



Adopt London East Annual Report April 2020 to March 2021

Background information

The Department for Education (DfE) paper, Regionalizing Adoption proposed the move to Regional Adoption Agencies [RAA] in order to:

- Speed up matching.
- Improve adopter recruitment and adoption support.
- Reduce costs.
- Improve the life chances of vulnerable children.

All Local Authorities must join a Regional Adoption Agency by April 2020. Feedback from Regional Adoption Agencies in operation for a year or more is positive. Adopters report on improved services and staff on improved job satisfaction. Ofsted reports on Local Authorities with adoption services delivered regionally have been universally positive.

The government continues to drive forward with the structural reform programme regarding regionalising adoption and all but a handful of authorities are either in a live Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) or in an RAA which will go live by October 2020. The government have noted the significant progress in cutting the time children wait to be placed with their adoptive parents and this is a positive outcome for children. However, both the number of registrations of interest and approved adopters nationally, regionally and locally within East London have fallen in recent years. An increase in expressions of interest has been sustained since the service went live last October and we anticipate this will increase the number of adopters approved in 2020/21

The adoption functions of Tower Hamlets, Newham and Barking and Dagenham were delegated on the 1st October 2019 to the London Borough of Havering within terms drawn up in a detailed partnership agreement. Adopt London East (ALE) formally commenced operational activity on this date.

Adopt London East works in close collaboration with the 'Adopt London' adoption agencies who provide services for 23 Local Authorities in total. In this way we are able to develop a London wide profile, develop economies of scale and share best practice.

Outcomes

Adopt London East is committed to improving outcomes for children for whom the plan is adoption through:

- Increase in the percentage of children adopted from care



- Improved timescales for placing children with adoptive families
- Fewer adoption placement disruptions
- More children placed in an early permanence placement
- Reduction in the number of children for whom the permanence plan has changed from adoption
- Improved timescales for adopter assessments
- Higher conversion rate from enquiry to approval
- Fewer prospective adopter approvals rescinded
- More timely matching of approved adopters

Scope of service

Adopt London East has responsibility for all adoption led services:

- Recruitment and assessment of adopters.
- Family finding and matching
- Adoption support.

Responsibility for the child remains with the Local Authority. The Local Authority will therefore remain responsible for the child's progress through the court system and for final decisions in respect of care and adoption planning.

Adopt London East has a responsibility for support to Local Authority social workers including dissemination of information on regulation and best practice

Design Principles

The Board agreed the following design principles

- Local delivery - Responsive to the needs of the community
- Close relationships with children's social workers
- Economies of scale
- Cross local authority working
- Innovation and service improvement
- Evolving service design – one size may not fit all
- Provide value for money
- Service informed through the voice of adoptive families

Adopter Voice

Adopters in East London contribute to service development through the Adopt London commissioning arrangements with 'We are Family', a London wide peer-led organisation delivering support to adopters.

The voice of our adopted children was captured through a partnership with 'Body and Soul'. We plan to re-commission this service in 2021/22



Service development post go-live

Governance

All service functions and relationships are detailed within the partnership agreement. The agreement includes:

- Governance
- Finances and Budget setting
- Data sharing agreement
- Dispute resolution
- Termination of agreement

The Ale Partnership board has met on 4 occasions in 2020/21.

The partnership board comprises of ADCS or their representatives with delegation of authority. These members have responsibility for all partnership decisions

Service delivery

The central head office is in Havering but staff also have a local base in each Local Authority. In this way we aim to ensure that the existing close working and supportive relationships with children's social work staff and partner agencies remain absolutely central to our practice.

Throughout 2020/21 due to Covid restrictions all staff have primarily worked from home. Adopt London East has followed national and local guidance and as such working practices have adapted to periods of lockdown and easement. The service has continued to provide all services and to undertake face to face work where necessary and safe to do so. Working from home has proven to be highly efficient and where it benefits the service, workers will continue to be able to home work. Plans are in place for a partial return to face to face staff meetings in 2021 following further easement of restrictions.

Adopt London East and the Havering Liquidlogic support team worked jointly on a project to develop Liquidlogic capacity to operate an adoption file system. This work identified that the Havering Liquidlogic LCS system was unable to host easily retrievable and secure adoption files. A solution has been identified and a workspace purchased. Further work is ongoing to develop appropriate pathways and generate forms. Family finding and adoption support case files are currently held on a secure drive. Recruitment and Assessment files are now held on Liquidlogic.

We also have agreements in place that locally based adoption staff will continue to be able to access LA systems. The practicalities of access have proven challenging but work is underway to resolve this

Although services are delivered locally we are also able to work together to develop a more responsive service. This helps us to recruit more adopters to meet our children's identified



needs and to provide better support through a core offer delivered by the adoption support workers in partnership with local agencies.

The central ALE panel was developed in phase 2 of go-live. In-house panels have been in operation since by the end of May 2020. Two panel chairs ensure panels are able to meet every 2 weeks in order to support timeliness. The panel makes recommendations in respect of both adopter approval and child matches. Decisions in respect of child matches continue to be made by the Agency Decision Maker in the LA with responsibility for the child. The ALE HOS acts as ADM for decisions in respect of approval of adopters.

The panel has met virtually since commencement of operation. This has provided some benefits for panel members and adopters alike in terms of ease of attendance. All but one prospective couple responded positively about the virtual experience. Decisions regarding continuation of virtual or direct panels will be made in line with easement of regulations and consideration of the costs and benefits.

Staffing

Adopt London East has permanent managers in all posts and has only one agency worker covering maternity leave. Three posts are vacant. Two have been successfully recruited to and the third will be re-advertised as soon as possible. A further agency or seconded worker will be required to cover maternity leave.

Service demand has been high and three additional posts were created within budget in 2020/21.

- Stage 1 recruitment and assessment coordinator – to ensure a speedy response to all enquirers and efficient transition through the early stages of assessment
- Family finding social worker – to assist in response to an increasing volume of work. We have been unable to recruit to this post to date
- Contact coordinator – to assist in response to increasing demand for this work

All staff have responded positively to the challenge of working from home during Covid restrictions. All staff had previously been issued with portable tablets and headphones to assist in home working. Risk assessments have been used to ensure individual staff needs are met. Social work is a face to face activity and although many meetings were held virtually, where necessary and safe to do so direct visits have continued to take place. Some workers are now partially office based in order to ensure letterbox contact continues. This service was placed on temporary hold during full lockdown. All visits including office visits are subject to individual risk assessment.

We have learned a lot during this period of enforced remote working and will continue to undertake many functions remotely where it is efficient to do so without detriment to the quality of service provided.

Work was undertaken with the senior leadership team, the management team and with all staff to establish the vision and values of Adopt London East. We have worked to maintain this whilst working remotely.



Ongoing development work has continued with all staff regarding the importance of relationships as we build the Adopt London East profile within all Local Authorities, working in a culture of high support and high challenge. Remote visits have taken the place of direct office bases but have worked well

Weekly remote team meetings and fortnightly service meetings have ensured we maintain a clear service focus and provide mutual support. We provide space for informal conversations, mirroring 'coffee break' spaces as far as possible. At times of challenge other means of coming together have been used.

Sadly one valued social worker in the family finding team died in January following a brief battle with Covid. She has been sorely missed by all. Additional support was offered to all staff. The strength of the service was reflected in the ways in which all supported each other and also ensured her work was completed in her memory.

Business and Service support

Adopt London East has three Business Support Officers (BSO's) who provide a dedicated service. The BSO's are line managed within Havering Business support teams.

ICT and systems development

All staff have use of a Havering supplied laptop and mobile phone. Laptops have Skype and Teams connectivity and mobile headsets.

Social work staff also need access to constituent Local Authority ICT systems in order to access information for the purposes of family finding and adoption support. This has proven to be challenging. Interim arrangements are in place in all LA's and more permanent solutions are in development.

The migration of casework data onto Liquid Logic (LL) was hampered by challenges in system development. Development work was complicated by an incomplete transfer from the development team to the permanent LL support team. Recruitment and Assessment files are completed and uploaded. It was essential to develop a new pathway for family finding and adoption support files. Work on adoption support files has nearly concluded. The family finding work involves a restructure of the Havering pathway and is being managed through a task and finish group chaired by the ALE HOS.

Service accessibility

Adopters, prospective adopters, birth families and professionals may access the service through the Adopt London website, by email or by telephone. The duty telephone is staffed by Business Support Officers (BSO's) between 9 and 5 each weekday. The BSO's have been trained in telephone response. Each team operates a duty response system and calls forwarded from BSO's are usually answered quickly. A high turn-over and vacancy rate within the BSO service has impacted on our response rates and also on social work staff who answer calls in the absence of the BSO. Work is ongoing to resolve this.

Adoption Panel

Adoption panels initially remained in Local Authority in order to allow other aspects of the service to bed in prior to go-live of panels. Adopt London East panels became operational on 27th May 2020. All panel members also attended webinar training prior to panel. This



included an overview of Adopt London East, updates on regulation and best practice and a welcome from the panel chairs.

Two highly experienced panel chairs have been recruited together with a central list of panel members. Panel member expertise includes adoption experienced social workers, adopters, care leavers and professionals from a range of backgrounds. Two panels operate per month with additional panels where necessary. Panels are currently held virtually. Panel papers are sent securely through egress.

Medical advisors provide advice to panel on their own children either in writing or directly to panel.

Legal advice to panel is provided by the Havering legal team though legal advice in respect of an individual child's care plan remains with the Local Authority.

Partnership work

Adopt London East coordinated a London wide group of virtual school heads, teachers and therapeutic service providers aiming to promote a pan London approach to trauma informed schools. This has encouraged conversations and supported development of professional networks. A Pan London virtual training session with Louise Bomber an expert in the field was attended by over 100 professionals.

It has proven difficult to engage with the CCG's at a strategic level during times of Covid but positive operational service relationships have developed. The panel advisor has positive relationships with all designated Doctors and individual social workers have developed positive working relationships with providers. A more strategic approach will bring dividends and will be followed when capacity allows.

We have commissioned Cornerstone, an adopter led organisation to provide a specialist virtual reality tool to assist in one to one support and training for our adopters.

We have also commissioned PAC-UK to provide a helpline and one to one counselling. This service is also available to birth families. We plan to re-commission the birth family support service as a pan London service in 2021/22

All Intercountry adoption assessments are undertaken by 'Inter Country Adoption'. This commissioned service provides specific expertise and value for money in provision of a highly complex area of adoption work. Some post assessment work remains in-house.

We work closely with We are Family, an adopter led support group providing support to families across London. We are Family have adapted to Covid requirements through development of an online webinar and podcast based service. Adopt London has partially funded these highly successful initiatives. We also work in partnership with New Family Social who support LGBTQ adopters.

Adopt London HOS meet with the Voluntary sector stakeholder group on a quarterly basis. We also purchase bespoke therapeutic provision through use of the Adoption Support Fund. This work is commissioned from a range of registered adoption support providers.

A separate sub group considers the means to promote adopter sufficiency.

Covid fund response



The DfE funded Adoption Support Fund was extended in 2020 to allow regional adoption agencies to provide enhanced support to adoptive families and those caring for children on a Special Guardianship Order. In total Adopt London had £800,000 in funds to provide a flexible and immediate response. Special Guardians are supported by individual Local Authorities in all but one of the RAAs. We worked closely with our LA partners to ensure we provided comprehensive support for all our families.

We commissioned services from 13 agencies. These included:

- Helpline
- Brief interventions
- Counselling and support
- Practical support for special guardians
- Direct support for adoptive children and teens
- Training and group support

The four Adopt London head of service worked jointly with all Voluntary sector partners to provide an innovative and flexible service whereby adopters accessing the helpline could be referred onto a number of differing interventions on the basis of an immediate assessment of need.

Feedback in respect of these services was extremely positive. An evaluation of this approach was undertaken by Hugh Thornberry, a renowned expert in adoption in the UK. Hugh reflected the positive experience of our adoptive families and also the added value felt by our voluntary sector partners in this permissive approach.

This work was fed into the DfE review of the Adoption Support Fund and was commented on positively. We hope this will inform decisions as to how to allocate funds in the future.

Performance information 2020/21

Best Interest/SHOBPA decision

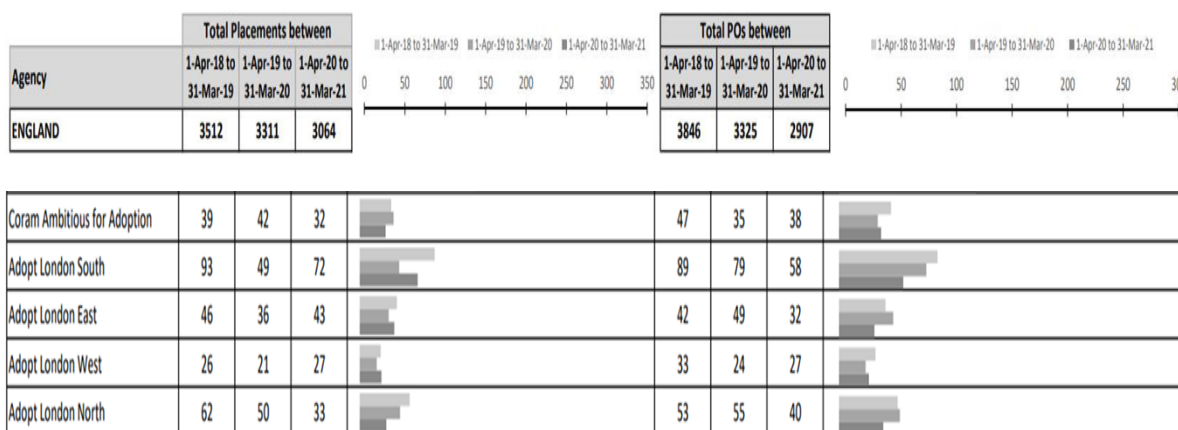




The number of decisions made in each Local Authority by the Agency Decision Maker that a child should be placed for adoption (SHOBPA) have decreased overall over the last three years in all London RAA's. Three of the five (including ALE) saw an increase in 2019/20 and subsequent decrease. It may be that Covid regulations impacted on the LA's ability to progress cases. The decline in numbers echoes the England figures.

In all cases the number of SHOBPA decisions per 10,000 of the population is lower than the England average (London LA's typically place more children in extended family placements under a Special Guardianship Order). ALE has roughly the same percentage of children placed as all other London RAAs except ALW where the placement rate is considerably lower.

Placement orders and children placed



Placement orders are granted by the court during care proceedings following review of the ADM decision that the child should be placed for adoption. Care proceedings are complex and not all children with an agency decision will be granted a placement order, however the number of placement orders made roughly mirrors the number of SHOBPA decisions made as would be expected.

The overall number of adoptive placements made in England has decreased over the course of the last 3 years. All Adopt London agencies went live in mid-2019/20 and the number of placements made dipped as a result of the transition. Adopt London East and West have both placed numbers comparable to 2018/19 in 2020/21 all other services have seen a significant reduction.

Overall numbers placed across each RAA vary considerably and are largely dependent on the number of LA's the RAA serves. ALE performance equates to an average of 11 placements per LA. The other RAA's average is considerably lower and ranges from 3.5 to 8 placements per LA

RAA	Number placed	Number of LA's	Average per LA
Coram	32	9	3.5
AL South	72	9	8
AL East	43	4	11
AL West	27	4	7
AL North	33	6	5.5



Adoption Orders

Agency	Total AOs between		
	1-Apr-18 to 31-Mar-19	1-Apr-19 to 31-Mar-20	1-Apr-20 to 31-Mar-21
ENGLAND	3521	3427	2863



Agency	1-Apr-18 to 31-Mar-19	1-Apr-19 to 31-Mar-20	1-Apr-20 to 31-Mar-21
Coram Ambitious for Adoption	51	33	35
Adopt London South	80	91	51
Adopt London East	50	44	42
Adopt London West	19	30	25
Adopt London North	76	45	37

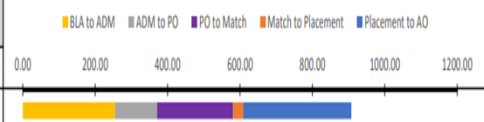
The number of adoption orders granted in each year will follow the number of placements made.

The England numbers have shown a steady decline in reflection of the reduction in placements made. The decline steepened in 2020/21 at least partially due to delays in court following Covid restrictions.

Numbers across London have also declined. The decline in ALE is not as steep as elsewhere following concerted work with the East London Courts.

Childs journey timescales

Agency	BLA to ADM	# ADMs	ADM to PO	# POs	PO to match	# matches	Match to placement	# placed	Placement to AO	# AOs
Target timescale (days)*	182		91		121		31		274	
ENGLAND	255	3731	117	2907	210	2946	28	3064	299	2863



Coram Ambitious for Adoption	261	56	114	38	161	29	23	32	308	35
Adopt London South	251	72	86	58	228	70	36	72	309	51
Adopt London East	236	38	163	32	215	40	21	43	364	42
Adopt London West	205	25	105	27	192	22	31	27	373	25
Adopt London North	232	56	105	40	256	29	57	33	420	37

Timescales for each individual child will vary considerably and a lengthy journey to adoption for a single child will impact on overall figures.

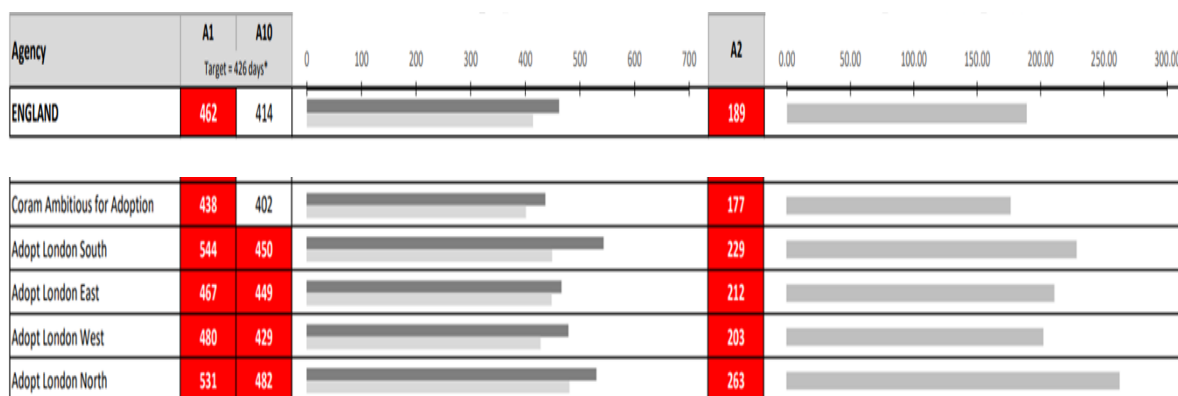
As can be seen most government set targets are not met by any RAA.

ALE achieves the set targets in timescales from match to place and performs better than England average and London RAAs in this field. Overall however ALE timescales are higher than England averages. Timescale delays are most marked in the early stages of decision



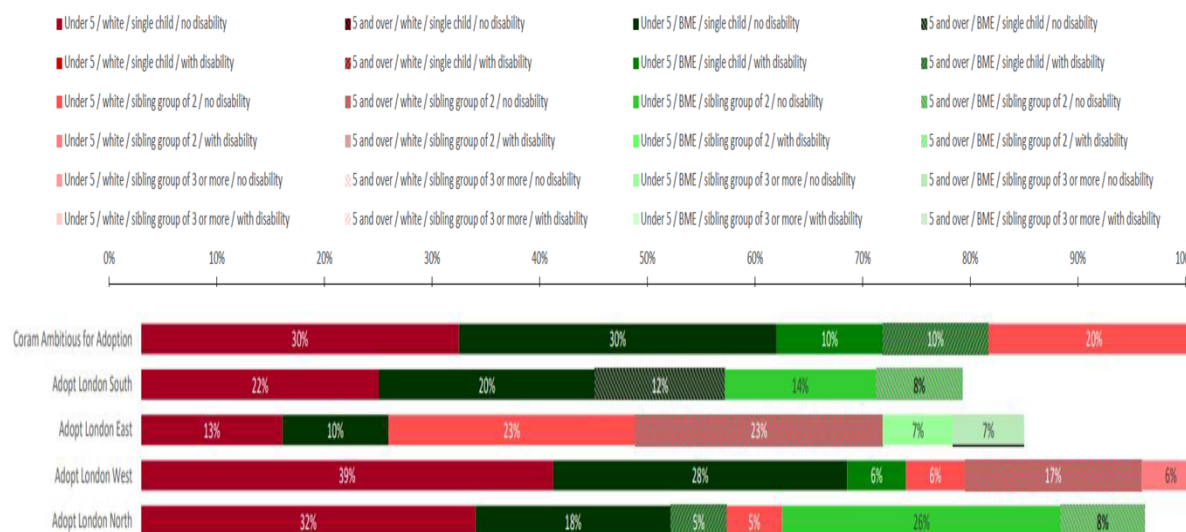
making and in the time taken from placement to adoption order. Timescales here are affected by complexity of adoption cases and in court delays. We are working with LA's and courts to ensure delays are kept to a minimum.

Adoption Scorecard indicators – Reflecting 3 year average, all figures based on completed adoptions



The three year average figures form part of the Adoption Scorecard. The scorecard provides a means of comparing performance across England. ALE is performing roughly in line with England and London averages. This reflects positively on the service as ALE LA's have a significantly larger percentage of children with complexity in need of placement.

Characteristics of children waiting at the close of 2020/21



Typically white British children aged under 5 are deemed to be the easiest children to place. Timescales for all harder to place children are usually longer. London has higher rates of harder to place children than England averages. Even within London averages ALE children are most likely to be in the harder to place category. Only 13% of our children are deemed easy to place. All other London areas operate within a range closer to the England average (between 24% and 39%).

Newham and Tower Hamlets have some of the highest incidences of poverty in the UK. All LA's with the exception of Havering have significantly higher number of children from BME



backgrounds including 60% of children in Newham and 50% in Tower Hamlets. 60% of all children waiting for a placement in ALE are children in sibling groups. Of these 14% are in a sibling group of 3 or more.

Analysis of Adopt London East

Outstanding adopters meet the needs of our children

Adopter approvals – historical performance analysis across each Local Authority

LA	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Newham	3	1	6	4	
Tower Hamlets	5	7	10	4	
Havering	7	9	8	4	
LBBB	3	3	12	6	
Total	18	20	36	18	19

The numbers of adopters approved varies considerably across all LA's. Numbers approved in 2019/20 declined to 2016/17 levels as is consistent with all RAAs in their year of go-live. The general pattern of adopter approval prior to this decline was an increasing pattern from 18 in 16/17 to 36 in 18/19

Please note that as all adopters approved in 20/21 were approved in ALE there is no breakdown by LA

ALE service modelling was based on a commitment to improving on 17/18 figures of 20 approvals per year.

In 2020/21 ALE achieved the results below

- Number adopters approved last year in total = 19
- Number of adopters matched last year in total = 14

Stage	Number	Comment
Enquiries	8	Initial Enquiries Completed April 21
Stage 1	42	Stage 1 Assessments
Stage 2	37	Stage 2 assessments
Approved in ALE and waiting for placements	9	
Approved pre-ALE and waiting for match	4	All have been subject to review by HOS



Other assessments

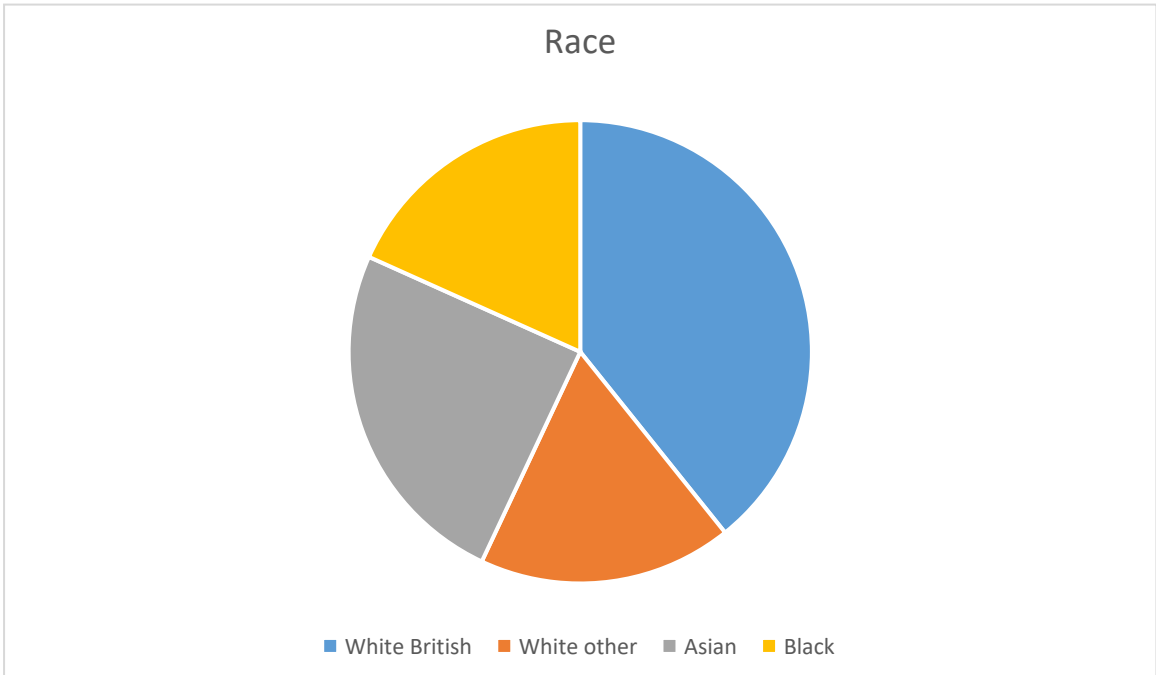
Type	Number	Comment
Step parent (family) adoptions	38	6 were passed from LA's
Inter-country	15	5 in court 1 CP concerns 3 complex cases – all related to children being brought into the country without following regulation

Characteristics of prospective adopters

We work hard to engage with our local communities, especially our black communities as black children often wait the longest for placement

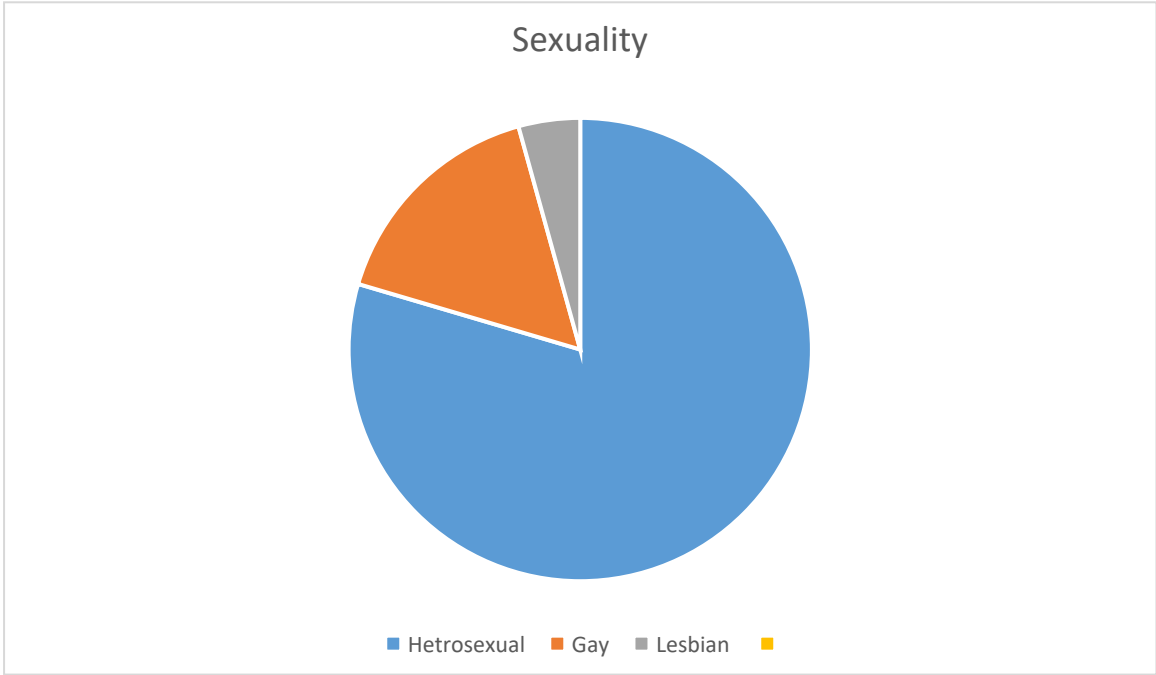
Factors such as lower average pay and poorer housing opportunities can impact on adopter availability from our black communities. Covid has also disproportionately affected our less financially secure communities; prospective adopters from these communities are more likely to have lost employment or decreased hours/income. We continue to work creatively to extend opportunities wherever necessary.

Characteristics of all prospective adopters



Although White British adopters continue to be the largest single group, a wider span of adopter applications has resulted in greater diversity. Last year 69% of prospective adopters were White British: this has decreased to 39% in one year. The percentage identifying as Black has increased from 7% to 39% in the same timescale. This also only captures individual characteristics of each applicant. Many applications are from couples with diversity.

There is an oversupply of adopters from Asian communities nationally as Asian children are often cared for within family and community networks. We work with prospective Asian adopters to ensure they are able to accept a diverse range of children.





Heterosexual adopters remain the majority but increasing numbers of gay and lesbian people apply. The number of Gay men applying has increased from 9% to 15% and lesbian applicants have increased from 6% to 8%. We continue to ensure we have a presence in pride events and work with the specialist support group New Family Social to raise awareness of our offer.

Summary

Adopter approvals have taken longer to turn the curve than placements made. The reasons for this are varied

- The lead in time for adopter approval is lengthy and the amount of other work especially in private adoptions and complex inter-country work which sits outside the IAC contract has increased.
- Initial uncertainties following Covid restrictions resulted in a decrease in adopter applications
- Covid restrictions had a disproportionate impact on adopter approval timescales due to lengthy delays in medical assessments and in checks from overseas. This had a greater impact in ALE as we actively promote applications from our incoming communities

ALE achieved 19 adoptions in 2020/21. This still placed ALE as one of the higher achieving RAA's in 2020/21.

Campaigns have been successful and the new National 'you can adopt' campaign which launched on 16th September has brought more interest.

We continue to face a number of challenges in improving our adopter approval rate but are progressing with a clear action plan as detailed below

Challenge	Description	Action
Staffing	High vacancy rate 3 agency workers failed to meet standards One successful applicant not progressed due to poor reference Capability issues	Continued attempts to recruit both to permanent and interim positions One permanent staff member recruited – commenced in November Further staff member recruited – to commence in July 2021
Early stage processes	Inefficient early stage processes Back log of enquiries	Review of processes Initial enquiry coordinator post created Worker in place since early December New processes and close monitoring Improvements across the board
Enquirer suitability	Enquirers unsuitable to adopt Adopter offer gap See below for National availability	Improved website information Information evenings and meet the adopter evenings Counsel out at initial enquiry or initial visit Development of a self-select adopter readiness tool using the website (in progress)



Service capacity	Insufficient staffing to allocate all assessments	Development of ISW role Recruitment of flexible workforce of ISW's
Covid related issues	<p>Medicals</p> <p>International certificate of good conduct – police do not take fingerprints</p> <p>Health and safety visits – adopter approval to visit</p> <p>Inability to undertake direct training</p> <p>Virtual Panel cannot hear all cases</p>	<p>GP's undertaking virtual medicals</p> <p>Use of specialist agency – adopter funded</p> <p>A challenge in a small number of cases</p> <p>Development and delivery of virtual preparation and training sessions</p> <p>Use of Covid regulations for straight to ADM approval. Now ceased</p>
Private adoptions	<p>38 families awaiting assessment (highest in London)</p> <p>4 allocated</p>	<p>Urgent allocations to be made</p> <p>Letter to all others to state will not be allocating until at least April 2022 – information about other options</p>
Inter-country adoptions	<p>15 cases – some highly complex</p> <p>Court delays</p>	<p>ICA contract – for assessments</p> <p>Continue to undertake supervision and Annex A</p> <p>Some further work contracted out</p>

Timely matching of children with outstanding adopters

Placements made – Historical performance analysis across each Local Authority

LA	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Newham	10	27	5	10	14
Tower Hamlets	8	19	10	7	14
Havering	8	7	11	4	4
LBBB	15	13	21	8	13
Total	41	66	47	29	44

Placement orders



LA	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Newham	24	18	11	12	8
Tower Hamlets	21	9	12	11	11
Havering	7	15	2	2	7
LBBB	13	21	16	13	6
Total	65	63	41	38	32

The numbers of placement orders and placements made varies considerably from year to year and across each Local Authority. A down turn was noted in 2019/20 as is consistent with all RAA's in the year of go-live.

Most LA's saw an increased number of placements made in 20/21 with the exception of Havering where relatively few placement orders had been made. 7 placement orders were made in Havering in 202/21 and an upturn in placements made is expected in 21/22.

The number of placement orders made reduced considerably in 2 LA's, increased in 1 and remained consistent in one. The national background rate is of a reduction in placement orders.

Family Finding workload breakdown on 31st March 2021

The chart below details a snapshot of the workload of the family finding team at the end of the 20/21 financial year.

	Placed for Adoption	Matched not yet placed	Linked not yet matched	Family finding post PO	Post ADM no PO	Early Monitoring	Total Children in tracking	Children in EP prior to formal matching
Newham	14	2	3	3	3	8	14	2
Havering	4	2		3	7	2	9	
Tower Hamlets	14		3	9	19	12	25	
LBBB	13	1	3	8	7	4	18	
total	45	5	9	21	36	26	66	2

Newham, Tower Hamlets and LBBB continue to have a remarkable degree of consistency in terms of placements made. Havering has traditionally had a lower level of demand and only 4 placements were made in 2020/21. A further 14 are either linked or matched and awaiting placement. Numbers in this cohort are fairly consistent across all Local Authorities. Numbers in Tower Hamlets in pre PO stages remain comparatively high and this requires further exploration.



Placement statistics

44 matches were made in 2020/21 with an additional three children placed in early permanence placements but not yet matched. A total of 10 children were placed through early permanence. This is the highest performance per number of Local Authorities in London by a considerable margin.

Each Local Authority has a lead worker but workers are also paired to ensure cover for each Local Authority at all times and to allow a more flexible response in times of higher demand. Tower Hamlets and Newham are paired as are LBBD and Havering.

All workers attend placement planning and tracking meetings, offer support and guidance to children's social work staff and give additional support to complete paperwork and drive progress where necessary

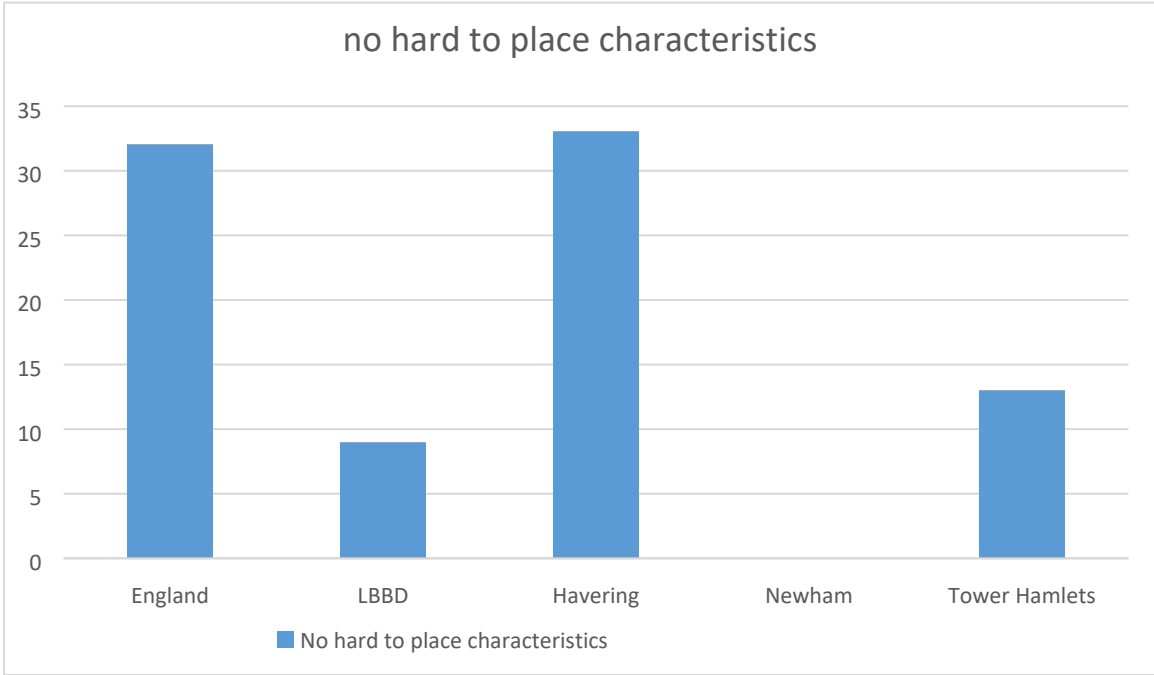
One Advanced practitioner takes lead responsibility for relinquished children and early permanence.

It was agreed in the Board meeting in November 2020 that a further temporary position could be created. A further vacancy was created through the sad death of a worker; Anne Fitzgerald in January. A further temporary vacancy was created due to a worker going on early maternity leave. Two workers are currently providing cover for a team of five. The service has continued to provide support for all children requiring a match but has temporarily ceased direct attendance at legal and permanency planning meetings.

The service has advertised permanent and temporary posts and has found it difficult to recruit to these posts. We have successfully recruited to one post and are offering a secondment opportunity for the temporary post. A further advert has gone out.

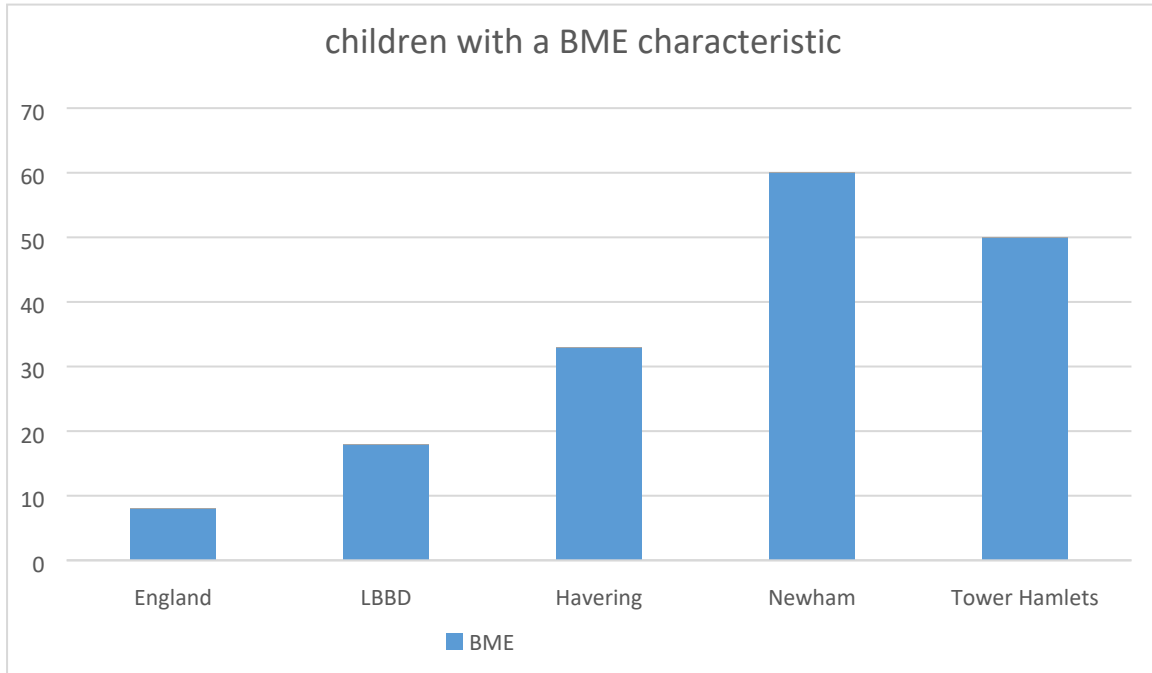
Children in active family finding

Percentage of children in active family finding at 31st March 2021 who were categorised as having no hard to place characteristics



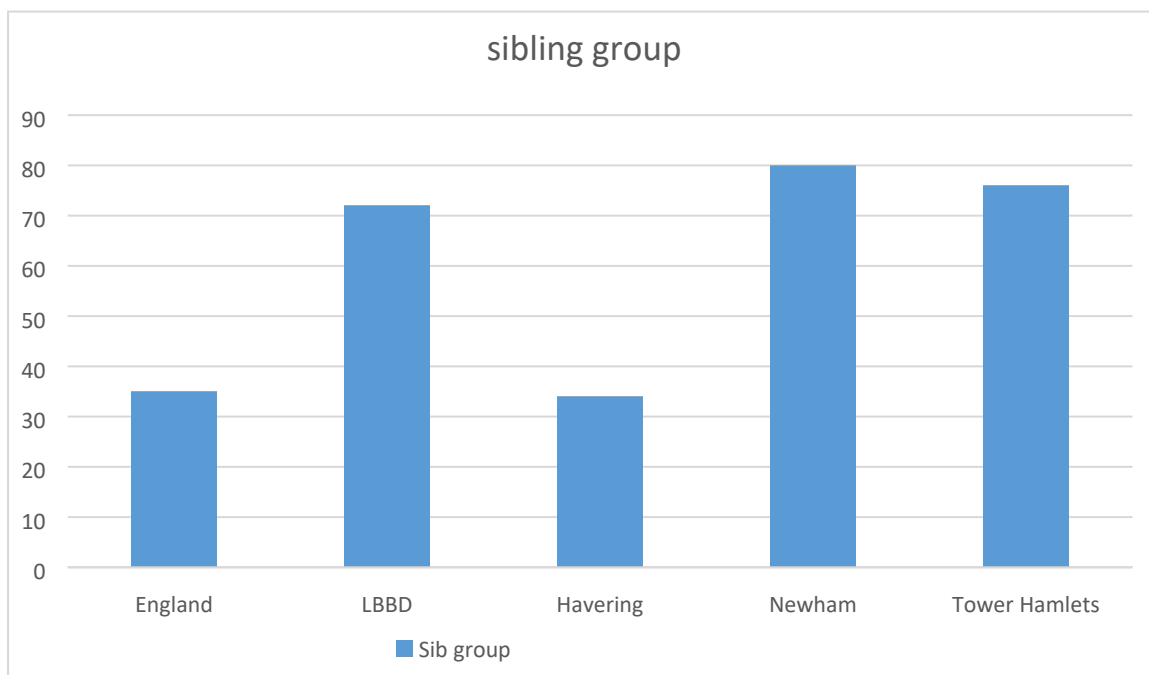
On average in England 32% of children have no hard to place characteristics. These children are usually placed more quickly than children deemed harder to place. Only Havering equals this percentage. All other Local Authorities have much lower numbers of children ranging from 13% in Tower Hamlets to no children in Newham

Percentage of children in active family finding on 31st March 2021 from a BME background



Children from a BME family are often harder to place. Adopt London works with all BME communities to promote adoption and a number of successful campaigns have increased the number of applications considerably. The England average of 8% of children waiting is much lower than averages from all ALE Local Authorities. In Newham 60% of all children waiting are from a BME heritage.

Percentage of children waiting at 31st March 2021 who are part of a sibling group



The number of children waiting to be placed in a sibling group in Havering reflects the England average. In all other Local Authorities up to 70% of children waiting are in a sibling group.

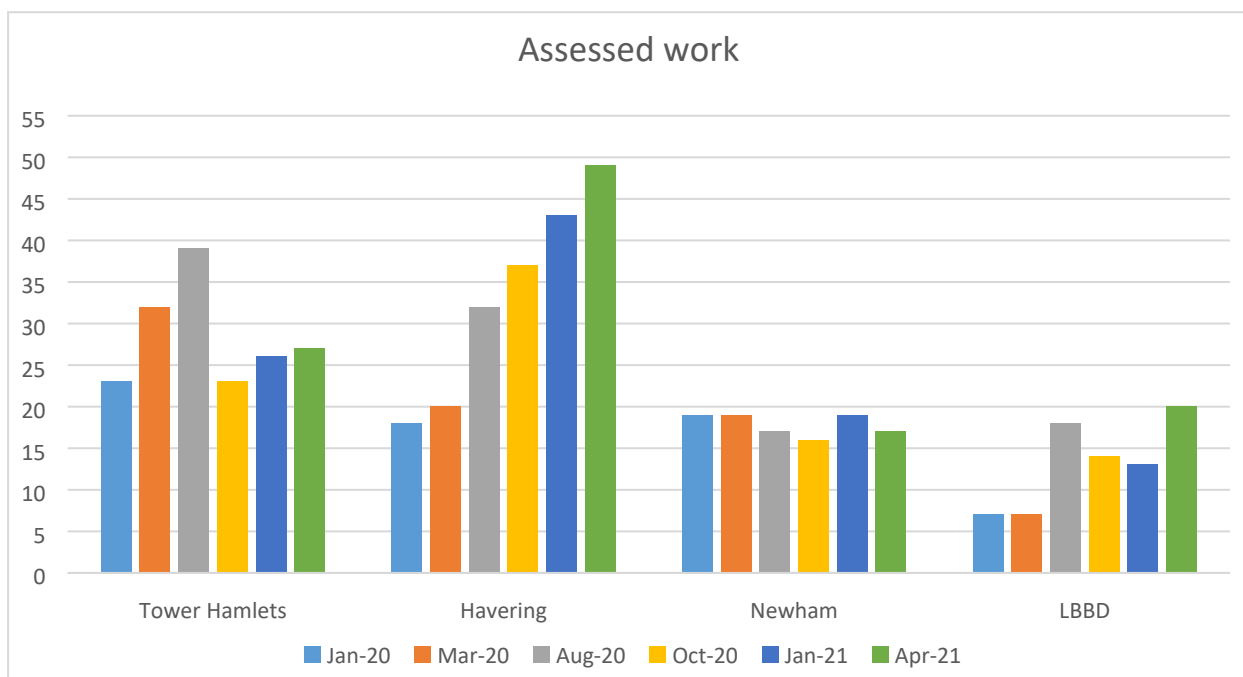
Service Plan

Development area	Action	Comment	Progress
Staffing	Full staffing. Back fill for maternity leave Staffing insufficient to meet demand	Increase in core staffing from 4 to 5 workers achieved in budget Difficulty in recruitment	3 permanent staff 1 post temporarily covered for maternity leave 1 post remains vacant
LA relationships	Locally based staff Agree strategic and operational leads in all LA's Develop positive working relationships	Covid restrictions resulted in WFH for most staff Relationship building through online platforms	Development of pairing system to allow for named worker support with flexible response
Access to LA records	Identify solutions to access LA records on read only basis to	This has proven difficult	Access in place in 2 LA's and partial access in one other

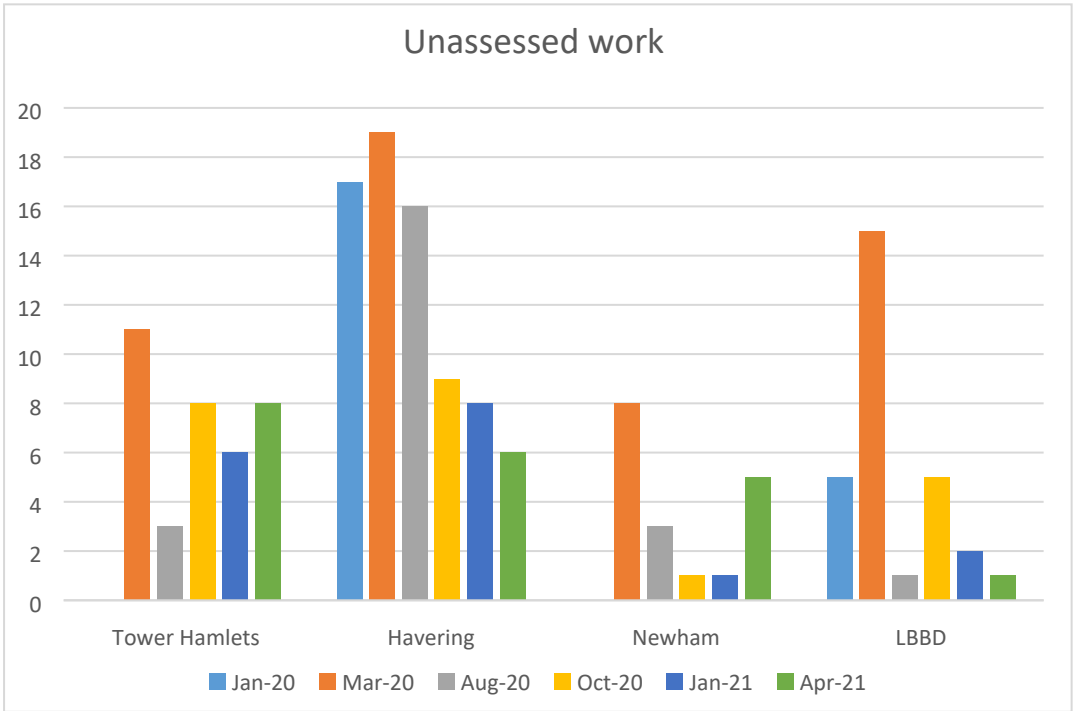


	ensure information flow is seamless	Further work ongoing	
Protocols	Protocols developed and shared with LA services	High staff turnover – to review and re-issue	Further protocols to be developed Operational sub group of the Board to be developed
Relinquished babies And Early permanence	AP to take lead role in development and delivery		Lead role progressing EP increasing to 10%
Tracker	Develop effective tracker ASGLB compliant	System glitches	Completed – to further review

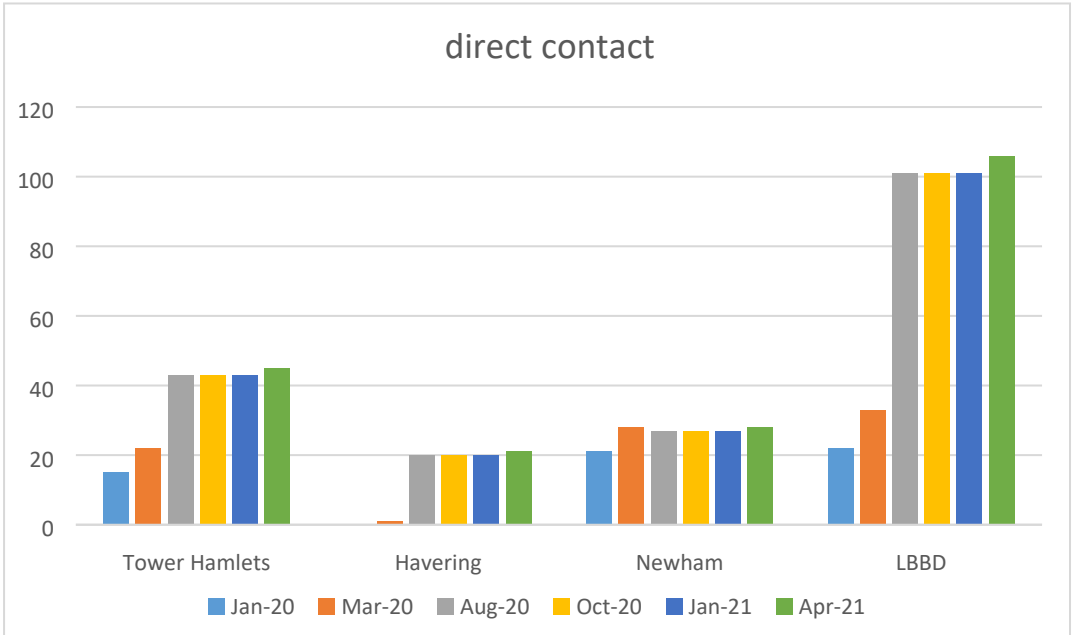
Adoptive families are supported to achieve happiness and the best outcomes



With the exception of Havering, assessed adoption support work has begun to stabilise although overall assessed work continues to increase. There are a larger number of adoptive families living in Havering and entitled to a service. Many were not recruited in Havering and therefore were previously unaware of their entitlement. As can be seen below this increase in demand in Havering initially resulted in an increase in unassessed work being held prior to assessment. This has now been addressed



A low number of cases will continue to be held as unassessed work. 5 cases are awaiting adoption support (down from 9 cases in January); 15 adopted adults are also receiving support. A further cohort of adopters receive one off advice and support through the duty system and are not included in these figures. Other adopters may access our universal services provided through PAC-UK, 'We are Family', Adopter Hub and National Association of Therapeutic Parents.





As can be seen supported direct contact has stabilised. We are now confident that we have identified all families in need of support. Some direct contact was supported during the summer months but almost all supported direct work has been undertaken virtually this year. Direct work plans have resumed in line with government guidance.

LBBB traditionally supported all direct contact. Direct supported contact will be subject to continuous review with the aim of preparing families to meet safely without support wherever possible.

Overview

Although numbers of adopters being offered a service has stabilised, demand for adoption support continues to rise. We continue to support adopters to access other support services such as those provided by We are Family and the Adopter Hub in order to ring-fence support services for those families most in need. Our duty service provides an immediate source of support for our adoptive families prior to allocation and following completion of allocated work.

Most families receiving direct support from ALE have high levels of need. ALE social workers work in partnership with workers from a range of organisations to support children on the edge of care and in need of safeguarding. In many cases ALE social workers take a lead role in provision of direct support. Levels of need have increased through

- the impact of Covid,
- post Lockdown reintegration into education
- community issues (including county lines)
- impact on mental health

Service plan

Development area	Action	Comment	Progress
Staffing	Temporary cover for maternity leave	Workload high and resources must be restricted	Fully staffed
ASF	<p>Ensure compliance with new ASF requirements</p> <p>All providers to be subject to compliance checks</p> <p>Annual returns to be signed off by lead finance officer</p>	Some challenge with historical returns	<p>All new contracts issued only after compliance</p> <p>Annual return ready to complete</p>



	Historical issues to be addressed in LA		
Adopter led support	<p>Liaise with existing peer support networks</p> <p>Work with WAF Pan London</p>	<p>Formal consultation with adopters through WAF</p> <p>Links and relationships in Local area made and maintained</p>	WAF offer well established
Develop immediate access service	Duty system to be developed	Managed by TM with close oversight	System developed and operating well High levels of customer satisfaction
Develop core offer	<p>80% direct work to be assessed</p> <p>Improve early offer to all adopters</p>	<p>Develop structure for planned interventions</p> <p>Some commissioned services offer direct access</p> <p>Improved working with peer support networks</p>	Some delay in assessments due to staffing challenges
Develop core adopted adult/birth family offer	<p>Develop protocol for clarity of role</p> <p>Develop effective commissioned offer</p>	<p>This aspect of work has been delayed due to pressure on the adoption support offer</p> <p>Birth family support undertaken wherever possible</p>	Commissioning of pan London birth family service being led by ALS
Improve partnership offer	<p>Develop effective working relationships with key partners</p> <p>Undertake joint delivery/programmes where appropriate</p>	Challenge with health services due to differing CCG's	<p>Training for Virtual schools and LAC designated teachers Pan London</p> <p>Local operational networks developing</p>
Review commissioned services	Review and develop effective commissioning strategy	Pan London approach wherever possible commencing with Adopted adult and birth family services	Delay in Adopted adult services – Pan London Southwark commissioning service lead



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Adopter consultation

Adopt London services work closely with We are Family an adopter led peer support organization.

All adopters and prospective adopters are invited to enroll with We are Family (WAF) at the point they enter stage 2 assessment. Take up of the service is high. During Covid restrictions WAF re-modelled their service to a more centralized webinar and podcast based model with presentations from a number of expert speakers. This work was funded by Covid funds, charitable funding streams and Adopt London.

WAF conducted consultation with their members on their needs during Covid lockdown. This informed our spending priorities. Further consultation is now built into our annual cycle.

Adopt London also sent out adopter consultation questionnaires to all adopters on approval and to all adopters on our newsletter list regarding our support to them.

We have had some teething problems with staffing in the adopter recruitment team and as a result although most comments were positive we also recognized we needed to ensure consistency of approach

Overall comments were positive and included the following

- Overall, we found the experience straightforward. Built a very good rapport with our social worker. Had no issues speaking to anyone. No issues with Zoom meetings or skype. We were well informed about all stages of the Assessment and what was expected. The information days were informative. Our experience of the process has been positive overall
- We felt that our assessment was very thorough + professional and that xx had really prepared for each session.
- xx was able to explore our backgrounds and difficult topics whilst making us feel at ease and confident in our application. Whenever xx left, we always felt positive and looking forward to our next session with her.

Comments suggesting improvements included the following

'After this prep course I think you should help people set up a what's app group so people can keep in contact after prep course. We did this on my recommendation after the previous prep course & we still communicate nearly a year later.'

- Since Covid restrictions Preparation groups operate online and include as homework small group discussions with the participants on subjects delivered in podcast form. WhatsApp groups facilitate this process and are now an integral part of the offer

'I would suggest that after the prep course that for stage 2 you work out all the prior dates and times in advance between SW and potential adoptee'.



- It is a service expectation that work is structured in this way. We have ensured all social workers whether employed or Independent assessing social workers understand this expectation

'I think you should very seriously consider & put in place a buddying up process. So all potential adopters would buddy up with a person who has already adopted through you so all the basic questions they have could be answered. '

- We work in partnership with We are Family who now offer a range of forums for adopter to adopter communication and support

'Very long. Communication with the social worker was chaotic, what made us very anxious and insecure with the whole progress . Assessment with (team manager) was great, excellent communication and guidance for the preparation for the Panel day.'

- These individual issues have been addressed

We received only 7 responses to the questionnaire in respect of adoption support. All seven were highly positive. Comments included

- In the short time that we've known xx, she quickly had a clear understanding of what our Son is like, which is such a relief.
- She is incredibly efficient in getting her work done.
- xx has helped us in contacting the school which has helped move them along in their complacency.
- Xx (manager) who was the first person to contact us was very supportive.
- xx was available when we needed her, reminded us of what needed doing and in what order and responded to us, quickly going to find information and get back to us with it much faster than we expected.

One adoptive couple whilst praising the service also made some suggestions for improvement as below

'One thing that would be positive for future adopters is to have a rough guide of the approximate foreseeable costs of adoption right from the outset to the final costs of ordering certificates. Though we knew that some of them would be coming, we were still surprised by some of the costs. It would be a way to improve the information given to adopters'.

- The offer varies from Local Authority to Local Authority. We plan to work on clarifying the offer in partnership

'We would have loved to have had more opportunities to talk to current adopters during training days as, when this did happen, there was a really nice balance of being able to have trainers/social worker's professional responses to questions alongside an adopters' more personal take on it. It also gives prospective adopters an opportunity to ask questions in a way they might not when talking to adopters in a social setting.'



- This couple undertook training commissioned from Barnardos in the previous LA model of practice. Training has since been delivered by ALE. We have delivered training remotely since Covid restrictions commenced. Training sessions include an adopter led session and a session with contributions from a birth mother. Training will continue to be subject to review.

Complaints and compliments

The service has had two complaints in 2020/21. Both complaints were from prospective adoptive parents. One complaint was in respect of a decision not to proceed following receipt of statutory checks. The other was in respect of timescales for approval. Both complaints were resolved in stage 1.

Some lessons were learned as a result of these complaints. We have improved our information giving re time-scales and provide more clear information following a decision not to proceed on other options available.

The service has received numerous informal compliments and has logged numerous compliments from adopters, birth families and professionals.

In addition to the compliments noted in adopter feedback compliments include:

Adopter on direct support: Thank you so much for your time and support today. We really appreciated having you there

Adoption panel members: The panel members wished me to pass on that they felt your presentation of your case at panel today was “excellent”.

LA Team Manager: I would like to compliment (worker) for her amazing partnership work and supporting us today with a very complicated COVID-19 situation. (the worker) is amazing, she is such a hard worker, she is driving things forward and I could not be happier to have such member in our extended partnership team.

LA Social worker: (worker) is always supportive, positive, quick to find solutions and moving things quickly and providing high quality work.

Summary of current achievements

Adopt London East has been operational for 18 months. 12 of these months have been in Covid related lockdown. Despite this much has been achieved:

- The highest rate of children placed in all London RAA's
- Adopter approval in line with or higher than all London RAA's
- A large increase in the percentage of black and LGBT adopters
- A new adopter support offer both locally and pan London
- A Covid support offer independently evaluated as outstanding and praised by the DfE
- Rapid response to Covid including quick development of online training and support
- A productive partnership with We are Family delivering webinars and podcasts as well as direct support
- A clear and positive website showcasing our work

Future challenges



The service is still new and has primarily operated within Covid related restrictions. These restrictions have affected the service, partners and our adoptive families.

Infrastructure development

Certain aspects of infrastructure development have been delayed and a primary focus in 2021/22 will be in this field. Development areas include:

- A Liquidlogic based software tool for use across the service
- An ASF supplier accreditation tool
- Digital read only access to LA files to ensure easy transfer of information
- Improved financial reporting systems through separation of cost centres
- Pan London commissioning of a birth parent service
- Improvements to the website including a readiness tool for prospective adopters and adopter led access to services
- Consolidation of new ways of working post Covid restrictions

Adopter approval

Due to the long lead in time and the impact of Covid restrictions: adopter approval has taken longer to turn the curve than other sectors. Approvals have begun to increase and 21/22 will see increased numbers of adopters improved. Development areas include:

- Higher ratio of adopter applications from target groups such as black adopters
- Increase in applications from adopters able to care for more hard to place children
- Increase in the number of adopters willing to consider early permanence
- Improvement in timeliness in all aspects of the approval process

Family finding

Family finding continued throughout restrictions and the number of children placed increased. Development areas include:

- Production of further tools to assist LA social workers to understand adoption and adoption processes
- Streamlining processes to ensure each LA has the same offer and best practice is shared
- Further embedding the Beth Neil approach to introductions
- Increase in the use of in-house adopters

Adopter support

Prior to the development of ALE the adoption support offer was underdeveloped. Many adopters were not aware of the offer available. The support offer is now much more readily available and demand for services is high. The offer has been streamlined with an immediate duty offer triaging into a social work allocated offer. Development areas include:

- Improved management of the ASF offer through dedicated administrative support
- Improved management of direct contact through review of contracts and safe transition to adopter led contacts where safe to do so

- Further development of the partnership with We are Family and other local peer led adopter support groups
- Improved adopted adult and birth family support through re-negotiated contracts and focussed support

Financial statement

Category of Expenditure	20-21 Budget	Actual Expenditure 2020/21	Variance 2020/21
Staffing Costs	1,161,566.80	1,161,567	0
Agency Staffing	282,421.03	282,421	0
Other Staff Costs	69,370.12	69,370	0
Travel/Transport	2,805.12	2,805	0
Office Expenses	39,749.13	39,749	0
Premises Related Costs	944.55	945	0
Commissioned Services	102,634.32	102,634	0
Communication/Publicity/Market Engagement	169.59	170	0
Internal Recharges	42,772.06	42,772	0
Total Expenditure	1,702,433	1,702,432	0

Category of Income	20-21 Budget	Actual Income 2020/210	Variance 2020/21
DFE Income carried-forward from 18/19	-48,931	-48,931	0
LA Contributions:			0
LB Barking & Dagenham	-463,041	-463,041	0
LB Newham	-479,690	-479,690	0



LB Tower Hamlets	-337,051	-337,051	0
LB Havering	-373,720.00	-373,720.00	0
Total Income	1,702,433	-1,702,433	0

Net Expenditure 20/21

	Adjusted Budget 20-21	Actuals 2020/21	Variance 2019/20
Net Expenditure	0	0	0

Sue May

HOS Adopt London East

1st September 2021