

# **ADOPTION & PERMANENCE ANNUAL REPORT**

**2015 – 2016**



## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1** The Adoption Service Annual Report provides an opportunity to set out the key achievements and challenges for the service covering the period April 2015 to March 2016 and identifies priorities for plans for the service for coming 2016-17 period.
- 1.2** This report is provided as part of the monitoring of the Adoption Service in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD) required under the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011.

## **2. Background and national developments**

- 2.1** The adoption of children from care has continued to receive national attention. This has been a key priority for over a decade with the overarching aim being to enable more children to be adopted. Local authorities and the courts have the challenging task of establishing that parents cannot safely parent a child and that there are no other family members who could care for the child. At the same time the local authorities and the courts have to work to ensure that there is a minimum of delay in securing permanence for children.
- 2.2** Whilst the aspiration is very positive there are significant challenges in finding suitable adoptive parents who want to adopt children, particularly those children who are regarded as harder to place through factors such as disability, age, ethnicity and being part of a sibling group.
- 2.3** Services have also had to work with the ongoing impact of recent case law (Re B, Re BS and Re T) which is continuing to have far reaching implications for local authorities when considering permanency for children, for whom adoption would usually be the plan. This has included an increase in the number of parental challenges to Placement Orders already granted - a Placement Order is an Order made by the Court that enables the local authority to place a child with a new family to be adopted. There have also been a number of challenges by parents to Adoption Orders, which has meant that the granting of these orders is taking longer, and as the child is already with the adopters creates uncertainty.
- 2.4** Over the past year there has been a decline in the number of Placement Orders being granted which gives a local authority permission to pursue a match with an adoptive family. In October 2015 the National Adoption Leadership Board confirmed that there had been a 24% reduction in Placement Orders being granted nationally.

- 2.5** The government is concerned about the reduction of children now being considered for adoption and is reviewing the situation with a view to considering the introduction of legislation to counteract the impact of case law.
- 2.6** In March 2016 the government document “Adoption: A vision for change” was released. This document sets out the way Adoption will be developed over the next five years until 2020. The government aims to reform the quality of the children’s social care system. Adoption reforms will be part of the wider reforms in social care.
- 2.7** Also during this last year there has been an emphasis on developing the Government’s adoption programme through Regional Adoption Agencies. Discussions have been taking place among local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs), through regional projects to plan how regionalisation will be implemented. This will have implications for the Local Authority’s adoption service over the coming year. The aim is to increase the number of children adopted in a timely way.
- 2.8** In line with the plan for more adoptive placements, the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) that came into operation on the 1 May 2015 will be expanded to include more families including inter-country adoptions and Special Guardianship placements. All adopted children will get free early education from the age of two years, pupil premium and priority school admission. This will enable adopters to work with schools to consider what individual support will be of benefit for the adopted child.
- 2.9** In the context of these challenges and the changing landscape in adoption work, the service in LBBDD has continued to work to achieve adoptive placements and permanence for children. Service plans are monitored and reviewed to take into account the needs of the children and the challenges of achieving adoption placements.
- 2.10** Planning for the period of 2015-16 followed on from the inspection by OFSTED during the April – May period of 2014. In this, and as part of the wider inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, the service was judged as requires improvement. This led to an improvement plan in which there were a number of actions identified and these have all been implemented:
- To introduce a tracker for timescales on individual cases.
  - To ensure that plans are in place for permanency for children through checks by independent reviewing officers.
  - To introduce a permanency policy.
  - To support social work staff through training and supervision about permanency planning for children.

### **3. Outcomes for Children through Adoption in 2015-16 – activity and performance.**

- 3.1** This year has been another busy period of activity within the service that has seen 28 children adopted, many with some special needs.
- 3.2** There have been 10 domestic adoptive families (not inter-country) recruited by LBBD in 2015-16, and a number of matches have been made both with internal adopters who have been waiting, and children matched with adopters from other agencies. LBBD has also provided 2 adoptive families for other local authorities both within the East London consortium, of which we are a member and another local authority. In 2013/14, there were 16 families approved and in 2014-15, there were 10 families approved.

#### **Summary of the children referred for Adoption**

- 3.3** In the period 2015-16, the number of children with ‘should be placed for adoption’ (referred to as SHOPA) decisions was 28 children and this compares with 14 children in 2014-15 - a 100 % increase.
- 3.4** The decision as to whether or not a child should be placed for adoption is made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). The ADM is the Divisional Director Complex Needs and Social Care, or the Group Manager responsible for the Adoption Service can deputise if needed.
- 3.5** The tables below provide a further analysis regarding the children.

#### **Children with Adoption Decisions**

Table 1. Approvals and Rescinded Decisions

Total children approved for adoption by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM): April 2015 - March 2016	27
Adoption plans rescinded by the ADM	0
Total no of relinquished children approved for adoption by the Adoption & Permanence Panel (relinquished by birth mother)	1
Adoption plans rescinded by the Panel	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>

Gender Breakdown	
Boys	9
Girls	19

Ethnicity	No. of individuals
White British	19
White European	4
Mixed Heritage	2
Black African	3

Age of at time of the decision by ADM or Panel	No. of individuals
Under 1 year old	6
1 year +	5
2	6
3	5
5	6

### Summary of the children who were matched with families for adoption

- 3.6** It is important to note that the number of matches in a year do not equate to the number of children adopted in that year. Adopters have to wait 10 weeks before they can apply for the Adoption Order, some might wait much longer if there are issues in the placement that they want assurances about before they make the application, there are delays in obtaining court dates and a number of hearings if parents challenge the adoption. Therefore, many matches might actually have the orders granted in the next reporting year.
- 3.7** There were 9 children who were matched with families for adoption in 2015-16. The number of children matched for adoption in this period compares with 17 in the 2014-15 period.
- 3.8** Of these 9 children, there were 7 single children and one sibling group of two children. Of these matches, 3 single children were matched with in-house adopters.

**3.9** Of the remaining 6 children who were matched to interagency adopters (adopters approved by other local authorities or voluntary adoption agencies), one match was a sibling group of two; and 4 were single children.

**Summary of children who were matched with Adopters**

Sibling Groups and Individuals	
No in Group	No of Groups
2 siblings	1
Individuals	7

**Interagency Placements**

**3.10** When adoptive parents are recruited by our own adoption team they are referred to as in-house adopters. There are occasions when our in-house adopters do not want to adopt the children we have available for adoption. When this happens, usually our children are described as ‘harder to place’, we find adoptive parents for them from other agencies, either another local authority or voluntary adoption agency. Placements with these adopters are referred to as ‘inter-agency placements.’

**3.11** We have had to reduce our recruitment of in-house adopter activity because the number of children available for adoption is declining and there is a surplus of adopters nationwide. Our ongoing recruitment will focus on families who are willing to consider children who are ‘harder to place’ as these are the children who wait longer because adopters are not as ‘readily available’ as for small babies. We continue to have joint recruitment activities with the East London Consortium members in order to attract more adopters, provide a richer recruitment experience for our adoptive families and because this is a more efficient process than working as a single agency.

Table 7. Interagency placements bought and sold 2015/16	
Purchased (£)	Sold (£)
£178,000 (8 families)	£27,000 ( 1 family)
<b>Total</b> £178,000	<b>Total</b> £27,000

- 3.12** The cost of an interagency placement is approximately £27,000 for one child (or £29,700 if purchased from a London adoption agency); and £43,000 for sibling groups of two (London fee is £47,300).
- 3.13** The DfE Adoption Reform Grant (introduced in 2015) funded the purchasing of interagency placements and the local authority has been reimbursed for the placements purchased.
- 3.14** In 2012 the government increased the rate for the purchase of interagency placement across local authorities in an attempt to introduce a 'level playing field' with voluntary agencies. Prior to 2012, local authority interagency placements cost approximately £9000 and voluntary adoption agency rates were £27,000. Local authorities tended to buy placements from each other rather than voluntary adoption agencies. LBBDD bought 8 adoptive families in this period and sold one family.

#### **Summary of the children who were adopted**

- 3.15** The total number of children who were adopted during this period was 28. This constitutes 11% of children exiting from care which compares with 17% nationally, 12.9% for statistical neighbours and 8.9% in London. This compares with 17 children who were adopted in the 2013-14 period and 32 children adopted in the 2014-15 period.
- 3.16** The service has however continued to be successful in placing 'hard to place' children, including sibling groups and older children .

#### **Total number of Adoption Orders Granted April 2015 - March 2016**

Total number of Adoption Orders Granted April 2015 - March 2016 for LBBDD children	28
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#### **Gender Breakdown**

Gender Breakdown	
Boys	10
Girls	18

#### **Ethnicity Breakdown**

Ethnicity	No. of individuals
White British	16
White European	4
Mixed Heritage (Black/white)	4
Black UK	2
Asian	2



#### Age Breakdown

Ages	No. of individuals
0 - 3	16
4 - 7	8
8 - 12	4

#### Sibling Groups and Individuals

Sibling Groups and Individuals	
No in Group	No of Groups
2 siblings	5 (pairs)
3 siblings	0
Individuals	18

#### 4. Impact of new Regulation, Guidance and Case law

- 4.1** Whilst the number of children placed for adoption has fallen, there has been a continual rise in the number of children placed with family under Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). Special Guardianship orders came into force on 30th December 2005, as part of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, Section 115. A Special Guardianship Order is an Order granted by the courts. It offers a real alternative to long-term foster placements or adoption for those children who, for whatever, reason cannot live with their birth parents.
- 4.2** Special Guardianship allows children to remain within the family unit or another significant person. It allows children to have a sense of permanency. The evidence suggests that these are children who would have previously been placed for adoption. We have placed 14 children under three years old with family under SGO, who might otherwise have been placed for adoption.
- 4.3** The impact of this turnaround in the numbers of children available for adoption has meant that we now have more adopters approved and waiting for placements than ever before. This trend is mirrored by many other Adoption Agencies nationwide, who eagerly embraced the government's initiatives to 'drive up' adopter recruitment.
- 4.4** The consequence is that many local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) have a surplus of adopters for a rapidly diminishing pool of sought-after children i.e single children, under the age of 2, without known complexities in their backgrounds or their needs.
- 4.5** The situation in Barking and Dagenham is that there were 5 couples and 3 single adopters who were waiting for a child as at the end of March 2016. Overall however we have been successful in placing children with the adopters we approve. At the time of writing (May 2016) we only have 2 single

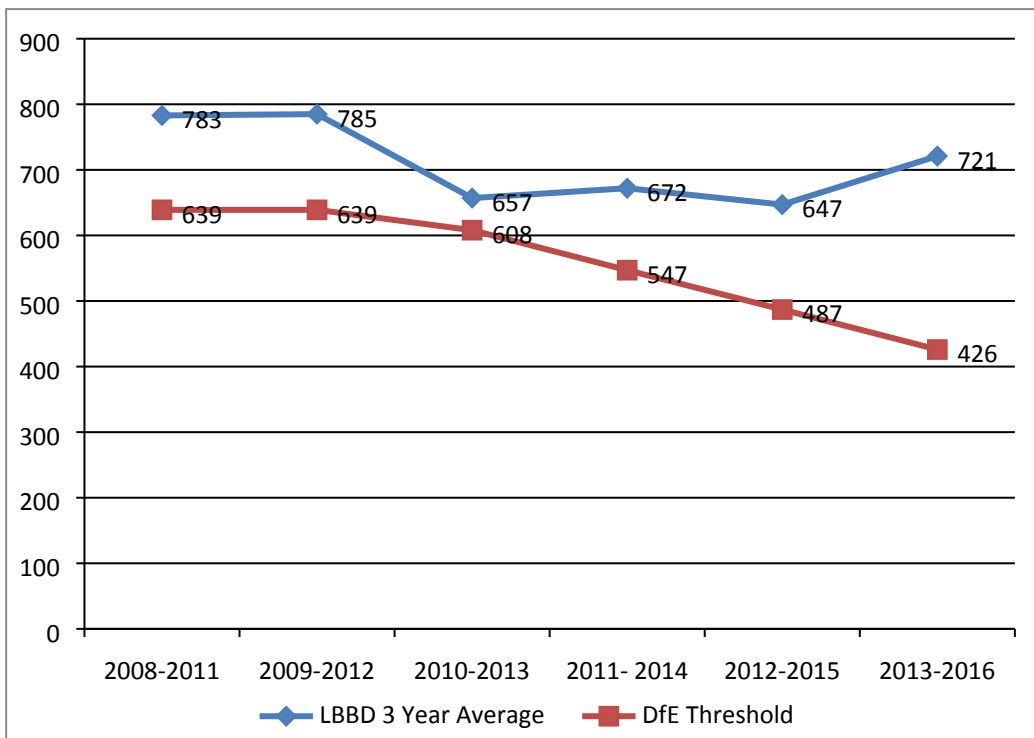
adopters and 1 couple waiting for a child, but these families require careful matching

**5. Timeliness: the adoption scorecard**

**5.1** The Adoption Scorecard is a tool introduced by the DfE in 2012 in relation to the adoption of children across local authorities. Two key indicators, A1 and A2, in the Adoption Scorecard measure the timeliness of adoption. The descriptors for A1 and A2 are set out below.

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

**A1 - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)**

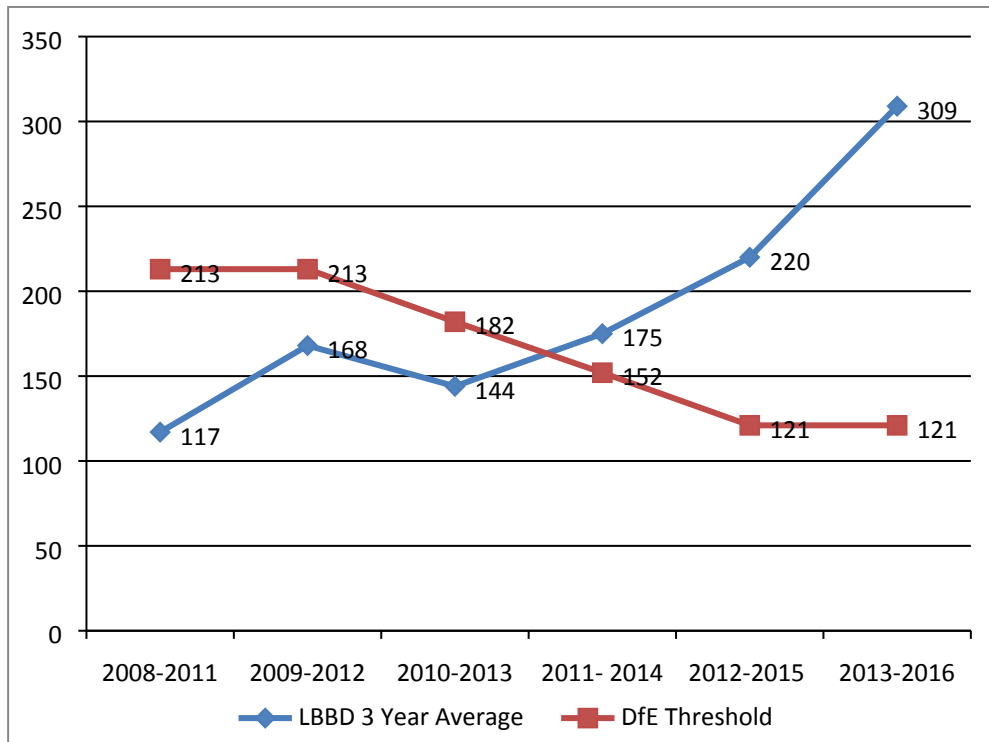


**5.2** The Adoption Team at Barking and Dagenham has successfully placed children considered 'hard to place' which has been a good outcome for those children. However, this good practice has adversely impacted the scorecard which indicates performance well above target. This means that the timeliness in relation to the scorecard does not portray the true picture in

terms of outcomes for the child, in that they have best outcomes for their future adoption, even though they may have waited longer to be placed.

- 5.3** The adoption scorecard measures performance over a 3 year rolling average. Our three year rolling average has increased from 647 days for 2012-15 to 721 days for 2013-16. This is due to our previous 12/13 good performance (585 days) being removed from the calculation and our 15/16 performance (769 days) being added.
- 5.4** The performance for the A1 indicator was 295 days above the DfE threshold. This is being addressed as a priority for action in the 2016-17 period but it is important to note that this area of performance is likely to get worse due to the time it takes to place children with complex needs who have waited a long time for adoptive families. This time period takes account of the date of entry into care, rehabilitation options to family, length of care proceedings, match being approved by Adoption Panel and ADM and introductions period prior to placement. We have however been successful in placing children who have complex needs.
- 5.5** As part of addressing the issues which have arisen from this area of performance, the Adoption Improvement Group meets regularly to discuss the situation and how those involved can work more effectively. The group will be monitoring the performance over the coming year. This will include checking on a case by case basis that there is no drift in developing permanency plans for children from the time they enter care. In addition, the performance within care proceedings and meeting the deadline of 26 weeks will continue to be scrutinised in conjunction with our Legal colleagues.

**A2 - Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)**



**5.6** The three year rolling average has increased from 220 days for 2012-15 to 309 days for 2013-16 and shows a decline in performance. This is due to our good performance (149 days) in 2012-13 being removed from the calculation and our performance (375 days) in 2015-16 being added. We are now 188 days above the DfE threshold.

**5.7** Again it is important to explain that some of the children that have been placed for adoption have complex needs which have impacted on the timescales for family finding with the government expected timeframe. Examples include:

- One male child with a diagnosis of autism (1244 days for A1).
- One male child with severe medical issues and dual heritage (719 days)
- Sibling group of three children (811 days).
- One female child who was visually impaired (645 days)
- One male child aged 10 (970 days)

**5.8** The quickest time we were able to achieve placement within this indicator was 44 days for a White British 1 year old girl with no additional needs. We were also able to place a White British 1 year old boy with no additional

needs within 87 days and a sibling group of 2 girls within 109 days (match from the Adoption Activity Day).

## **6. Adopters**

### **Recruitment Activity- 2015-2016**

**6.1** In order to promote adoption activity a range of activities take place. Activity between April 2015 to March 2016 included:

- Coordinated presence at external events including stands at Queens Hospital and St Georges Day and presence at dedicated adoption events – national and local ‘Exchange events’.
- Co-ordinating and promoting 9 adoption information events.
- Professional photography for all children with adoption as their plan.
- Joint working with East London Adoption Marketing Group - boroughs are Havering, Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Newham and Tower Hamlets. Outcomes include a new website for East London Adoption.
- New branding for adoption rolled out across all materials including adopter and children’s profiles, stands and give-aways.
- We give out enquiry booklet for prospective adopters when asked and at information evenings.
- We continue to post a short film about adopters’ journeys with us – used on social media and Lbbd.gov.uk website.
- Uploading profiles on adoption link and managing enquiries.

**6.2** We continue to consider traditional and new initiatives to identify adoptive families for children needing placements. To this end, we became members of “Adoption Link” (an on-line web search for adopters to identify potential matches themselves, similar to the National Adoption Register) and “New Family Social” (an organisation which supports LGBT prospective and approved adopters), and attended a further 2 Adoption Activity Days – from which 1 placement (1 x sibling group of 2) were made.

**6.3** Adoption Activity Days are fun events that are held for children who are considered to be harder to place and for adopters to meet them in an informal setting. The aim is to break down preconceptions about such children and for matches to be ‘adopter driven’ by making connections with children who they may not have considered previously. The success rate for matches from these events is approximately 18%. We have had 12 children attend the two Activity Days during 2015 – 16 and 2 were matched (16.6%).

**6.4** We did not make any official “Fostering for Adoption” placements. This is a scheme where carers are dual approved as both adopters and foster carers. This approach enables those approved to adopt to have a child placed with

them as a foster child while the process continues through to adoption. There is an increased risk with these placements because the child could return home to their birth family. The child selected for fostering to adopt must be chosen carefully to prevent this. The local authority only selects children where it strongly anticipates that they will go on to be adopted by their carers. However, we did place a baby with an adoptive couple under fostering regulations after the placement order was granted, to ensure safety of this child in their new family out of the area. The child remained under fostering regulations until the adoption order was granted.

- 6.5** Fostering to Adopt schemes are not appropriate for all situations as the adopters have to bond with a child as well as managing the risk that the child will be returned to their family. However, if this arrangement is considered appropriate it is extremely beneficial to the child who has no change of carer, which is preferable for maintaining attachments to their primary carer.

### Summary of Adopters

- 6.6** There have been 12 adoptive families approved during the 2015-16 period which compares with 17 families approved in the 2014-15 period.

- 6.7** The figure of 12 families approved includes two families that were inter-country adopters.

### Number of couples/Single adoptive families 2015-16 (Figures for 2014-15 in brackets)

Couples	9 (8)
Single Adopter (female)	3 (3)

- 6.8** Recruitment of adopters has been relatively low due to the fact that there are a number of adopters waiting who do not have placements. Potential applicants are therefore aware that they will be competing with a larger cohort than previously for the preferred profile of younger children with no complex needs.

- 6.9** It should be noted that there are numbers of children with SHOPA decisions, who have special needs; which in turn will require us to balance the numbers of prospective adopters recruited in the future to meet the needs of harder to place children.

- 6.10** We have made efforts to recruit a more diverse group of prospective adopters who are willing to consider hard to place children, primarily siblings and children with additional needs.

## 6.11 Types of Adopters

Types of Adopters		
New adopters (families) Including 3 foster carer couples	12	
	3 single applicants	9 couples
2 <sup>nd</sup> Time adopters	0 single applicant	0 couple

### Ethnicity of Approved Adopters - Couples

Couples	
White British	9
White British/Black British	0
White European/Black British	0

### Ethnicity of Approved Adopters – Single carers

Single Adopters	
Asian Pakistani	1
Black British	2 (inter-country adopters)
White British	0

**6.12** To provide additional support to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender adopters, as mentioned above, we are members of, “New Family Social” a registered charity that works closely with adoption and fostering agencies across the UK. We have approved 1 same sex couple this year.

## 7. Disruptions of adoptive placements

**7.1** A disruption is the breakdown of an adoption placement. There have been no disruptions, post placement or post Order, during this reporting period.

## 8. Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

**8.1** There were no appeals to the IRM in the period 2015-16. The IRM is an independent body to review fostering and adoption agencies’ decisions not to

approve applicants. The IRM will make a recommendation to the agency but the ADM makes the final decision about approval.

## **9. Adoption Panel**

- 9.1. The Borough's Adoption and Permanence Panel meets monthly to make recommendations to the Divisional Director Complex Needs and Social Care, who acts as the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), with regard to the approval of prospective adopters and the matching of children with specific families.
- 9.2. Additional panels can be convened as necessary, although this was not required during this period. One panel meeting was cancelled in January as there were no cases to present.
- 9.3. The composition of the Panel is in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2011, and includes independent members. The Chair is an independent person who has significant experience of adoption work.
- 9.4. The Panel representatives are committed and attend regularly with unplanned apologies being rare. The purpose of the Central List representative is to provide additional capacity.
- 9.5. Newly recruited social workers are also offered the opportunity to observe Panel as part of their induction.
- 9.6. The Divisional Director Complex Needs and Social Care is the Agency Decision Maker and is responsible for the annual appraisal of the Panel Chair.

## **10. The Adoption Team**

10.1 The Adoption Team consists of :

- 1 Team Manager
- 1 Deputy Team Manager
- 1.5 Post Adoption Social Workers
- 1 Play Therapist – pre and post order support and sibling group work
- 1 Training and Life Story Social Worker
- 3 Adoption Social Workers undertaking recruitment of adopters & family finding
- 2 Special Guardianship Social Workers

## **11. Adoption Support Services**

11.1 The provision of adoption support services continues to feature heavily in the Government's current adoption reform. From the 1st May 2015, the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) became operational as recognition that many adoptive



families will require additional therapeutic support throughout their adoption journey. This funding is for therapeutic support for adopters and children which can be purchased externally and funded by ASF. During 2015-16 LBBD secured £45,436 from the ASF.

- 11.2** Currently the service has 1½ social worker posts, supported by our in-house Play Therapist, who provide support to birth and adoptive families who require a service. The play therapist has worked individually with 14 adoptive families providing therapeutic support. She works with the adoptive families and children both pre-order and post adoption order.
- 11.3** The number of families in receipt of post adoption support packages (not 'one off' advice) for support that was provided on any date between 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015 was: 10

#### **Requests for Assessments for post adoption support**

How many requests for assessments for post-adoption support did you receive from families	10
Of the requests for assessments, how many assessments resulted in the provision of support	10
Of the requests for assessments, how many assessments did not result in the provision of support	0
Of the requests for assessments, how many assessments were still being carried out at 31 March 2014	0

#### **Post Adoption Support Packages**

Number of families in receipt of post-adoption support packages (not one off advice) funded by LBBD	4
Number of families in receipt of post-adoption support packages (not one off advice) funded by another local authority or voluntary adoption agency	0
Number of families in receipt of post-adoption support packages (not one off advice) funded by another route (e.g. the Adoption Support Fund)	6
Total number of families in receipt of post-adoption support packages (not one off advice)	10

**11.4** The service provided support to a number of adults who have been adopted

Number of families in receipt of adult adoptees support packages (not one off advice) funded by LBBD	10
Number of families in receipt of adult adoptees support packages (not one off advice) funded by another local authority or voluntary adoption agency	10
Number of families in receipt of adult adoptees support packages (not one off advice) funded by another route (e.g. the Adoption Support Fund)	0
Total number of families in receipt of adult adoptees support packages (not one off advice)	20

**12. Special Guardianship and support**

**12.1** The service also has responsibilities regarding special guardianship orders and arrangements which have increased as adoption orders have decreased.

**12.2** The overall number of Special Guardianship Orders granted, which is 49, includes 33 who have exited care as a result of this order being made. There are 16 children who were made the subject of Special Guardianship Orders and were not in care but for whom the local authority has responsibilities to consider the arrangement and support required.

**12.3** The number of children - 49 – made the subject of a Special Guardianship Order in the 2015-16 period compares with 28 in 2013-14 and with 35 in 2014-15. This is a performance of 13% for the children exiting care and this compared with the national figure of 11.3%, with 9.5% for statistical neighbours and with 10.6% for London.

<b>Total number of Special Guardianship Orders granted:</b>	49
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Gender Breakdown	
Boys	26
Girls	23

Ages	No. of individuals
0 – 3	16
4 – 7	9
8-12	12
13+	12

**12.4** Information regarding the breakdown of special guardianship orders is that there have been 6 breakdowns in these arrangements:

- 1 child has gone to live with grandparents
- 1 child put back in foster care.
- 4 children have returned home to mother

**12.5** There were 49 Special Guardianship Support packages completed in the period 2015-16. This support includes direct work with many families relating to contact, child's behaviour and financial arrangements.

**12.6** Special Guardians' Support Groups have been held six times in the year a year and on average 5 – 10 people attend. This group's remit is to support special guardians in dealing with issues related to the parenting of the children, managing contact with their birth parents, financial issues etc.

**12.7** Parent Support Groups have been arranged to take place three times in the year but take up is very low with only one parent attended the last group. The focus of this group is to enable parents to come together to share experiences of their children living with alternative carers, support each other and help them recognise the issues that led to separation from their children. It will also assist with contact issues.

**12.8** Special events have been arranged over the course of the year with a summer picnic – 4 families attended and a Christmas lunch – 10 families attended.

### **13. Training, awareness and consultation**

- 13.1** The team provide regular consultations for social workers who are considering plans for children to achieve the best outcome.
- 13.2** Presentations about special guardianship have taken place at team meetings twice a year at all the Children's Services team meetings including: Learn to Live, Children in Care, Care Management and Children with Disabilities teams.
- 13.3** Training regarding adoption and special guardianship is part of the annual training plan and programme for social workers across the service

### **14. Finance**

- 14.1** The annual budget for Adoption and SGO allowances is £2,836,210. The spend exceeded the budget by £590,824 meaning that the total spend was £3,427,034.
- 14.2** It is important to note that almost all allowances are less than the cost of in-house foster care rates, which would be the minimum amount that each child subject to permanent orders would cost if they had remained looked after.

### **15. Achievements in 2015-16**

- 15.1** The service has seen 28 children adopted during the course of the 2015-16 period. Whilst this is a decrease from 32 in the previous year it is important to put this in context of the number of children placed who have needs which mean that they are harder to place and the national and regional context of reducing numbers of adoption orders being granted for children due to the impact of case law.
- 15.2** There has been a sustained number of 'should be placed for adoption' (SHOPA) decisions, which is not reflected nationally (see paragraph 2.8).
- 15.3** Positively there have been no disruptions for children whose situation is either pre adoption order or post adoption order.
- 15.4** The service has made successful applications to the Adoption Support Fund and Inter Agency Support fund generating reimbursement/income of £223,436.
- 15.5** The Adoption Panel has worked well with consistently positive feedback from attendees.
- 15.6** There has been good joint working within the East London Consortium on recruitment and matching.

**15.7** The introduction of Special Guardianship support and training in recognition of the significant increase in activity in this area of permanency planning for children.

**16. Challenges and service plan priorities for 2016-17**

**16.1** We can be very clear about the key challenges which face the service regarding the adoption of children where this is considered to be in her/his best interest and to achieve the most positive outcomes. These are incorporated in to the action plan for the service for 2016-17.

- a) Improving the timeliness of achieving adoption.
- b) Ensuring that the plan for the recruitment of adopters is geared to encouraging applicants to meet the diverse range of the Borough's children's needs.
- c) Ensuring that the Borough's service is responsive to national developments and expectations about performance in adoption.
- d) In recognition of the challenges for achieving successful and timely adoption for children an Adoption Improvement Group has been established and will oversee the practice regarding adoption. This group is chaired by Divisional Director Complex Needs and Social Care and will have a case by case overview of the activity and timescales involved.
- e) Detailed case by case scrutiny of planning and timescales to ensure that appropriate cases are progressed in a timely way and tracked; work is carried out to rescind placement orders for children who are the subject of placement orders where the original plan was for adoption but this is no longer the care plan ; and use of Special Guardianship Orders as an alternative appropriate option for permanency where adoption is not achievable
- f) Monitor and review arrangements regarding special guardianship and the support plans for these given the increasing numbers.
- g) Support social work staff in their permanency planning for children, including adoption, through consultation, training and guidance including input from managers, Independent Reviewing Officers and the Court Progression Officer.
- h) Work with partners and make use of Adoption Support Fund (ASF) initiatives locally and regionally through the East London consortium
- i) Plan for the Government's regionalisation programme along with continuing to develop and embed the adoption reforms in response to the Government's Action Plan for Adoption and those announced in the

new Education and Adoption Bill. The Bill may have implications for adoption in that there will be a requirement that the court must have greater scrutiny of family assessments and may reject riskier family placements, resulting in an increase of children with adoption plans.

- j) Increase the Central List for Adoption Panel.

**Marie Ologbosere, Team Manager Adoption Team**  
**Joanne Tarbutt, Group Manager, Looked After Children Services**

**17 August 2016**