, were children going missing. The DOCCS stated that it varied from a day to much longer. Sometimes, whilst the Council would record a child as ‘missing’, social workers and other professionals had a good indication of where the child was, for example, a looked after child may have gone to see their birth parents or a friend without informing the person looking after them first.

A member asked how the reporting of CSE could be increased and what the current methods of reporting were. The DOCCS stated that the efforts to raise awareness of CSE outlined in the report should lead to increased reporting. Methods of reporting included the NSPCC and Child-line telephone numbers. Schools had contacted the Council to report concerns relating to sexting. The Council and its partners had a responsibility to share information and act on information relating to all potential crime against children; not just CSE. Barking and Dagenham Police would be entering a tri-borough arrangement with Havering and Redbridge so it would be important to ensure that these new arrangements will enable them to address all the concerns in the HMIC report, which was highly critical of the Met Police in relation to CSE. The LSCB had already asked the Police for a report on this issue.

Members asked whether there was a service available for potential perpetrators of CSE, such as those who were having thoughts about harming children but had not yet acted on them. The DOCCS stated that perpetrators were not likely to report themselves to the Council or Police. They were more likely to go to their GP, which meant it was important to work with GPs so that they knew where to signpost individuals to and who to refer any concerns to. Support for potential perpetrators was a very controversial issue.
A member asked what was being done to educate young people about their rights and whether standardised information packs could be shared with children and their parents to raise awareness of CSE. The DOCCS stated that the Council employed a Children’s Rights officer who undertook much valued work with individual young people and acted as their advocate. The CDE stated that schools are obliged to teach sex and relationships education and the Council had maintained a resource for PSHE lessons to enable this. It was currently not a statutory requirement; however, this issue had been debated by parliament recently and the Secretary of State for Education had announced that it should be made statutory. She would circulate information on this following the meeting.

A member asked whether in addition to providing information in schools, information on CSE could be provided to other community hubs, such as places of worship, as it was known that in the past, many cases of CSE had occurred in such places. The DOCCS stated that the Council did not have the power to vet places of worship to check their child protection policies or the risk of children coming to harm. However, it was hoped that general awareness raising of CSE would lead to increased awareness in the whole community. The CDE stated that the regulator for community organisations which provided services for children was Ofsted. Ofsted could contact the Council if it had concerns and vice versa. The Group Manager for Adoption, Looked after Children and Prevention Services (GMLACPS) stated that the Council always checked the Ofsted report of a residential unit before placing any looked after children in it and also contacted other local authorities for references.

A member asked why some children at risk of CSE were not known to agencies. The DOCCS stated that the nature of CSE was that it was abusive, and abuse is only effective if it hidden from authorities. This is the reason for joint working as it gives agencies a chance to find out about potential abuse by sharing all the relevant information that is available.

The Chair recommended that the CSSC, Safer and Stronger Community Select Committee or, possibly, a joint meeting of both, should consider CSE in the next municipal year by making it a part of their work programme(s). The Committee agreed the recommendation.

The Chair thanked the DOCCS for presenting the item.

27. Draft Report arising from the Committee’s Scrutiny Review on 'Improving the Council's Adoption Scorecard Performance'

The DOCCS presented the draft report arising from the Committee’s scrutiny review on ‘Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance’.

Members stated that the premise of the report was that the borough has a higher proportion of harder to place children than other boroughs, which affected its timeliness performance targets. However, the report also acknowledged that the Council only had ‘soft’ evidence to support this claim. The member acknowledged that the Committee may be able to rely on soft evidence for the purposes of this report, and asked whether officers could undertake a piece of work to try and obtain hard data to support his claim, and report back to the Committee in the next municipal year. The GMLACPS stated that it may be possible to obtain this data.
from local authorities within the East London Consortium, but beyond that it would be a challenge. The DOCCS stated that every effort would be made to obtain this data.

A member asked what more could be done about the recruitment of adopters. The GMLACPS stated that a lot of the Council’s recruitment comes from ‘word of mouth’. A risk of expensive recruitment campaigns was that they could have a very poor return on investment. It was therefore very important to undertake the right type of recruitment campaigns and target people who were willing to adopt harder to place children. She added that the Council had not relied much on social media for recruitment purposes, until now. The Service was working with the Council’s Communications team to take this work forward.

The Chair thanked those who contributed to the review and asked officers to present the final version of the report to the next meeting.
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Children’s Care and Support

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2016-17
Corporate Parenting
Annual Report 2016-2017

Foreword
It is my pleasure to introduce this year’s Corporate Parenting report, which outlines the work of the Members Corporate Parenting Group (MCPG) over the past twelve months and details challenges the Group must address in the coming year.

During 2016/17, MCPG has focused on ensuring the promises LBBD make to our Looked After Children are kept, with Members and Officers working with our young people and partner services to make sure these are delivered.

One key area of concern for Members has been long term placement stability, and Officers have worked hard over the past year to ensure young people are placed in the most stable environment we can possibly offer. Although this is still a significant challenge for us, various measures have been taken to increase placement stability across the borough. Special Guardianship Orders are helping us place children with family members long term, the Adoption Team continue do their upmost to find suitable families for hard to place children and much work is being undertaken to reduce the likeliness of placement breakdown. All these measures help to provide the stability children need to flourish in other areas of their lives, so we will continue to be a priority for us in the coming year.

For our older children and care leavers, Employment, Education and Training is one of the most important issues, which is why as a group, we are really pleased to see our young people are outperforming the national average and our statistical neighbours. That said, accommodation is proving hard to find for our care leavers and is a challenge we must address if we are to give our young people the start in life they deserve.

Overall, this year has been one of both successes and challenges. As budgets continue to be squeezed, we will find it is increasingly difficult to provide the services that we know work and deliver for our young people. This said, the advice and insight that Skitlz provide us with, added to hard work and commitment of Children’s Services staff will ensure that we can meet the challenges we face.

Introduction
This report concerns the work of the Corporate Parenting Group of Elected Members and partner agencies from April 2016 to March 2017.

Over the last year, the Corporate Parenting Group has focussed on delivering on the ‘promises’ to children in care and care leavers, which are outlined in the Corporate Parenting Strategy, building on the work undertaken...
the previous year when the strategy was refreshed. Each meeting had an identified focus e.g. Education, Health, EET/NEET, Adoption/Fostering, CSE. In addition, one meeting was led and chaired by the Children in Care Council (Skittlz).

The Corporate Parenting Group and Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Corporate Parenting Group has aspirations for children in the care of the borough and has set out promises as part of fulfilling its roles and responsibilities which are:

• To make sure you get the best care
• To look after you and treat you well
• To help you be healthy
• To get the best education
• To be successful in life

The strategy sets out the collective responsibilities of the Council and its partners to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are looked after in public care. This then involves a number of actions aimed at achieving improved outcomes. The arrangements in place, work carried out and performance are reported in Appendix 1 below.

In 2016/17, progress has continued to further strengthen the Corporate Parenting arrangements to ensure strong elected member representation including the Lead Member and 3 Councillors, through the Members’ Corporate Parenting Group.

The local performance dataset provided for the Corporate Parenting Group has been revised and expanded considerably. The report and appended dataset provides an update on numbers and trends, as well as trends in safeguarding, education, employment and health outcomes with benchmarks and analysis. The revised dataset has enabled detailed discussion in strengths and areas in need of improvement.

Over the course of the 2016-17 period the Panel has met regularly on a bi-monthly basis attended by elected members and partners from Health, Social Care, Education. The Council’s Children’s Rights and Participation Team have continued to attend and support the Borough’s Children in Care Council (Skittlz) at the MCPG meetings. Skittlz are a group of looked after children and young people who represent the views of looked after children at MCPG meetings.

The Corporate Parenting Group has received detailed reports from the Looked After Children’s Health Service, the Virtual School and Children’s Social Care services about a range of issues and performance during the course of 2016-17.

Children in Care and key trends for 2016-17

Over the course of the year the total number of children in care has remained stable, with minimal fluctuation each month. Overall there was a slight reduction in the total of children looked after to 414 as of end of March 2017 (418 at 31.3.16). This means that the rate per 10,000 children remains at 69, which is in line with our statistical neighbours but continues to be higher than the London average (52) and the national average (60).
A total of 339 (82%) children were placed in family based care through foster care, placement with adoptive carers or placement with parents as of March 2017, no change on the year before. The % of children placed within the Borough has decreased from 40% at the year end of 2015-16 to 38% at the end of 2016-17. This equates to a reduction from 167 children to 156 children living out of borough. It is important to note that there are also a lot of foster carers who live in neighbouring boroughs such as Havering. High numbers of children continue to be cared for in family based care within or nearby to the Borough which can be beneficial for the children in maintaining links with family and services, including schools.

The number of children placed in residential care has fallen from 35 (8.4%) to 33 (8.0%) over the course of the year as appropriate arrangements have been put in place for moving on in their care plans. At the beginning of April 2015 there were 45 children in residential care and a lot of work was undertaken to bring this number down to 35 at the beginning of April 16. Further work is being undertaken to review all placements of children in residential care and to review the most appropriate plans for them.

More young people are living in semi-independent placements, the numbers increased from 39 (9.4%) to 42 (10.4%) – over the last year as part of plans to move towards leaving care and adulthood. In April 2015 there were 32 young people (7%) in semi-independent placements, but over this year further work has been undertaken to prepare more young people for independent living as they are transitioning through to adulthood. However, they are not moved from foster care to 16+ provision unless it is the young person’s preference.

There has been an increase from 65 (15.6%) to 82 (19.8%), in the number of children who are placed 20 miles plus from home. It is sometimes necessary to place further away to achieve the placement to meet the child’s needs.

The number of children adopted in this period has gone down from 27 in 2015-16 to 14 in 2016-17. This significant reduction is reflected across London and nationally and is linked to the decline in Placement Orders being granted by Family Courts, which provide legal permission to place a child for adoption. The Ministry of Justice published the ‘Family Court Statistics Quarterly, England and Wales Annual 2016’ data on 30 March 2017 which evidenced a reduction in placement orders being granted for the second consecutive year. Performance, including the timeliness of achieving adoption, has been affected by rulings on cases in the courts and by the challenges in finding a suitable match for children who are hard to place. The adoptions achieved have included numbers of ‘hard to place’ children who are older, have a disability, are part of a sibling group or from a minority ethnic background.

The number of children being made the subject of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) has increased from 7 in 2010-2011 to 45 in 2016-2017 (37 in 2015-16). This is another form of permanency that is considered alongside adoption and long term fostering. There is a correlation in the reduction of Placement Orders and the increase in SGOs. The special guardianship arrangements often mean staying within the wider family network or continuity of care from foster carers, but these arrangements are often just about good enough and do result in placement breakdown, which rarely happens in adoption. There were 8 SGO placement breakdowns in 2016-17.

The figures highlight that Special Guardianship Orders have become increasingly popular within care proceedings. Significant numbers of children have therefore been supported to have plans for permanency through adoption or special guardianship as alternative arrangements to long term care.

A good level of performance has been achieved which has impacted positively on children in care. These include: good performance in children having 3+ moves – met target of 10% or less, LAC review timescales have improved performance, reduction of children in care under S.20, met target for health assessments being over 90%, care leavers in EET has improved from 50.2% to 55.1%.
Progress is being made with permanent recruitment in all teams responsible for looked after children, which will impact positively on staff building relationships with children and young people. Despite the challenges of recruitment, all looked after child have an allocated social worker and, when leaving care, a personal adviser.

A fuller breakdown of information regarding children in care including age, ethnicity, gender and type of legal order is attached in Appendix 2 which is the Children in Care dataset for the Corporate Parenting Group.

**Challenges**

Long term placement stability continues to be a challenge with final year performance being 60.8% for children aged 16 as of 31st March 2017 who have been in the same placement for 2+ years (Statistical Neighbours 69%, London 66% and National 68%). Placement changes occur for various reasons which include: child’s challenging behaviour, issues with the placement, older children returning to family as they don’t want to be ‘in care’. However, there have been positive moves for some children including planned rehabilitation to parents or moves from residential care to fostering in recognition of the progress they have made, but these moves impact on the overall performance. Various measures are being implemented to prevent placement breakdown such as support from skilled Family Support Workers, Restorative Justice and Family Group Conference interventions, buddy system with in-house foster carers, Parenting Teenagers course for foster carers, but this work will continue to be built upon with the aim of improving this performance. In addition, LBBD has been successful in its bid for DfE funding to set up the Mockingbird fostering programme for in-house carers which aims to support placement stability. This will be in place around autumn 2017.

Work will continue to further reduce the number of children who are looked after in care to achieve a lower rate per 10000 which is closer to that of the London average of 52 per 10000. This however has to be seen in the context of the borough’s population, levels of need and demand for services.

Achieving adoption with the necessary order through the courts and an adoptive placement within the timescales will continue to present challenges when taking into account the profile of the children whose plan is for adoption and many children being ‘hard to place’. The Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee have been undertaking a detailed piece of work regarding adoption, the Scorecard performance and the wider issues impacting on adoption during 2016-17 and are due to report in July 2017 on the outcomes and recommendations.

There is every indication that the number of special guardianship orders (SGOs) will continue to grow. It is important that this work is not seen as being secondary to that of adoption as breakdowns of SGO arrangements will be likely to have an adverse impact on children and will have resource implications if children come back into the care of the local authority. Over the last year 45 SGOs were granted (37 the previous year) and in 2016-17 eight SGO arrangements broke down.

The number of young people who are in employment, education and training can be seen as both an achievement and a challenge. It is an achievement when making comparisons with national and statistical comparative performance, but still means that there is a significant number of young people who are not in employment, education or training and is therefore an area for continued attention. At the end of 2016-17 55.1% of care leavers were in EET compared to 53% in London, 48% for Statistical Neighbours and nationally.

Sourcing and sustaining accommodation for young people 18+ remains a continued challenge due to the lack of social housing stock available for care leavers, but there has been a dedicated resource this year to procure good quality 18+ accommodation from the private sector via the SAFE programme.
This programme has left a sustainable process to commission housing accommodation post SAFE with a commitment to ensuring an appropriate quality/value split.

Recruitment of permanent staff has remained as a priority for the services involved during this period and recognising that this can impact on performance in supporting children and young people in care. However, on a positive note there is comparative stability within the Children in Care, Leaving Care, Fostering and Adoption services.

**Priorities for 2017-18 within the Corporate Parenting Strategy**

Continuing to recognise the importance of service user views, plans are in place to continue to build upon the increase in young people who are now participating in the Children in Care Council (Skittlz). The focus will be on recruitment of care leavers aged 18+ and for children placed out of area to have a more active role in sharing their views and developing services through the use of technology.

‘Total Respect’ training about children’s experience in care and led by young people who are ‘care experienced’ – is to be arranged for Elected Members and the Corporate Parenting Group and is scheduled for June 2017.

A focus on long term placement stability for children through increased management oversight, tracking of individual cases to identify the reasons for any placement breakdown and further guidance and supervision for social workers about permanency planning for children. In addition, there are developing links between Fostering, Children in Care Team and the Access to Resources Service to identify additional supports to placements that can be flexible out of hours, with a view to increasing stability.

Monitor and improve timescales and performance regarding the placement of children with adoptive families. The Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee (CSSC) have undertaken a detailed inquiry into the issues of timescales performance and the wider issues impacting on adoption and is due to make recommendations in July 2017. The work of the Adoption Improvement Group has continued this year and tracks each child’s individual performance.

The assessment process for Special Guardians is a priority for the coming year to bring more of these assessments ‘in-house’ to the Adoption Service rather than Independent Social Workers (ISW) being commissioned. The Adoption Team are currently responsible for completion of the Support Packages for prospective Special Guardians but not the assessment of their suitability to care for the child. However, the quality of ISW reports is variable and if not robust the long-term sustainability of the placement is often challenging or the support package required is extensive. The Adoption Team are best placed to undertake the assessment and to develop the appropriate support package. Resources within the team will be under review to maximise the use of the team’s expertise in this area.

Continued attention will be given to performance regarding care plans and pathway plans being up to date and in place to ensure that the progress made in improving the performance in these areas will be sustained.

Children and young people’s views are being sought and recorded and arrangements are in place to check this through the work of the Independent Reviewing Officers, through audit as part of a programme of quality assurance work and through arrangements for supervision.
Work is constantly evolving to ensure the protocols between Health and Social Care regarding looked after children and ensuring initial health assessments, reviews health assessments, dental, optical checks and SDQs are undertaken in a timely way. A six weekly Health Improvement Group has been set up to problem solve any issues that impact on this area of performance. End of year performance for children in care for 1+ yeas was 92% having had a health check.

Further work needs to be undertaken with CAMHS now that a dedicated CAMHS LAC social worker has recently been appointed. The pathway for referral is in place for LBBD CAMHS, but there are still issues regarding eligibility, take up of service, what services are available at Tier 2 and assistance with accessing services outside of Nelft.

The introduction of new arrangements for e - Personal Education Plans has been introduced for children’s education up to age 16. This scheme enables the PEP to be reviewed and updated each term with two meetings interspersed with work done on line. The Virtual School is leading on this and PEP champions are in place and available on a session basis for input about children’s plans for education. The Virtual School will also continue to focus on ensuring that plans are in place at an early point for children in their pre-school year at nursery.

Support will be given by the Virtual School to year 6 and 11 students during key stage/exams and students who have special educational needs to fulfil their potential.

Focused attention to improving school attendance for children who are in care led by the Virtual School.

Continuing work to improve EET with close attention to each individual young person’s situation and plans alongside creating opportunities in partnership with providers of work, training and education. Two NEET workshops have taken place in 2016-17 to focus on vulnerable groups and have been attended by Members. The workshops have looked at ways to maximise the Council’s responsibilities as Corporate Parents to offer a wider range of opportunities to care leavers to ensure sustained engagement in education, employment and training and to offer new opportunities to those who are currently NEET. Work continues outside of these workshops to implement the actions agreed.

Joanne Tarbutt, Head of Service, Services for Looked After Children
23 May 2017

Appendix 1 : Progress report regarding the promises to children in care for the period 2016-17

Promise 1: ‘To make sure you get the best care’
Children are involved in the Children in Care Council known as Skittlz and they attend the Corporate Parenting Group to put across their views and experience about being in care. This is an important
gauge about services being provided and a source of ideas for improvement. One example this year is that they produced a child friendly guide for Pupil Premium Plus to assist children in care in understanding what this is, how it is used and what they can expect. They also carry out an annual ‘appraisal’ of the social work service received and a report is provided for this. The findings are brought to the Corporate Parenting Group and fed back to the service.

The Children in Care Council is supported by the Children’s Rights Officer who also offers a service to support individual children. Arrangements have continued to provide support through the Independent Advocacy Service which is commissioned from Barnardo’s.

Each child in care has a social worker and the service has ensured that 100% of children and young people have an allocated social worker. All young people who are leaving care have a Young Persons’ Advisor.

Training is in place for carers and workers, including Total Respect training which is run by young people who have care experience and training for foster carers, to support their understanding of the issues for children in care and leaving care.

The ongoing successful recruitment of in-house foster carers enables children and young people to remain in the local area of LBBD or surrounding boroughs and to maintain attendance at their school, if appropriate. In addition, the range of training for in-house carers is extensive and is developed according to changing needs. An example is the delivery of the Managing Teenage Behaviour course which has been adapted for foster carers. It is hoped that this enhanced learning might positively impact on placement stability for this age group.

The policy for permanency which has been put in place includes the commitment to placing siblings together when placements are being made and when plans for longer term permanency are agreed. If there are issues about placing siblings then these are further assessed to ensure that plans are based on sound information and if necessary further expertise sought. This work is usually undertaken by the in-house play therapist based in the Adoption Team.

There is a strong regard for arrangements for contact for children so that they are supported, where appropriate, to have contact with family and if not possible for this to be explained. The Contact Service provide expertise in this important area of work. Arrangements for contact are checked regularly at the child in care review meetings.

As mentioned, each child and young person who is looked after will have regular child in care review meetings at which the plans and arrangements are checked and altered to meet needs. Each child and young person therefore also has an allocated Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for this arrangement. As part of this the IRO seeks the views of the child or young person for the meeting. It is also important that the Social Worker, Carer and other professionals involved share good things which have happened for the child and the IRO and social worker have important roles to fulfil by ensuring that this is achieved for the child.

The frequency of Looked after Children review meetings is monitored and performance reported with 95% of the reviews being completed within timescales. This is an improvement from 93% in 2015-16 and above London (91%), national (90%) and statistical neighbours (88%).

Promise 2: ‘To look after you and treat you well’

Children's Services has continued to experience changes in social work personnel and recognises the difficulties in this for supporting children in care and building the relationships with them which are so important. There is however greater stability in the workforce in the children in care and leaving care teams which is positive, although this year has seen a period of staff changes in both teams. The
service as a whole continues to make strenuous efforts to recruit social workers and achieve the desired workforce stability.

Arrangements are in place through a dashboard of performance information to show the frequency of visits by social workers to children so that good standards are maintained and this is regularly monitored by managers. The visits recorded are regarded as a minimum and it is important to note that many children are visited at more frequent intervals depending on circumstances. There are two measures reported for visits to children in care:

a) Visits are at a minimum frequency of 6 weeks to children for the first year of being in care.
   Performance for 16/17 period was 75%. This is an improvement on our 15/16 figure of 66%.

b) Visits are at a minimum of 3 months for children in care and where plan is for long term care.
   Performance for 16/17 was 87%, a slight decrease on the 15/16 performance of 89%.

All children must have an up to date care plan throughout being in care. All young people who are leaving care should have a pathway plan which is put in place as they approach their 16th birthday. The plans are important as these set out the actions identified to meet the individual child and young person’s needs and impact on their outcomes. At the end of the 2016-17 period 96% had a care plan recorded. Some children had been in care for less than 28 days and would not yet have a plan recorded. 91% of pathway plans for care leavers were up to date as at the end of 2016/17 – no change on the previous years performance.

The stability of placements is very important for children and is a good basis for achieving positive outcomes. There are two measures of placement stability which give information about the moves of placement over periods of time:

a) Short Term placement stability (Former NI 62) - The % of children with three or more placements during the year, fell from 12% (50/418 children) in 2015-2016 to 10% (41/418 children) in 2016- 2017. This is good performance. We are now in line with the National average and below the Statistical Neighbours average (11%) and London average (12%).

b) Long Term placement stability (Former NI 63) – the % of children in care for at least 2.5 years and in the same placement for the last two years, increased slightly from 60% in 2016 (82/137) to 61% (72/120) in 2017. However, this area of performance is below all comparators – London 66%, SN 69% and National Average 68%. This is a key area of practice activity for action in the 2017-18 period with further attention to the matching of children with carers/placement and guidance for social workers about permanency planning.

Reference has been made to the challenges presented in achieving an adoptive placement for children. This is also reflected in the timescales involved where it has taken longer to match and place children in adoptive placements often because of the complexity of the children’s needs such as disability, ethnicity or sibling groups. There are two measures about timescales for adoption:

a) The average time between a child entering care and moving in with adoptive family has increased from 769 days in 2015-16 to 821 days in 2016-17.

b) The average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match has increased from 375 days in 2015-16 to 380 days in 2016-17.

Further analysis has been undertaken to understand this area of performance and actions are already in place.
Promise 3: 'To help you be healthy'

The Corporate Parenting Strategy recognises the importance of ensuring that children’s health needs are addressed and this includes a number of health-related checks. There is a strong partnership arrangement in place with a range of health-related service commissioners and providers. A presentation to GPs recently took place on LAC. This session enabled GPs to ask questions and consider issues for children in care in terms of their interventions with children and young people in the future.

There is close working with the Designated Doctor and Nurse for Looked After Children. Children in care should have initial health assessments within 20 working days of admission to care and then review health assessments – every 6 months if child is under 5 and annually if child is over 5. It is important to note that whilst the aim is for all children to benefit from the range of health-related checks some children choose not to attend for appointments arranged despite the efforts of those involved. Progress about the checks and any findings are discussed as part of the child’s review meeting. Performance regarding review health related checks has been positive with the great majority of children receiving checks.

a) There was an improvement in the number of children receiving medicals which increased from 82% in 2015/16 to 84% as at the end of 2016/17.

b) The number of children who have been in care for over one year having up to date health checks was 92% in 15/16. The previous year was 94% but there was an increase in adolescents refusing health checks this year which impacted on performance. We remain above all comparators however.

c) Up to date dental checks for children improved from 85% to 89% over the last year.

d) The number of up to date eye checks for children increased from 76% to 80% between March 2016 and March 2017.

The health assessment and review work includes attention to immunisations and ensuring that these have happened and are up to date.

Children in care can receive support regarding advice, support and information about substance misuse through the Subwize service which is commissioned by the local authority.

Emotional wellbeing and health is a significant issue for many children in care due to their experiences prior to becoming looked after and adjusting to separation from their family. As part of the health assessments, emotional issues are identified as part of the Health Care Plans. Emotional wellbeing is monitored as part of the ongoing annual health checks and at LAC reviews.

There are arrangements in place for making a referral to CAMHS and providing a response through screening and an assessment within 28 days. Further work is planned for the coming year about CAMHS support for children in care with the appointment of the CAMHS Social Worker.

Children and young people are encouraged and supported to be active, participate in hobbies, sport and interests which are appropriate to their abilities. Carers are expected to support this as part of their role and responsibilities. There are arrangements in place for allowances for children to do activities and children and young people have further support through leisure passes to the Borough’s leisure centres. A recent survey children in care undertaken by Skittlz evidence that 68% of respondents were involved in an extra-curricular activity.

A support group for children in care is held every Thursday where they can meet other children in care, have fun and be involved in various activities such as dance, music, art and video. However, a number of children in care are choosing to attend generic youth groups rather than the dedicated group as they want do not want to be identified as ‘in care’.
**Promise 4: To get the best education**

The Virtual School is an essential service to support children and young people to achieve good outcomes through their education. This is done in a number of ways which include ensuring that children and young people in care have a place at a good nursery or school so that they have the best circumstances to achieve in their education.

Another important source of support provided through the Virtual School is to work with the school, designated teacher and social worker for each child and young person to have an up to date Personal Education Plan. By the end of the 2016-17 period a total of 91% of children in care had a Personal Education Plan which was in place and reviewed within the required 6 monthly timescale. This was a slight improvement on the 90% reported in 2015-16.

Additional funding can be accessed through the Pupil Premium Plus as part of the plan. Arrangements are in place for Education Health and Care Plans to support children and young people with complex needs.

The results of tests and exams for children and young people in care from 2016 are shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children looked after</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>Rank/152</th>
<th>Quartile</th>
<th>Latest England ave LAC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Stage 2 - % Reading Level 4+</strong></td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Stage 2 - % Maths Level 4+</strong></td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Stage 2 - % Writing Level 4+</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Stage 2 - % Reading, Writing &amp; Maths Level 4+</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Stage 2 - % Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling Level 4+</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em><em>GCSE - % 5+ A</em>-C</em>*</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em><em>GCSE - % 5+ A</em>-C inc. English &amp; Maths</em>*</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2016, the new more challenging national curriculum, which was introduced in 2014, was assessed by new tests and interim frameworks for teacher assessment. Results are no longer reported as levels: each pupil receives their test results as a scaled score and teacher assessments based on the standards in the interim framework.

The new expected standards were designed to be broadly similar but are not equivalent to an old level 4b.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>All England Ave - LAC</th>
<th>LBBD All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>KS4 Progress 8</strong></td>
<td>-1.12</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KS4 Attainment 8</strong></td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definitions of Attainment 8 and Progress 8

**Attainment 8** measures the average achievement of pupils in up to 8 qualifications including English, maths, three further qualifications that count in the English Baccalaureate and three further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or any other non-GCSE qualifications on the DFE approved list.

**Progress 8** aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of key stage 2 to the end of key stage 4. It compares pupils' achievement – their Attainment 8 score – with the average Attainment 8 score of all pupils nationally who had a similar starting point, calculated using assessment results from the end of primary school.

The results show that at KS2 our students achieved above the national average for all LAC. It also shows that we were close to the borough average for the combined reading, maths and writing. We will continue to liaise with our Advisory colleagues to ensure our students are fully supported.

At KS4 the results show that our students’ attainment is very close to the National Average for LAC but below the results for the Borough. Strategies continue to be put in place to support our Year 11 students.

The Virtual School service continues to use a range of approaches to support and improve children’s education attainment and attendance. These include:
• Delivering training to the Designated Teachers, Foster Carers and social workers.
• Increasing the number of students receiving 1:1 tuition in English and maths.
• Employing a mentor for all year 11 students (in borough) and provided specialist mentoring for students at risk of exclusion
• Purchasing various learning apps and tablets for individual students
• Using PP+ funding to help schools support students with mental health issues

The service also takes action to address school attendance and monitor this with a view to making improvements. As at the end of July 2016, attendance for the academic year 2015-16 was

• 78% of students have 95-100% attendance
• 90% of students have 90-100% attendance

Attendance for children in care shows fluctuations and needs attention to make improvements. Students achieving less than 90% attendance have interventions in place via the Virtual School.

The Council has recognised young people in care aged 16+ and care leavers in its annual event to celebrate their achievements in October 2016 and which is a very positive experience for all involved. The awards cover a wide range of achievements including formal qualifications at school, college and university, apprenticeships, volunteering, participation in groups and giving back to the community. A similar celebration event for children aged 7 to 16 (Year 11) is planned for July 2017.

**Promise 5: ‘To be successful in life’**

It is very important to involve children and young people and seek their views about important decisions which affect their lives. Arrangements continue to be in place to promote good practice so that social workers and IROs listen to children and young people and take their views in to account when decisions are being taken and plans made.

There are a range of measures in place to support young people when leaving care and living independently. Training is in place for carers who can help young people to prepare for living independently. Young people receive a leaving care grant which is specifically tailored as for example to furnishing accommodation when moving to live independently. They are also given support with finding accommodation, including priority status for council provision. As at the end of the 2016-17 period there were 81% of young people who were care leavers and in suitable accommodation – this is an improvement on our 15/16 performance of 77%. Although we did not reach our target of 83%, we are now in line with similar areas and the national average (81%), and just below the London average (83%). It is important to bear in mind that the situation is affected by a number of factors including young people being in custody. We continue to be reliant on private rented market and landlords offering care and support packages to the Local Authority so that there are ‘move on’ plans from foster care and 16+ provisions.

There is a ‘Staying Put’ scheme in place which enables young people to continue to live with carers beyond the age of 18 and avoid a sudden cut off of the arrangements for their support and care. This recognises the more usual situation for young people in which they continue to live at home after the age of 18 and beyond. At the end of 2016-17 we had 18 young people in Staying Put arrangements.

The council provides a scheme for savings for children and young people in care which they can access when they leave care. This is in addition to the leaving care grant which is more. Guidance and support is provided about the use of the savings and the leaving care grant by staff in the service and working with the young person.
The Corporate Parenting Strategy includes actions to support young people to get in to work through continuing their education, training or finding a job. There is a council wide Employment, Education and Training (EET) strategy in place and this is actively supported by Members, which has included their involvement in 2 workshops regarding NEET and vulnerable groups, Care Leavers being one of the identified groups. Individual pathway plans for young people identify actions tailored to the young person’s individual needs which can support and assist them in to opportunities for education, training or work. Work takes place within the Council and with key partners such as the Job Centres and Careers Advice Services.

The performance regarding employment, education and training of young people aged 16-21 is monitored and at the end of 2016-17 was 55%. This is an increase from the 50% reported % as at the end 2015-16. This is above all comparators - London average (53%), National average (48%) and statistical neighbours average (48%).

In the period of 2016-17 there were 17 young people attending university.
Title: Improving the Council's Adoption Scorecard Performance Scrutiny Review

Report of the Commissioning Director, Education (and Scrutiny Champion for the Committee)

Open Report For Decision

Report Author: Joanne Tarbutt, Head of Looked After Children Services & Masuma Ahmed, Democratic Services Officer

Contact Details: Tel: 020 8227 2756 E-mail: masuma.ahmed@lbbd.gov.uk

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

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

Summary:

At the start of the 2016/17 municipal year, the Children’s Services Select Committee (CSSC) agreed to undertake an in-depth scrutiny review into ‘Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance’. Appended to this cover report is the proposed final report arising from this scrutiny, which makes nine key recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration to help improve the Adoption Service’s adoption timeliness performance. The appended scrutiny report provides the background to why the CSSC chose to review this area, the methodology for the scrutiny, an introduction to the issue of adoption, the importance of reducing delay and factors which generally affect local authorities’ timeliness performance, an explanation of the Adoption Service’s performance measured against the Department for Education’s targets, consideration of the reasons behind the Service’s performance, consideration of what more can be done and, next steps.

As standard scrutiny practice, a monitoring report shall be presented to the CSSC providing an update on the progress of the recommendations that are accepted by the Cabinet Member, in approximately six months’ time, to help the CSSC evaluate the effectiveness of this Scrutiny Review and to obtain a view of the early impact of the recommendations.

The Cabinet Member has been invited to this meeting to respond to the report and recommendations.

Recommendation(s)

The CSSC is recommended to agree the appended Scrutiny Report at Appendix 1, which makes nine recommendations.

Reason(s)

The topic of adoption timeliness performance relates to the Council’s priority to ‘Enable Social Responsibility’ and the objective to ‘protect the most vulnerable, keeping adults
1. **Introduction and Background**

1.1 At the start of 2016/17, the CSSC agreed that the Council’s Adoption Service’s Performance would be the topic on which to undertake a scrutiny review due to the concern around the potential impact the Service’s performance was having on children waiting for an adoptive family.

2. **Title and Terms of Reference**

2.1 The title of the Scrutiny Review is “Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance” and the following four key questions formed the Terms of Reference:

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?

The main Sections of the Scrutiny Report at Appendix 1 are:

- Introduction
- What is Barking and Dagenham’s Adoption Scorecard Performance?
- Why is the Barking and Dagenham Adoption Service not meeting the DfE’s A1 and A2 targets?
- What is Working Well and What More Can be done?
- Next steps

Below are summaries of each section.

3. **Section 3 - Introduction**

3.1 This Section introduces the concept of adoption and discusses why placing children early with an adoptive family is of crucial importance. There is evidence that shows that the earlier a child is adopted, the better the child’s life outcomes. This is why the Government introduced the A1 and A2 targets to measure all local authorities’ timeliness performance in relation to children waiting for an adoptive placement. Both these measures are reported as a three-year rolling average.

- **A1** measures the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted, in days; and
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:

3.2 This Section considers the impact of factors that local authorities generally face in trying to meet these targets. These include the impact of caselaw, particularly the case of 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”, which has resulted in extended family members coming forward at a late date to be assessed as alternative carers for a child.

3.3 This Section also explores the issues of delays caused by care proceedings such as difficulties in obtaining dates for cases to be heard at Court due to the demand for hearings, and an increase in parental legal challenge to placement orders resulting in delays in placing children with adopters.

3.4 Finally, the Section looks at delays which can occur in social care teams and the issue of resources and caseloads. It recognises that the Council’s Adoption Service has implemented an ‘Adoption Action Plan’ in response to these challenges which includes an ‘Adoption Improvement Group’ (AIG) to improve transparency and accountability around the Service’s performance.

3.5 This Section recommends that:

Recommendation 1
The Cabinet Member report back to CSSC within six months’ time, the impact of the Adoption Action Plan on timeliness performance for all adopted children; and

Recommendation 2
The AIG continues to be held at the current frequency of bi-monthly and the challenge to timely performance remains a focus.

4. Section 6 - What is Barking and Dagenham’s Adoption Scorecard Performance?

4.1 This Section explains that the Adoption Service has consistently been failing to meet the A1 and A2 targets over the years, and its performance has been poorer than the national and London averages. Between 2010 and 2015 the Service’s performance has been better than, or close to, its statistical neighbours. The Committee noted that the DfE’s target has becoming increasingly more challenging over the years. The Service’s 2013-16 Scorecard performance for A1 was 721 days against a target of 426 days and its 2013-16 Scorecard performance for A2 was 309 days against a target of 121 days.

5. Section 5 - Why is the Barking and Dagenham Adoption Service not meeting the DfE’s A1 and A2 Targets?

5.1 National data shows that some children can be ‘harder to place’ and this includes older children, disabled children, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children and children in sibling groups. Officers explained that there was anecdotal and soft evidence to suggest that the Service had a higher number of harder to place
children in its cohort, compared to other London boroughs, which would explain its poor performance. The Service’s case was that rather than place children who are harder to place in long term foster care, it was pursuing adoption as the plan for more of these children than other boroughs, which meant that its cohort of ‘harder to place’ children was larger than that of other boroughs. Its reason for taking this approach was that rather than being led by the impact on its Scorecard performance, it was led by the outcome adoption would have on these children, which was achieving stability and permanence, which in turn would lead to better long-term outcomes for these children.

5.2 The CSSC agreed with the Adoption Service that meeting the DfE’s performance targets should not be at the expense of the outcomes for the borough’s children. The CSSC recommended that:

Recommendation 3
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.

5.3 However, as the Service could not provide ‘hard’ data to the Committee to substantiate the claim that it had a larger ‘harder to place’ cohort, it felt it was important to exercise caution when accepting this as the reason for the Service’s poor performance. The CSSC therefore recommends that:

Recommendation 4
The Cabinet Member requests that officers in the Adoption Service undertake research to gather data which substantiates the claim that Barking and Dagenham has had more ‘harder to place’ children in its cohort than its statistical neighbours and other authorities in the East London Consortium, and that it has placed more of them for adoption than other authorities, and that the Cabinet Member reports the findings back to the CSSC within six months’ time.

5.5 Furthermore, the Committee noted that whilst taking this approach to family finding was in the best interests of the children in the Service’s cohort, the impact of this approach on the Council’s Scorecard could remain for years. This led to the recommendation that:

Recommendation 5
The Cabinet Member ensures 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 (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.

5.7 As there was no hard comparative data on the number of ‘harder to place’ children in the Service’s cohort, the CSSC felt it was important to know the Service’s performance for children who were not considered ‘harder to place’ and so it asked for a breakdown of this information. This established that nine out of 18 children in the not ‘harder to place’ category were not placed within DfE thresholds, which amounted to 50% of the cohort. The CSSC felt concerned at this and so asked for an analysis of each case where the child was not placed in time, which lead to the
recommendation that:

**Recommendation 6**
The Cabinet Member ensures that recommendations a – c are implemented and that the AIG is made aware of these additional action points:

(a) It is essential that all children have a contingency plan in case the match with the identified adopters does not proceed for any reason. The contingency plan should be formally recorded at Looked after Children reviews and within the child’s care plan;

(b) If foster carers wish to adopt a child, they should be supported with a private application rather than undertake a full adoption assessment on them – any issues can be highlighted in Annexe A (a court document) if necessary; and

(c) Consideration should also be given to arranging additional Adoption Panels to consider matches, if there will be a delay of several weeks, in order to maximise performance.

5.8 The Committee heard that the cohort of children relating to the 2014-17 Scorecard included 10 harder to place children and therefore the Service expected its Scorecard performance to worsen. The Committee felt concerned that the category, ‘harder to place’, was very wide and agreed that the Service should expect different timeliness performance for children in different sub-categories under ‘harder to place’. Members therefore felt that the Service should have in place a system whereby managers can more easily scrutinise the Team’s family finding performance in light of the circumstances of each child. The CSSC recommended that:

**Recommendation 7**
The recording of all family finding activity relating to each case is recorded in one place so that it is transparent and accessible. This could take the form of a Family Finding Record which is updated with every activity linked to family finding as a separate chronology attached to each child’s file. The Family Finding Records should be reviewed by the AIG, during Looked after Child reviews, as well as in staff supervision.

6. **Section 6 - What is Working Well and What More Can be done?**

6.1 In this Section the CSSC acknowledges the hard work within the Service, and the measures already in place, to improve performance.

6.2 It also considers areas for further consideration, in addition to the issues raised in the preceding sections. Members agreed that more could be done to target recruitment of adopters for harder to place children, such as:

- 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;
- 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.

The CSSC therefore recommended that:

**Recommendation 8**
The Strategic Director for Service Development and Integration oversees the implementation of the Committee’s suggestions to improve the recruitment of adopters.

6.3 The CSSC found that 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. In light of this, the CSSC recommends that:

**Recommendation 9**
The Cabinet Members asks the Adoption Service to undertake a review of resources to ensure that there is the correct allocation of staff to the various tasks within the Team, taking account of the changing landscape of adoption nationally. This may be an interim measure pending the outcome of Regionalisation.

7. **Financial Implications**
Implications completed by: Katherine Heffernan

7.1 Should the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham intend to adopt all nine recommendations coming from the CSSC review, it will involve staff within the Service spending time reviewing current practices and other investigative work. This will need to be met within the current staff budget.

8. **Legal Implications**
Implications completed by: Lindsey Marks

8.1 The Adoption Scorecards allow Local Authorities and other adoption agencies to monitor and compare their performance. The performance thresholds set by the Department of Education make clear the Department of Education’s minimum expectations for timeliness in the adoption system.

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

None.

**List of appendices:**

Appendix 1 CSSC Scrutiny Report on Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance
Report of the Children’s Services Select Committee: Improving the council’s adoption scorecard performance: Scrutiny Review 2016/17

Contact:
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Scrutiny
Democratic Services
Law and Governance
scrutinyninbox@lbdd.gov.uk
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 to improve performance.

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 certain categories of children can be ‘harder to place’ for adoption. These include children who are from ethnic minorities, are part of a sibling group, are older, or have complex needs. The Adoption Service’s experience implies that when compared to London, the borough has a higher than average number of children who are in ‘harder to place’ categories because it chooses to pursue adoptive placements for them. We learnt that the Adoption Service has successfully placed children considered ‘harder to place’ for adoption which has been an excellent outcome for those children. However, due to the time it has taken to find adoptive families for such children, 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. As the Committee was concerned at this, it recommended that the Service undertake research to establish whether the borough truly does have a higher number of ‘harder to place’ children in its cohort, compared to other boroughs in London, so we may obtain a fair picture of the Adoption Service’s performance.

We also asked for a breakdown of performance relating to children whom were not considered ‘harder to place’, to obtain a view of performance in that area. We found that there are lessons to be learnt from some of these cases and have recommended that the Service improves some of its processes to improve timeliness of family finding. It is also 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. We also felt that more can also can be done to improve the recruitment of adopters, and so we have made recommendations which we hope will help address these issues.

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 to the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration that:

1. The Cabinet Member report back to CSSC within six months’ time, the impact of the Adoption Action Plan on timeliness performance for all adopted children;

2. The Adoption Improvement Group (AIG) continues to be held at the current frequency of bi-monthly and the challenge to timely performance remains a focus;

3. 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;

4. The Cabinet Member requests that officers in the Adoption Service undertake research to gather data, which substantiates the claim that Barking and Dagenham has had more ‘harder to place’ children in its cohort than its statistical neighbours and other authorities in the East London Consortium, and that it has placed more of them for adoption than other authorities, and that the Cabinet Member reports the findings back to the CSSC within six months’ time;

5. The Cabinet Member ensures 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 (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;

6. The Cabinet Member ensures that recommendations a – c in 5.13 are implemented and that the AIG is made aware of these additional action points;

7. The recording of all family finding activity relating to each case is recorded in one place so that it is transparent and accessible. This could take the form of a Family Finding Record which is updated with every activity linked to family finding as a separate chronology attached to each child’s file. The Family Finding Records should be reviewed by the AIG, during Looked After Child reviews, as well as in staff supervision; and

8. 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.

9. The Cabinet Members asks the Adoption Service to undertake a review of resources to ensure that there is the correct allocation of staff to the various tasks within the team, taking account of the changing landscape of adoption nationally. This may be an interim measure pending the outcome of Regionalisation.
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.
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/
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 Šelwyn 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 placement.¹

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 background.² 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.

foster care and returning home. Younger children are more likely to return home successfully than those who are older. 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 had 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.

**The Importance of Avoiding Delay**

3.3 Graph 1 below shows comparative data on outcomes at age 33 for children who were adopted at a young age, against average outcomes in the general population and outcomes of those who grew up in single parent families from the same socioeconomic group.

**Outcomes of infant adoptions at age 33**

(NCDS data)

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5 Selwyn, J et al (2006) ibid
Graph 2 below shows comparative data on outcomes of those who were adopted at birth against those who were adopted late after a good start in life and those who were adopted late after a poor start.

**Comparative outcomes according to quality of start**

(from Howe, 1997)

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?**

3.4 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

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6 Data from the 1958 National Child Development Study. [http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/page.aspx?&sitesessionid=724&sitesectiontitle=National+Child+Development+Study](http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/page.aspx?&sitesessionid=724&sitesectiontitle=National+Child+Development+Study)
- **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.

Local authorities have to submit this data to the DfE annually.

**The Impact of Caselaw on Timeliness**

3.5 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.

Members learnt from officers in the Council’s Legal department that 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 is 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. Members noted that this may create delay and impact 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.

**Delays relating to Care Proceedings**

3.6 As discussed above, there can be lengthy delays in care proceedings due to the courts requesting further assessments of family members, which impact on A1. 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.

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 the Service would 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 (see Section 5) and family finding can take some time.

**Delays in Social Care Teams**

3.7 The CSSC heard that previously, there were internal delays, such as delay in the submission of social workers’ reports and other paperwork to the Council’s Legal Department and the lodging of the application, which may officers felt may be attributed to the Services’ workload being disproportionate to the resources of the Council.

Previously, there were also 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. Furthermore, there were delays which related to the Adoption Team prioritising family finding in a timely way and managing high caseloads.

**The Adoption Service’s Action Plan**

3.8 The Service recognised these issues, and in response, produced an Adoption Action Plan (provided at Appendix 1) to improve scrutiny of timeliness performance. (The Action Plan is discussed in more detail in Section 6 of this report).

**Recommendation 1**
The CSSC recommends that the Cabinet Member report back to CSSC within six months’ time, the impact of the Adoption Action Plan on timeliness performance for all adopted children.

One of the key outcomes of the Action Plan was the implementation of the Adoption Improvement Group (AIG) where there is ownership of the Plan across Children’s Services and the Legal Department. This Group would:

- Formalise a process to track and monitor performance at a senior management level to enable professionals to have a clearer understanding of delays for individual children, and
- Create a forum where issues or blocks could be addressed, where there could be challenge about performance, and care plans could be reviewed for those waiting a long time.

The CSSC heard that whilst the Action Plan has helped to resolve many of the challenges described above, historical delays may impact on current performance.

**Recommendation 2**
The CSSC recommends that the AIG continues to be held at the current frequency of bi-monthly and the challenge to timely performance remains a focus.
4. What is Barking and Dagenham’s Adoption Service’s Adoption Scorecard Performance?

4.1 We learnt in 3.4 of this report that the DfE have two key adoption performance indicators, known as A1 and A2. This Section will discuss Barking and Dagenham’s Adoption’s Service’s performance on the A1 and A2 measures, compared with the performance of our statistical neighbours, the London and England average, against the DfE’s thresholds. The DfE’s thresholds 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A1</th>
<th>LBBD</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>London</th>
<th>Statistical Neighbours</th>
<th>DfE Threshold</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2011</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>626</td>
<td>639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2012</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2013</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2014</td>
<td>672</td>
<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></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data was not available at the time of drafting this report

A1 - LBBD performance compared to the National, London, statistical neighbour and the DfE threshold averages
As shown in the above table and graph, the Adoption Service’s 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 had not been published at the time of drafting this report).

**A2 performance over the last five years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>A2 LBBD</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>London</th>
<th>Statistical Neighbours</th>
<th>DfE Threshold</th>
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<td>2009-2012</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>140</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2013</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>225</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2014</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2015</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>121</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-2016</td>
<td>309 *</td>
<td>256 *</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This data was not available at the time of drafting this report*
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 had not been published at the time of drafting this report).

The CSSC expressed concern at the Service’s level of performance for A1 and A2 and asked officers to give the potential reasons behind it, which are explored in the next Section.
5. Why is the Barking and Dagenham Adoption Service not meeting the DfE’s A1 and A2 Targets?

5.1 In this Section the potential reasons why the Adoption’s Service is behind the DfE’s targets on the A1 and A2 measures are explored.

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

5.2 Officers explained to the CSSC that there was ‘soft’ evidence to suggest that there were a high number of children in ‘harder to place’ categories in Barking and Dagenham, compared to other London boroughs, which meant that family finding took much longer, and would explain the Service’s A1 and A2 performance. This was possibly because other authorities were mostly finding adoptive placements for children who were less challenging to place, which meant that their cohort of ‘harder to place’ children for whom adoption is the plan, was smaller.

Whilst there is no formal definition of what constitutes ‘harder to place’, the definition widely adopted is that ‘harder to place’ children include older children, disabled children, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children and children in sibling groups. These categories have recently been included in the DfE’s revised criteria for the Adoption Grant, in recognition of the challenges to place these children.

“Until now, there have been two major problems that delay the adoption process. The first is financial.

“But there is another, much trickier, bigger problem to navigate. The reality is that many adopters are searching for a healthy, single child under the age of two. But, of the 3,000 children waiting to be placed, many are older (although often only by a year or two) disabled, or have serious health conditions, or need to be placed together with their siblings. Many are also black or from minority ethnic communities. Such children are considered “harder to place”, and wait much longer for a family to be found for them. For some children, a family cannot be found at all.”

Officers stated that this was the issue that was impacting most on the Service’s Scorecard performance and they predicted it would continue to do so as there was no evidence that the children currently subject to family finding were considered less ‘harder to place’ (see 5.14 of this report).

7 See article by John Simmonds, Director of Policy Development and Research at the British Association of Adoption and Fostering, 9 July 2015: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/relationships/fatherhood/11729260/Getting-adopted-is-straightforward-as-long-as-youre-a-healthy-white-baby.html Accessed on 11 April 2017
Of the 66 children in the Service’s 2013-16 Scorecard cohort, 48 fall into ‘harder to place’ categories – 72.7%, which officers felt was comparatively, a very high proportion of the cohort, according to anecdotal evidence:

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

5.3 Officers explained that the Adoption’s Service’s approach to family finding was that an adoptive placement should be pursued for children who fall into a ‘harder to place’ category due to the evidence that showed that adoption was the best outcome for children, even though this approach was likely to have a negative impact on the Service’s Scorecard performance. The Adoption Service visited the DfE to discuss its performance in summer 2016. The Service gave a number of case examples to illustrate the work being undertaken and the DfE was supportive of the Service continuing to pursue adoption for those children that are ‘harder to place’, notwithstanding the impact on performance.

Members recognised that family finding can take much longer for some children in ‘harder to place’ categories and careful consideration must be given to the robustness of adopters to cope and sustain more challenging placements to prevent placement breakdown. The Adoption Service’s case was that 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.

The Service argued that 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.

5.4 “Local authorities can decide to place a child with an adoptive family that was assessed and approved by a different adoption agency (this can be another local authority or a voluntary adoption agency. In these cases, the agency will charge a fee to cover the costs of recruiting, assessing and approving the adopters. This is called the inter-agency fee.

“The inter-agency adoption fee grant is a government grant that reimburses the money local authorities spend on inter-agency fees for ‘hard-to-place’ children.”

The CSSC noted that more than two thirds of the Council’s current three year rolling cohort fall into ‘harder to place’ categories (these categories are discussed further below) and 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

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8 [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/inter-agency-adoption-fee-grant-for-local-authorities](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/inter-agency-adoption-fee-grant-for-local-authorities) Accessed on 7 June 2017
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, although 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.

The CSSC agreed with the Adoption Service that meeting the DfE’s performance targets should not be at the expense of the outcomes for our borough’s children.

**Recommendation 3**
The CSSC therefore 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.

5.5 Officers provided the following summary of the amount of children adopted in LBBD in 2015, compared to other local authorities, to the CSSC;

<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>

The CSSC noted that this data indicated that the Adoption Service was adopting a significant number of children in comparison to the borough’s 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. Members noted that the data indicated that other local authorities’ timeliness performance was better and asked officers the possible reasons for this. Officers gave a possible explanation that these authorities were only finding adoptive placements for children who were less challenging to place, which meant that their cohort of ‘harder to place’ children for
whom adoption was the plan, was smaller. (Children for whom adoption is not the plan, remain in long term foster care, and do not form part of the ‘harder to place’ cohort).

5.6 The CSSC asked the Adoption Service for hard data which benchmarked the Service’s number of children who were considered ‘harder to place’, against that of other local authorities in London. However, officers explained that this data was not currently collected. Given the Service’s performance, the CSSC felt this was disappointing, as members felt that there should be evidence for the reasons behind the Service’s poorer timeliness performance.

**Recommendation 4**

The CSSC recommends that the Cabinet Member requests that officers in the Adoption Service undertake research to gather data, which substantiates the claim that Barking and Dagenham has had more ‘harder to place’ children in its cohort than its statistical neighbours and other authorities in the East London Consortium, and that it has placed more of them for adoption than other authorities, and that the Cabinet Member reports the findings back to the CSSC within six months’ time.

5.7 Officers explained that in addition to the Adoption Action Plan, 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.

**Case Study**

Officers presented the Case Study below to illustrate the kinds of issues that may arise whilst family finding for a child.

**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.
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 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.

The CSSC noted that 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 would remain until the end of 2019.

**Recommendation 5**
The CSSC recommends that the Cabinet Member ensures 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 (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.

As stated previously, the outcomes for children in care are generally poorer than those who are adopted. In relation to this, 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, the Service has 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. Members noted that 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.

**Performance relating to Children Whom are Not Considered ‘Harder to Place’**

5.10 Given that there was a lack of data to confirm that the borough truly was looking for adoptive placements for more ‘harder to place’ children than other London boroughs, the CSSC emphasised that it was important for it to establish what the Adoption Service’s timeliness performance was for children who were not considered ‘harder to place’, which the report will now discuss.

The current Adoption Scorecard was measuring timeliness for all children adopted between 2014 -17. The Council has adopted 74 children during this period, 18 of whom were considered not to be in ‘harder to place’ categories. Of these 18 children, nine were placed within the DfE threshold. **This means that there were nine children where there was delay. The Committee was concerned that this meant that the Service missed the DfE targets for 50 percent of the cohort of children who were not considered ‘harder to place’**.

5.11 As 50 % of the not considered ‘harder to place’ cohort, for whom the Service did not meet targets, was very high proportion, the Committee asked officers to provide a breakdown for each child in this cohort to include:

- How many days after the DfE threshold the child was placed;
- The reasons for delay; and
- Whether there was anything the Service could have done differently, procedurally, to improve timeliness.

This breakdown is provided below.

**Breakdown of performance relating to children who were not considered ‘harder to place’ between 2013 – 2016:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Number</th>
<th>How many days past the DfE threshold was the child placed for Adoption?</th>
<th>What were the reasons for delay?</th>
<th>What could the Service have done differently to improve timeliness?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A1 58 days</td>
<td>Child adopted abroad by family, but complexities arose due to different legal systems to facilitate adoption. Child was formally in a fostering arrangement with family whilst adoption legal issues were resolved.</td>
<td>No contingency could have been put in place as the child was with family and therefore in a stable placement and all actions were taken to chase the appropriate authorities to facilitate the adoption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A2 177 days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23 days</td>
<td>144 days</td>
<td>Breakdown during introductions so family finding had to resume, which took longer than expected. There was no contingency plan for a possible breakdown. The Service could have had other adopters identified as potential families as a contingency plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>690 days</td>
<td>390 days</td>
<td>Child was adopted by her foster carers, but the carers had to be fully assessed as there were concerns about their ability to meet her long term needs. During the assessment period she was still technically fostered and not placed for adoption despite the fact that she remained in the same placement. They also had to attend Preparation Groups in advance of the assessment taking place. The Service should have accepted that the foster carers were highly likely to be successful with a private adoption application which would not require a full assessment and approval at Adoption Panel. The Service could have informed the foster carers of their right to apply privately for an adoption order and outlined the Local Authority’s concerns in Annexe A (document required for all adoptions) and allowed the court to determine the appropriateness of the match.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>293 days</td>
<td>99 days</td>
<td>Unacceptable delay although was matched with adopters within 7 months, but the DfE threshold is 4 months. Regular and robust scrutiny of family finder’s performance including identification of potential matches in advance of the Placement Order being granted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>690 days</td>
<td>390 days</td>
<td>Child had relatives being assessed in Australia but they subsequently withdrew from the process. Family finding resumed and took longer than expected to find an alternative family. Contingency plan of alternative potential families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>– was within timeframe</td>
<td>64 days</td>
<td>One child was due to be matched with an adoptive family but the birth father came forward and asked to be DNA tested as he had not been present during the care proceedings. This was granted by the Court and once it was established that he was the father, he was granted time to put forward relatives, who were subsequently ruled out. The timing of the DNA test and the granting of the Placement Order overlapped so the possibility of a challenge was possible. However, the Court were not prepared to delay the Placement Order as the father had a history of non-engagement. The Legal advice was that we should ensure there was not legal challenge in the future by robustly ensuring father and his family were not viable, therefore the delay was necessary. A family were ready to be matched as soon as paternal family were ruled out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>44 days</td>
<td>144 days</td>
<td>Unacceptable delay although there is evidence of 9 families being explored but due to uncertainty about potential health issues he may have developed due to mother’s substance misuse, adopters were cautious to proceed. Regular and robust scrutiny of family finder’s performance. More regular updates on child’s development from Health to share with potential adopters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.12 The CSSC recognised that the Service was working to address some of the reasons for delay. For example, work was ongoing to recruit more in-house adopters who could meet the needs of our children and to fast track assessments of any adopters who might be a match for a particular child whose plan either is or might be adoption. In addition to those adopters who might consider ‘harder to place’ children, it was also important to continue to have a pool of our own adopters who are better suited to the less challenging placements, particularly now the DfE are no longer refunding interagency fees for any child who has been waiting less than 18 months. The CSCC noted that a preparation group began in April and seven adoptive families had been identified to attend (two of these were foster carers adopting children already in their care). Members also noted, with regard to scrutiny of family finding work, that a number of actions had already been implemented, such as fortnightly updates at team meetings, scrutiny at the AIG, formal supervision by the team manager and ad hoc checks by the Head of Service.

5.13 However, from the above breakdown, the CSSC identified a number of additional actions that the Adoption Service could implement to ensure that children who are considered not ‘harder to place’, do not experience unnecessary delay:

(a) It is essential that all children have a contingency plan in case the match with the identified adopters does not proceed for any reason. The contingency plan should be formally recorded at Looked After Children reviews and within the child’s care plan;

(b) If foster carers wish to adopt a child, they should be supported with a private application rather than undertake a full adoption assessment on them – any issues can be highlighted in Annexe A if necessary; and

(c) Consideration should also be given to arranging additional Adoption Panels to consider matches if there will be a delay of several weeks in order to maximise performance.

**Recommendation 6**

The CSSC recommends that the Cabinet Member ensures that recommendations a – c are implemented and that the AIG is made aware of these additional action points.
Commentary on Potential Future Performance

Children due to go onto the Scorecard for 2014-17

5.14 These are the children who are currently placed with adopters and will go onto the Scorecard once the adoption orders are granted. Children must be placed with adopters for a minimum of 10 weeks before they can submit their application to court for the adoption order. The CSSC asked the Adoption Service to provide its estimation of how this cohort may affect future performance.

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 Down’s Syndrome; and
- 1 child who may possibly have developmental delay.

5.15 The current DfE target is 426 days for A1 and 121 days for A2. Officers explained that this target would not be achievable for a number of years given the current performance of the Scorecard. Furthermore, once these children are added to the Scorecard the Service expects that its performance will worsen as follows:

- A1 – will increase from 783 to 821 days, and
- A2 – will increase from 357 to 380 days.

Children due to go onto the Scorecard for 2015-18

5.16 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 ‘easier to place’ children), compared to previous cohorts. Officers felt that this must be viewed with caution as the Service has 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.

Not all ‘Harder to Place’ Children are Equally Hard to Place

5.17 The Committee expressed concern that the category ‘harder to place’ was very wide. This meant that although, for example, the following two cases would both would fall under ‘harder to place’, there could be a large variation in the time it takes to find a family for a young sibling group with no additional needs, and the time it takes to find a family for an older child with behavioural difficulties. The CSSC feel that the Adoption Service should expect different timeliness performance in each case, rather than simply treat both cases as ‘harder to place’. Members therefore felt that the Service should have in place a system whereby managers can more easily scrutinise the Team’s family finding performance in light of the particular circumstances of each child.
Recommendation 7
The CSSC recommends that the recording of all family finding activity relating to each case is recorded in one place so that it is transparent and accessible. This could take the form of a Family Finding Record which is updated with every activity linked to family finding as a separate chronology attached to each child’s file. The Family Finding Records should be reviewed by the AIG, during Looked After Child reviews, as well as in staff supervision.
6. What is Working Well and What More Can be Done?

What is working well?

6.1 We stated in the Introduction that the Adoption Service has in place an Adoption Action Plan that sets out the actions required for improvement (Appendix 1). 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. The Service has 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 AIG 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 who the Service is 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 adopters, 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 However, given the issues discussed in Section 5 of the report, the Committee felt that more must 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;

- 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.

**Recommendation 8**

The CSSC 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.

6.3 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 As recommended by the CSSC, 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 CSSC recognises that the challenges within the court arena are much more difficult to influence. The CSSC feels that there must be 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 and felt it would be positive to include service users such as these in training for staff. The Adoption Service have made plans to undertake a specific training session with all team managers in Children’s Care and Support in the summer regarding permanency, with opportunity for managers to have feedback from these adults. The CSSC also felt that the Adoption Service should include in the session 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. The Service hopes 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 The CSSC found that 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.
In light of this,

**Recommendation 9**
The CSSC recommends that the Cabinet Members asks the Adoption Service to undertake a review of resources to ensure that there is the correct allocation of staff to the various tasks within the team, taking account of the changing landscape of adoption nationally. This may be an interim measure pending the outcome of Regionalisation.
7. **Next steps**

7.1 This report will be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration. 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:

Guests

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

Council officers:

- Joanne Tarbutt: Head of Service, Looked After Children
- 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
# Appendix 1- Adoption Service Action Plan 2016/17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Timescale</th>
<th>Progress Update</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| To set up Adoption Improvement Group to monitor systems, processes, practice and outcomes for children considered for adoption and to ensure that cases are fast tracked for permanency where appropriate. | 1. Meetings to take place bi-monthly, tracking all cases considered for parallel planning from entry into care until placed with adoptive family.  
2. Replace NI61 performance monitoring in monthly dataset with Adoption Scorecard performance.  
3. Progress will be reported at monthly Portfolio meetings  
4. Scorecard Performance to be presented to quarterly Corporate Parenting Group | AG/JT  | May 2016          | Completed        |
| Embed use of Adoption Tracker across all teams to monitor timescales for performance | 1. Update current Tracker to ensure all children currently being considered for adoption are captured, but who may not yet have an ADM decision.  
2. Identify BSO/s who are responsible for updating Tracker. | JT/CG  | May 2016          | Completed        |
| Deliver a range of training to include Permanency Planning, process for parallel planning, timescales and links to performance. | 1. Commission training on permanency planning. | Learning and Development/JT | Sept 2017 |
| 2. Deliver training on writing good quality CPRs 3 times per year. | HK | July, Nov, March | Ongoing |
| 3. Re-launch Adoption Referral Meeting process for Team Managers and Social Workers. | MO | June 2016 | Completed |
| 4. Deliver training on Later Life Letters and Lifestory Work | HK | June, Oct, Feb | Ongoing |
| 5. Adoption Team to present permanency planning session to Team Managers’ Practice Improvement Group | Adoption Team | August 17 | |

| Continue to work with London Regionalisation Group and East London Adoption and Permanency Group re regionalisation planning | 1. Attend all London wide events | JT/MO | Ongoing |
| 2. Work with ELAPG to ensure East London’s views are represented in addition to individual boroughs. | | | |

| To identify additional resources to make applications to court to | 1. All applications to be submitted by end of July for those currently with a Panel/ADM decision that adoption is no longer the plan. | JT | July 16 |
| 2. | Completed | | |

| Document to be used in Adoption Improvement Group to ensure ownership across the Service. | AG/JT/CG | Ongoing | |
| Document to be used in Adoption Team Meetings every fortnight | MO | Ongoing | |

| Commission training on permanency planning. | Learning and Development/JT | Sept 2017 | |
| Deliver training on writing good quality CPRs 3 times per year. | HK | July, Nov, March | Ongoing |
| Re-launch Adoption Referral Meeting process for Team Managers and Social Workers. | MO | June 2016 | Completed |
| Deliver training on Later Life Letters and Lifestory Work | HK | June, Oct, Feb | Ongoing |
| Adoption Team to present permanency planning session to Team Managers’ Practice Improvement Group | Adoption Team | August 17 | |

| Attend all London wide events | JT/MO | Ongoing | |
| Work with ELAPG to ensure East London’s views are represented in addition to individual boroughs. | | | |

<p>| All applications to be submitted by end of July for those currently with a Panel/ADM decision that adoption is no longer the plan. | JT | July 16 | Completed |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Responsible Person</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rescind all Placement Orders where adoption is no longer the plan for the child.</td>
<td>2. To ensure that all future applications are submitted within one month of ADM decision that adoption is no longer the plan.</td>
<td>MO/JT</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior management steer is required re adoption planning for children who are considered ‘difficult to place’ (sibling groups, disabled children, children with a high level of needs, older children and BME). The length of family finding will impact on Scorecard performance and adoption may never be achieved.</td>
<td>1. Director of Children’s Services to clarify position so that social work teams and ADM are clear about parameters when considering adoption plans for children who are difficult to place.</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| To continue to make applications to the Adoption Support Fund to access resources for post adoption support. | 1. Therapeutic support to be identified at an early stage to ensure good performance on placement stability is maintained.  
2. To make applications to the ASF to support Special Guardianship placements (introduced 2016)                                                                 | Post Adoption Workers, SG Consultant                                                        | As required, As required |
| To continue to make applications for interagency funding reimbursement to | 1. To continue to make use of all interagency placement options for children who are waiting for an adoptive placement to ensure timely placement.                                                                 | MO/CL              | Ongoing |

Applications are considered on a case by case basis.

Applications are considered on a case by case basis.
| To maximise use of interagency placements to ensure timely placement | 1. To work with CPRS managers to ensure that IROs raise practice alerts when any drift is identified in permanency planning at any stage.  
2. IROs to ensure that Group Manager for Adoption is copied into any alerts for information to ensure that there is oversight on any potential drift.  
3. Adoption TM to attend IRO team meeting for discussion on adoption performance and delay. | JT/NA | May 2016 | Completed and refreshed as new IROs join LBBD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| To ensure IROs understand their role in adoption performance. | 1. Work with Legal to put on agenda for next meeting with Designated Judge. | AG/JT/CG |  | Legal are in discussion with Designated Judge regarding a date to meet.  
Offers attend the regional Family Court meetings and issues are raised here. |
<p>| Identify appropriate methods of engagement with Judiciary re mismatch in government agenda, case law and impact on LA performance on adoption. | 1. All initial enquiries to be thoroughly vetted to try to identify those who are likely to consider difficult to place children. | Adoption Team | Ongoing |  |
| To target recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters |  | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>who can meet the needs of LBBD children</th>
<th>2. Work with East London Adoption and Permanence Group to deliver regular preparation groups to prevent delay in assessment of prospective adopters.</th>
<th>MO</th>
<th>Barnardo’s to be commissioned by ELAPG to deliver preparation groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inter-country adoption assessments</td>
<td>1. Continue to offer assessments to inter-country adopters as this generates income and ensures expertise of ICA remains within the Service.</td>
<td>MO/MB</td>
<td>Under review due to capacity issues in team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>1. Fill 1 vacant post within the team to maximise capacity for family finding, assessments of adopters and post SGO support.</td>
<td>MO/ JT</td>
<td>tbc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and procedures</td>
<td>1. <strong>Continue to ensure TriX procedures are updated.</strong></td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>As necessary when TriX updates are required. Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. <strong>Highlight essential parts for ‘easy reference’ for social workers re permanency planning, which includes ADM process.</strong></td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>May 2016 Completed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

12 JULY 2017

Title: Options for a ‘small-scale’ Scrutiny Review in 2017/18

Report of the Commissioning Director, Education (and Scrutiny Champion for CSSC)

Open report For decision

Report authors: Masuma Ahmed, Democratic Services Contact Details:

Accountable Director: Jane Hargreaves, Commissioning Director, Education

Accountable Strategic Director: Anne Bristow, Service Development and Integration

Summary:

Each of the Council's scrutiny select committees has a work programme which is a timetable of the matters the Committee wishes to consider in the current municipal year.

As well as scrutinising one-off reports, a part of the work programme may involve undertaking a Scrutiny Review into an area of interest for members where the select committee may add value and help the Council achieve its vision and priorities. This report explains what a Scrutiny Review entails and provides three options prepared by officers to the Children's Services Select Committee (CSSC). After today’s meeting, there will remain only four CSSC meetings in 2017/18. Therefore, officers propose that rather than an in-depth scrutiny review, the Committee undertakes a 'mini'/ small-scale scrutiny review this year.

The following are appended to this report:

A. The Committee's remit as described in the Council's Constitution
B. A chart explaining the Scrutiny Review process
C. Three options for undertaking an in-depth scrutiny review for members to choose from.
D. Draft Work Programme 2017-18

The CSSC is are recommended to indicate which of the three options they would prefer to under-take a Scrutiny Review on. Members may ask for a topic of their choice to be put forward for consideration at the meeting, taking advice from officers as to whether a review of an alternative topic would be timely, impactful and deliverable. Members will note that a Scrutiny Review may only be undertaken on one topic, therefore the CSSC would need to agree upon one topic to take forward.

The Committee is also asked to agree its Work Programme for 2017-18.
Recommendations
The CSSC is recommended to:

(i) Agree a topic it would like to under-take a small-scale Scrutiny Review on in 2017/18, and
(ii) Agree its Work Programme for 2017-18

1. Scrutiny Work Programmes

Work Programmes generally consist of two types of scrutiny:

(i) Scrutiny Reviews

Usually, as part of their annual work programme, the select committees aim to complete at least one investigation into an area of member and/or public concern to make recommendations in order to improve services. These investigations are referred to as 'scrutiny reviews'. A scrutiny review usually involves a number of different stages including:

1. Agreeing the subject matter of the review according to given criteria
2. Drafting the terms of reference for the review/ key lines of enquiry (these are a set of questions/ specific areas the Committee wishes to consider, with a view to making recommendations for improvement in those areas)
3. Scoping the review (scoping refers to a detailed project plan outlining the suggested methods for gathering evidence including potential participants/ contributors to the review. It is a timetable designed to deliver what is set out in the terms of reference and includes the estimated date for the completion of the review, in accordance with internal scrutiny procedures and protocols)
4. Carrying out the review in accordance with the agreed scope
5. Producing a report of findings
6. Agreeing the contents of the scrutiny review report including the recommendations
7. Sharing the report with those involved with the review and finalising the report
8. Publicising the report
9. Monitoring the impact of the scrutiny review.

The chart at Appendix B describes the Scrutiny Review process in detail and the role of officers and members throughout. Appendix C lists the three possible areas for review that officers have put forward for consideration by members.

(ii) 'One-off' Items

Select Committees may also use the Work Programme to consider issues on a 'one-off' basis by, for example, asking representatives of a service to attend a meeting to have a discussion with members, or undertaking a site visit to a facility.

The draft Work Programme at Appendix D lists some areas members may wish to include, some of these being standard items and some being areas the CSSC of 2016-17 put forward for consideration, such as the item on Child Sexual Exploitation. Members, taking advice from officers, will need to agree what other items to include on the Work Programme for 2017-18.
2. Matters to Consider before deciding items to scrutinise

When deciding what matters should be scrutinised, whether they will be scrutinised it is good practice to reflect upon the following matters:

(i) The Committee's Remit

First and foremost the selected topics must be ones which fall under the Committee’s remit, which is provided in Appendix A.

(ii) The 'PAPER' Criteria

When deciding which topic to select for review, best practice is to select topics that meet the following criteria:

- Public interest (be of importance to local residents)
- Ability to change (be within the Council and its partners’ power to change or influence)
- Performance (areas where scrutiny can add value are ones which require improvement)
- Extent of issue (priority should be given to issues that are relevant to a significant part of the Borough)
- Replication (avoid duplicating the work of other committees, bodies or organisations)

3. Next Steps - Scoping

Scoping is also known as methodology. It refers to the different methods that may be used to gather evidence for a Scrutiny Review and achieve what is set out in its terms of reference, including:

- Desktop-based analysis and research
- Commissioning reports or presentations from council departments, partner organisations, or external bodies to be considered at formal meetings or informal meetings
- Organising themed workshops with stakeholders
- Surveys, site visits, walkabouts, or ‘mystery shopping’ exercises
- Inviting experts, officers, partners, those who are affected by the issue or other relevant persons or organisations to give oral or written evidence to a Select Committee meeting.

Once members have selected a topic for review, officers will aim to produce a scoping report that will outline to members the suggested methodology for evidence gathering and the time-table for producing the report with recommendations. This will list which experts the Committee will talk to and what site visits will be undertaken, for example.

The draft scoping report may need to be put to members outside of a formal meeting for agreement, as the next CSSC meeting is not until 2 October 2017, and to wait until then would cause a delay in the delivery of the review.
As for one off reports on the Work Programme, these will be commissioned after today’s meeting.

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


**List of Appendices:**

A. The Committee's remit as described in the Council's Constitution  
B. A chart explaining the Scrutiny Review process  
C. Three options for undertaking an in-depth scrutiny review for members to choose from  
D. Draft Work Programme 2017-18
CHILDREN’S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE (CSSC)

Scope
The scrutiny of the services provided by the Children Services Directorate including the provision, planning, management, and performance of child protection, health, welfare, education, youth services, and related matters in Barking and Dagenham.

The CSSC's functions as determined by Assembly:
- Scrutiny of matters relating to the provision of services to children and young people living or using services within the borough.
- Working with the Council and other partners to secure the continuous improvement of services for children and young people and assisting in improving outcomes for the borough’s young people.
- Undertaking reviews into any issues falling within the remit of the Select Committee that merit detailed investigation.
- Presenting recommendations arising from scrutiny investigations in accordance with the Council’s agreed processes, and submitting them to the relevant decision-maker as determined by the Council’s Scheme of Delegation.
- Monitoring progress of implementation of recommendations in accordance with the Council’s agreed processes, ensuring that decision-makers have due regard to findings and recommendations arising from scrutiny investigations.
- Monitoring of performance indicators that fall within the remit of the Select Committee.
- Addressing any Call-ins or Councillor Calls for Action as allocated by the Designated Scrutiny Officer.
- Considering petitions in accordance with the Council’s Petition Scheme

The CSSC's functions as determined by Statute
All the powers of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 and Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

LBBD Constitution
Part 2, Chapter 8 - Scrutiny, Select Committees and Call-in
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Appendix B
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Scrutiny Review Process

Members’ Roles

- Members prioritise topics according to a number of factors such as issues of local concern, Council priorities and performance.
- Select Committees prioritise reviews to be undertaken.

Stage 1 – Topic Selection

Criteria for selection:
- Potential impact for significant section(s) of the population
- Matter of general public concern
- Key deliverable of a strategic and/or partnership plan
- Key performance area where the Council needs to improve
- Legislative requirement
- Corporate priority

Stage 2 – Scoping the Review

- Rationale and key issues
- Objectives/Terms of Reference
- Relevant corporate priorities
- Indicators of success/outcomes
- Evidence required and methodology
- Key officers involved
- Key stakeholders/expert witnesses
- Consultation
- Publicity
- Risks
- Timescales

Stage 3 – Gathering Evidence

- Site visits
- Written submissions
- Research
- Experts/witnesses
- Focus groups/workshops
- Consultation

Stage 4 – Considering Evidence

- Look at the evidence obtained from the different methods used- what are the areas for improvement based on this?

Stage 5 – Report

- Report to Select Committee for approval
- Recommendations and template implementation plan to the relevant service and, if necessary, the Cabinet/ Health Wellbeing Board for consideration.

Stage 6 – Implementation & Feedback

- Implementation plan developed by relevant Service Officer
- Recommendations actioned by relevant Officers
- Feedback outcomes to stakeholders/ community

Stage 7 – Monitoring

- Implementation monitored by the Select Committee
- Further investigation/recommendations if dissatisfied

Officer Roles

- Officers present to members information and evidence performance reports or statistics to inform the process of selection.
- Officers advise members on topic selection having regard to agreed criteria.

- Scrutiny Officer and Service Officer provide advice on how best the topic can be tackled.

- Officers make arrangements for the gathering of evidence, including research, focus groups, liaising with witnesses, etc.
- Officers support Members in compiling questions if required.

- Officers collate the evidence received and support members in formulating their findings and recommendations.

- Based on members’ findings and recommendations, Officers drafts a report for approval by the relevant Select Committee and, where necessary, the Cabinet/ Health & Wellbeing Board.

- Officers support members in considering how to feedback the review outcomes to stakeholders.
- Service Officer ensures that adopted recommendations are actioned.

- Service Officer reports progress on the implementation of the adopted recommendations to the Select Committee.
- Members may choose to undertake further scrutiny if required.
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## Option 1: The Local Offer

### Overview

Every Local Authority has a duty under the Children and families Act 2014 to set out in one place information about provision across education, health and social care for children and young people who have SEN or are disabled, including those who do not have Education Health and Care (EHC) plans. This is called ‘The Local Offer’.

Our Local Offer was developed with parents, carers and young people and was formally launched in September 2014.

The purpose of the Local Offer is to:
- Provide clear information
- Make provision more responsive to local needs and aspirations by directly involving children, their parents and young people as well as service providers.

The Local Offer is not simply be a directory of existing services. Its success depends as much upon full engagement with children, young people and their parents as on the information it contains.

The Local Offer **must** include provision inside and outside our local authority area. It **must** include provision outside the local area that is likely to be used by children and young people with SEN for whom we are responsible and disabled children and young people.

The Local Offer should be:
- **collaborative**: we **must** involve parents, children and young people in developing and reviewing the Local Offer
- **accessible**: the published Local Offer should be easy to understand, factual and jargon free. It should be structured in a way that relates to young people’s and parents’ needs (for example by broad age group or type of special educational provision). It should be well signposted and well publicised
- **comprehensive**: parents and young people should know what support is expected to be available across education, health and social care from age 0 to 25 and how to access it. The Local Offer **must** include eligibility criteria for services where relevant and make it clear where to go for information, advice and support, as well as how to make complaints about provision or appeal against decisions
- **up to date**: when parents and young people access the Local Offer it is important that the information is up to date
- **transparent**: the Local Offer should be clear about how decisions are made and who is accountable and responsible for them.

Our Local Offer can be found at:
To date (June 2017) there have been over 81,000 hits to the Local Offer website. However, the recent inspection of SEND services across the Local Area highlighted:

- The local area involved parents at the initial stages of setting up the local offer. However, not enough parents know about, or use it to find advice and help.

We have stepped up the marketing and promotion of the Local Offer to include posters and flyers in GP surgeries, health centres, schools and early years settings.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 provide a common framework for the Local Offer. They specify the requirements that all local authorities must meet in developing, publishing and reviewing their Local Offer, and cover:

- the information to be included
- how the Local Offer is to be published
- who is to be consulted about the Local Offer
- how children with SEN or disabilities and their parents and young people with SEN or disabilities will be involved in the preparation and review of the Local Offer, and
- the publication of comments on the Local Offer and the local authority’s response, including any action it intends to take in relation to those comments

Areas of potential enquiry by the Committee could be to:

- Review the Local Offer in terms of ease of use and accessibility
- Meet with parent/carer forums to discuss usage

Joy Barter | Group Manager Early Years and Childcare
Option 2: How well is the Council playing its part in reducing the numbers of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training and what more might it do?

Overview

The Education and Skills Act, sections 10, 12 and 68 (2008), set out statutory duties on local authorities in relation to the participation of young people in education or training, otherwise known as Raising the Participation Age (RPA). Young people have, since 2015, been required to participate in education, employment or training until the academic year in which they turn 18. Statutory guidance issued in 2014 (Participation of young people in education, employment or training) provides detail of what is considered statutory under different circumstances.

Policy and legislative issues

The principal statutory duties are:

- Local authorities must promote the effective participation in education and training of 16 and 17 year olds in their area with a view to ensuring that those persons fulfil the duty to participate in education or training. A key element of this is identifying the young people in their area who are covered by the duty to participate and encouraging them to find a suitable education or training place;
- Local authorities must make arrangements – i.e. maintain a tracking system - to identify 16 and 17 year olds who are not participating in education or training;
- Secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people aged 16 to 18 and for those up to age 25 with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan in their area;
- Make available to all young people aged 13-18 and to those up to age 25 with an EHC plan, support that will encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training.

Data and Performance

Barking and Dagenham’s performance in reducing the numbers of young people aged 16-18 who are NEET or Unknown has improved substantially over the past 4 years as demonstrated by the key national measure of the November – January average figure (see figure 1). The national November – January average figure for 2016 is yet to be published, but the provisional figure is available. It demonstrates that Barking and Dagenham has improved its performance to better than national average. The provisional London average figure is 6.7%.
The majority of the progress made has been in the reduction of Unknowns, with NEETs appearing to be stubbornly high (see figure 2). The reduction in Unknowns has been largely achieved through better coordination of council and partner resources. For example, having access to the council’s Revs and Bens database to ensure contact details are up to date to enable more accurate tracking. Better and more accurate data sharing between services has also reduced levels of dependency on more costly tracking interventions, such as door knocking.

It is important to note that approximately one third of Unknowns are usually found to be NEET through the tracking process. Therefore, whilst it appears that NEETs have not shifted, NEETs may have reduced in real terms by up to 50% between 2013 and 2016. Nevertheless, the Local Authority has had a consistently high cohort of around
200 NEET young people to support back into education, employment and training over this period, which is too high and amongst the highest in London.

NEET and Unknown performance is particularly challenging in key target groups, such as teen parents, those with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities and care leavers. As a corporate parent, Local Authorities have a duty to provide services to all care leavers until the age of 21 (or 25 if in further education), including supporting those that are Not in Education, Employment or Training in EET.

The ongoing annual work of the local authority in raising levels of participation at post-16 and driving down NEETs is guided by the borough’s 14-19 Participation Plan, which sets out core annual activities against four overarching themes:

- An effective programme of pre-NEET prevention work, including a focus on preventing drop-outs;
- Improved outreach and marketing of existing services;
- Effective data sharing and partnerships;
- Improved support for vulnerable groups.

A workshop involving key Cabinet Members with a portfolio interest in NEETs and Local Authority leads was held in January 2017 to discuss strategies to further reduce our levels of NEETs, both generally and within priority groups. A series of core proposals and actions were then identified and developed into an action plan which was further discussed and finalised at a further workshop held in March. A number of core, longer term projects were signed off by the Workforce Board in April 2017 as part of the action plan and are currently being taken forward.

These are:
- expanding the council’s work experience offer;
- developing a partnership pledge for Small to Medium-Sized Enterprises;
- introducing a care leaver support grant to encourage take up or apprenticeships;
- introducing a corporate target or ringfence around the take up of apprenticeships from Care Leavers and other vulnerable groups;
- develop an internship offer for care leavers leaving university.

Areas of potential enquiry

Areas of potential enquiry for the committee could be to:

- hear the views of pupils, parents and Headteachers around the Council’s current work experience and work-related learning offer and how this might be improved;
- hear the views of businesses around what the Council might do to enable them to provide more support around developing work-place skills in our young people;
- hear the views of Care Leavers to better understand their support needs around moving into the world of work, whether they are NEET or in higher education;
- hear the views of pupils, parents and teachers around the public perceptions of apprenticeships and what the Council might do to further improve the image and take up of apprenticeships locally;
- scrutinise the level of support being provided by Officers in reducing NEETs, particularly with regard to care leavers.

**Erik Stein** | Group Manager - Integrated Youth Services, 14-19 Participation & Engagement
Option 3: How well are libraries supporting children’s reading inclusively, and what more can they do?

Overview

The library service in the borough is delivered through 6 libraries with all having defined children’s areas some with ICT access specifically for children. The library offer includes books, children’s DVD’s activities, story and rhyme time. Some libraries are co-located with Children’s Centres, however in all libraries sessions are run by Children’ Centres.

The library stock range is inclusive – from board books through to graphic novels and teen reads to study guides for GCSE, A level, B/Tec courses. The Schools Library Service provides loans of materials to schools to support curriculum in local primary schools.

For the purposes of definition, a child library membership is anyone aged 0 to under 16. The service requires parental permission and evidence of proof of address to join the library. Anyone over the age of 16 and overs can join with their own proof of address.

The service works closely with local schools who bring children to the library for class visits. Regular school holiday activities take place in libraries.

Policy and Legislative issues

Providing a library service is a statutory duty which local authorities need to provide a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ public library service, under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. This would include provision for library services for children.

The service also works to include recommendations from 2003 Every Child Matters white paper.

Performance

Performance of children using libraries in Barking & Dagenham is good, a range of performance information is provided below and libraries performance is monitored and reported on a regular basis.
Active Library Users 0 to 16  May 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 16</td>
<td>13,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 to 1</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 4</td>
<td>1,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 11</td>
<td>8,792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 to 16</td>
<td>3,038</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Population Barking and Dagenham 0 to 15 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LBBD</th>
<th>Outer London</th>
<th>London</th>
<th>National comparator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population estimate figure</td>
<td>209,000</td>
<td>5,299,800</td>
<td>8,835,500</td>
<td>55,609,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 to 15 population figures</td>
<td>56,848</td>
<td>731,372.4</td>
<td>1,228,134.5</td>
<td>10,565,824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of population aged 0 to 15</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children's Book Issues 2015-2016 comparison with London authorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per 1,000 population</th>
<th>Average in London</th>
<th>London Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>154,629</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>1,296</td>
<td>28/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Fiction</td>
<td>28,202</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>26/31</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Children's Book Issues as a % of all Barking and Dagenham book issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>Average in London</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>36.70%</td>
<td>40.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Fiction</td>
<td>6.70%</td>
<td>7.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Current Context

A recent National Literacy Trust Report – Celebrating Reading for Enjoyment, published June 2017, is the findings of the annual literacy survey conducted in November/December 2016. The survey is based on data from over 40,000 school students aged 8 to 18.
Key findings of the report are summarized below.

- Girls enjoy reading more than boys 64.9% of girls compared to 52.4% of boys
- Nearly twice as many children aged 8 to 11 enjoy reading compared to those age 14 to 16 (77.6% vs 43.8%)
- The gap between boys and girls increases with age. Overall, twice as many boys aged 8 to 11 said that they enjoy reading compared with boys aged 14 to 16 (72.4% vs. 35.7%), suggesting that teenage boys are a group that are of particular concern in terms of reading enjoyment. The equivalent drop for girls is also present but not as dramatic (82.8% vs. 53.3%).

Areas of potential enquiry

The service is keen to maintain and improve its engagement with young people and in turn contribute to improving the literacy skills in the borough and the aspirations of young people themselves and the borough to enable social responsibility. The following are examples of potential areas that could be developed.

- How can libraries contribute to improving boys reading enjoyment?
- How can LBBD libraries improve uptake of active membership and stock issues among children and young people compared to other London Authorities?
- What will help young people year 7 to year 10 to still engage with reading and libraries?
- As an integral part of Community Solutions, how can the opportunities for working in new ways be optimised to make sure reading remains an essential part of the menu of options to enhance children’s education and fun?

Zoinul Abidin | Head of Universal Services | Community Solutions
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## Appendix D: Draft Children’s Services Select Committee: Work Programme 2017/18

**Chair**: Councillor Elizabeth Kangethe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting date</th>
<th>Agenda items</th>
<th>Officer/ Presenter</th>
<th>Final Papers deadline</th>
<th>Relevant Cabinet Member(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 2 October</td>
<td>Performance Update report</td>
<td>Commissioning Director, Children’s Care and Support</td>
<td>Mon 18 Sept</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>TBC</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 27 November</td>
<td>Education: Results 2017</td>
<td>Commissioning Director, Education</td>
<td>Mon 13 Nov</td>
<td>Councillor Twomey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback from Cabinet on progress of Growth Commission recommendations prioritised by the CSSC in 2016</td>
<td>Councillor Twomey</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 22 January</td>
<td>Annual Looked After Children report</td>
<td>Director of Operations, Children’s Care and Support</td>
<td>Mon 8 Jan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring report – Adoption Scrutiny Review Report</td>
<td>Councillor Worby</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weds 21 March</td>
<td>Performance Update Report</td>
<td>Commissioning Director, Children’s Care and Support</td>
<td>Mon 5 March</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy Update <em>(TBC - jointly with SSCSC members)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>