

**Adoption & Permanence
Annual Report**

2014-15

Introduction

The Barking and Dagenham Adoption Service operates within the regulatory framework of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, revised February 2011, Adoption Regulations, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards. Adoption Services until September 2013 were inspected separately by Ofsted; however, the new inspection framework incorporates judgements on Adoption services into the overall Ofsted Children's Service inspection.

The Adoption Service was last inspected in April – May 2014, as part of the wider inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. The Adoption Performance was judged as requires improvement as were all other areas judged in the inspection. The feedback from the inspection was used to develop an Action Plan, which is included as part of Appendix 1. Area for Improvement (7): Introduce a permanency policy that emphasises parallel planning from the earliest point when children become looked after, as well as tracking the timescales for individual children with a plan for adoption.

This report, and the action plan update (Appendix 1 Section7) provides an update on activity in the Adoption Service from April 2014 – March 2015. It is also used as an evaluation of adoption & permanence practice in Barking and Dagenham, outlining developments in relation to improving service delivery and identifying priorities to be incorporated into the development plan for 2015-16.

Background

Adoption – National Focus and Changing Context

The adoption of children from care has received national attention and has been a key priority for over a decade. Most recently, the Prime Minister introduced a new strategy set out in 'An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay', 2012. The aim of the strategy is to introduce changes to practice that remove potential barriers and reduce delay in approving families as adopters, thereby increasing the number of placements available for waiting children. The strategy also introduced the 'Adoption Scorecard' – a national benchmark of adoption activity and also has resulted in changes to practice in adoption. The impact of these changes is discussed below.

In July 2014, further changes to adoption regulation were introduced through the Children and Families Act, 2014. Local authorities now have a duty to provide information to adoptive and potential families regarding the support services available in the local authority's area. The Pupil premium remit has been expanded to make available payments to adopted children. This will enable adopters to work with schools to consider what individual support will be of benefit to their adopted child.

Alongside the statutory and regulatory changes, Children Services also has had to work with the ongoing impact that case law (Re B, Re BS and Re T), that is continuing to have far reaching implications for local authorities when considering permanency for children, for whom adoption would usually be the plan. The clear

message from case law is that adoption should be seen as the last resort, that is, only to be decided upon when “nothing else will do”.

Nationally, there have been a small number of parental challenges to Placement Orders already granted. A Placement Order is an Order made by the Court that enabled the local authority to place a child with a new family to be adopted.

The challenges have been made when a child is already in its new family. The challenge to the Placement Order therefore, potentially places adopters in a more vulnerable position of uncertainty. In effect, practice has changed such that there are examples of cases that in the past resulted in an adoption plan being agreed at courts, this is no longer the case.

It is likely, therefore, that over time there will be a decline in the number of children being placed legally permanently with families for adoption, and with it a possible rise in the numbers of children placed legally until they are aged 18 only, under Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs).

Recommendations: This will mean that our permanency planning needs to be increasingly robust with parallel options being considered. To achieve this there should be 3 priorities next year:-

- **Ensure that parallel permanency plans continue to be considered from the start of a child’s social care experience, so that if permanent placement is necessary and appropriate this is well planned and all options have been fully explored ahead of any court process**
- **Further develop LBBD’s permanence procedures to support staff in ensuring that all permanence options are explored and progressed in a timely manner**
- **Increase induction training and training for permanent staff to ensure that good permanency and parallel planning is embedded throughout the social work team**

Summary of Activity in 2014-15

This year has been another extremely busy period of activity within the service that has seen a record numbers of children adopted and adopters recruited, staff arrivals and departures in the team, and changes in practice as a result of case law.

Impact of new Regulation, Guidance and Case law

As predicted in last year’s annual report, there has been a considerable drop in the numbers of children with a “should be placed for adoption” (SHOPA) decision, which appears to be a London wide, if not a national trend. According to the Adoption Leadership Board, “...*data suggests that the number of new decisions has continued to fall from 1,830 in quarter 2, 2013-14 to 960 in quarter 1, 2014-15, a decrease of 47%*”. They report a similar trend in the numbers of Placement Orders being made,

“...data suggests new placement orders have continued to fall from 1,550 in quarter 2, 2013-14 to 760 in quarter 1, 2014-15, a decrease of 51%.”¹

The evidence suggests that children who would have previously been placed for adoption and often becoming subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs). There has been an increase in children aged 0-3 who are now subject to a SGO rather than adoption as previously would have been the case.

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. LBBD, as with many other local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) have a surplus of adopters for a rapidly diminishing pool of sought-after children – single children, under the age of 2, with little complexities in their backgrounds or their needs.

Routes through to Adoption

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 3 Adoption Activity Days – from which 3 placements (2 x sibling group of 2; and 1 single child) were made. 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 14 children attend the three Activity Days during 2014 - 15 and the placement of 5 children represents a success rate of 35%.

Fostering to Adopt

We made our first “Fostering for Adoption” placement of a 2-day old baby boy, who was since been adopted. This is a scheme where carers are dual approved as both adopters and foster carers. The child may return home to their birth family but the local authority strongly anticipates that they will go on to be adopted by their carers. 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. In most cases children transition from foster carers to adopters and although this transition is managed well during the introductions period it does mean a change for the child.

¹ Adoption Leadership Board headline measures and business intelligence 2013 to 2014 and quarter 1 2014 to 2015 update: November 2014

Panel Attendance April 2014 – March 2015

LBBB's Adoption & 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. Additional panels can be convened as necessary, although this was not required during this period. 1 panel was cancelled.

The composition of the Panel is in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2011, and includes independent members. The Chair is also an independent person who has significant experience of adoption work.

The table below sets out the attendance of Panel Members:

Name	Attended	Apologies	Notes
Roy Stewart (Chair)	10	1	Holiday
Eileen Weaver (vice Chair & independent/social work representative)	9	2	Holiday
Roger Gardiner (vice Chair & independent member)	7	4*	* covers period of planned absence
Dr Magid (Medical Adviser)	11	0	
Jackie Parillon (Independent member)	9	2	
Alison Ryan (Social Work representative)	11	0	
Emma Malcolm (central list-independent)	7	N/A	
Joanne Tarbutt (central list – Social work representative)	1	N/A	

The Panel representatives are committed and attend regularly, with rare unplanned apologies. The purpose of the Central List reps is to provide additional capacity. Emma Malcolm is unable to commit to monthly attendance, but has committed to attending 6-7 meetings per year and these are planned in advance. Joanne Tarbutt provides 'last minute' cover if the meeting will not be quorate to ensure that there is no delay to decision making for adopters and children.

Any person wishing to become a Core or Central List Panel Representative must undertake an observation of Panel prior to becoming a member. They will also receive a brief induction from the Adoption Team Manager about expectations of the role.

The Agency Decision Maker also observed Panel in June 2014 as she was new to the role in LBBB. The ADM is responsible for the annual appraisal of the Panel Chair so the observation of how Panel operates is a crucial part of understanding the Chair's competencies.

Newly recruited social workers are also offered the opportunity to observe Panel as part of their induction or if they wish to become a Panel Member.

Panel Training

The annual joint training for Panel members and the members of the Adoption Team took place on 13th October 2014 and dealt with the topic of Fostering for Adoption placements. The training was well received by all staff and Panel Members and was crucial in understanding the complexities and benefits of Fostering to Adopt placements. The training was necessary to understand how best to work with this new practice to be sure that it worked well for prospective adopters and children.

Summary of the Children Referred for Adoption

Number of children with adoption as an outcome

The impact of the case law outlined above has had a significant impact on the number of children referred for adoption in 2014-15. This can be seen in the reduction in the number of children with SHOPA decisions, from 46 in 2013-14 to 14 in 2014-15, that is, a 70% decrease in numbers.

Furthermore, for 2 of the 14 cases, the children are now not available for adoption. One child, whose adoption plan was rescinded by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), was a 6 year old girl of mixed heritage whom became subject of an SGO to her foster carer. The second child is still pending the making of a Placement Order, as further assessments of family members are being undertaken.

Of the 8 children whose SHOPA plans were rescinded by the Adoption Panel, 6 have, or will, become the subject of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) to their foster carers. The other 2 are to remain with their foster carers on a long term fostering basis. The Panel were responsible for rescinding those decisions that they had made previously, prior to the introduction of the ADM process. All decisions about whether children are placed for adoption are now made by the ADM, with the exception of children who are relinquished by their birth parents for adoption.

It also evident that the trend of there being more SGOs (36) being granted than Adoption Orders (32) has continued during this period (see the section on SGOs).

Recommendation: Given the rapid changes and impact of case law, a priority for 2015/16 will be to continue 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.

Children's plans for adoption – Approvals and Rescinded Decisions

Table 1: Approvals and Rescinded Decisions

Total children approved for adoption by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM): April 2014 - March 2015	14
Adoption plans rescinded by the ADM	1
Total children approved for adoption by the Adoption & Permanence Panel (relinquished children)	0
Adoption plans rescinded by the Panel	8
Table 2: Gender Breakdown	
Boys	7
Girls	7

Table 3: Ethnicity	No. of individuals
White British	12
White European	1
Mixed Heritage	1

Table 4: Ages of at time of their ADM	No. of individuals
Under 1 year old	7
1 year +	3
2	1
3	1
5	2

Table 5: Sibling Groups and Individuals	
No in Group	No of Groups
2 siblings	3
Individuals	8

Summary of the children who were matched

Of the 21 children who were matched with families for adoption, 4 single children were matched with in-house adopters; one of whom was a child who matched with her foster carers.

Of the remaining 17 children who were matched to interagency adopters (adopters approved by other local authorities or voluntary adoption agencies), 5 were siblings

groups of two; and 7 were single children. The cost of such placements 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). We sold one single adopter in 2014-15 at a rate of £29,700. The Adoption Reform Grant funded the purchasing of interagency placements and now this funding has been withdrawn it remains a cost pressure for the Council.

Interagency Placements 2013-14

Table 6: Interagency placements bought and sold 2013/14	
Purchased (£)	Sold (£)
£54,000	£29,700
Total £54,000	Total £29,700

2014-15

Table 7: Interagency placements bought and sold 2014/15	
Purchased (£)	Sold (£)
£59,400 (incl. London supplement) £350,000	£29,700
Total £409,400	Total £29,700

This is the first year that interagency placements have exceeded in-house, but was anticipated as there had been a sharp drop in the recruitment of in-house adopters for the 18 month period preceding this one. The issue of recruiting adopters was highlighted in last year's Adoption Annual Report and we made an Invest to Save bid to employ a Marketing Officer for 18 months to improve our recruitment. However, we have been unable to wait until this recruitment campaign comes to fruition which has meant that interagency placements significantly increased this year. We are now in a position of having to slow down on recruitment as the number of children available for adoption has declined and there is a surfeit of adopters nationwide. Our ongoing recruitment will focus on families who are willing to consider children who are 'harder to place'.

Summary of the children who were adopted

The numbers of children who were granted Adoption Orders during this period was 32. This is a tremendous achievement for the service as it is almost double that for 2013-14 figures, which was 17.

Table 8: Total number of Adoption Orders Granted April 2013 - March 2014

Total number of Adoption Orders Granted April 2013 - March 2014	32
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Table 9: Gender Breakdown

Gender Breakdown	
Boys	18
Girls	14

Table 10: Ethnicity Breakdown

Ethnicity	No. of individuals
White British	23
White European	1
Mixed Heritage	8

Table 11: Age Breakdown

Ages	No. of individuals
0 - 3	16
4 - 7	14
8 - 12	2

Table 12: Sibling Groups and Individuals

Sibling Groups and Individuals	
No in Group	No of Groups
2 siblings	8
3 siblings	2
Individuals	10

Timeliness: Adoption scorecard

The Adoption Scorecard is used to measure performance. This tool allows the Department for Education (DfE) to measure how swiftly children are placed for adoption, with government thresholds set against two indicators measuring:

- **A1** - The time it takes for a child from entering care to moving in with their adoptive family.
- **A2** - The time it takes match a child to a family following the making of a Placement Order.

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

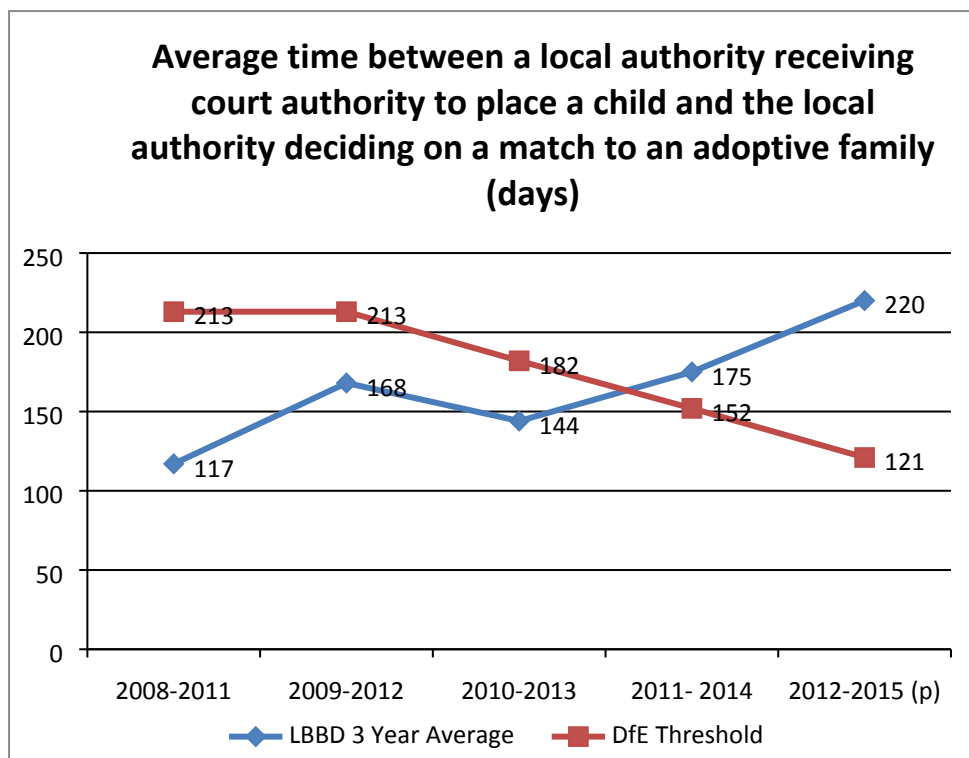
This has increased from 625 in 13/14 to 731 in 14/15 – However our three year average has fallen from 672 to 647 days. The DfE threshold is 487 days – we are therefore, 160 days over. This means that the time taken to achieve a permanent placement for a child has been quicker from the time they enter care, but there is still a lot of work to do to achieve the government timescales. This means that any delay in the assessment process of whether a child can return to their family or not will impact on this indicator, as well as the length of care proceedings and how long it takes to identify an adoptive placement, which can be challenging for children who are considered to be ‘harder to place’. The DFE target will reduce from 487 to 426 in 2016 which makes achieving this target even more challenging.

The quickest time we were able to achieve this indicator was 239 days, for a white British girl under 1 year old at the time placement. 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. Although she was part of a sibling group of two, this child benefitted from early identification of permanency planning.

The longest time it took was 1600 days for a white British boy, who was 9 years old at placement. An additional complexity to this case was that he was originally to be placed with two younger siblings, before plans were revised following work with our Play Therapist, which identified that separate placements for this group would be in their best interests. The placement initially was a fostering placement, but due to the positive attachments that were made during the placement, the foster carers decided to apply to adopt. This was an excellent outcome for this child as he would have remained a looked after child. However, the carers needed to be sure of their lifelong commitment before making the decision to adopt and therefore impacted upon the timescale adoption was achieved. This case highlights the challenges of meeting performance targets to place children for adoption quickly and continuing to pursue adoption plans for children who are considered to be ‘harder to place’. If the outcome for a child is a permanent family and they are no longer in care, this will on occasion, impact on our performance in both A1 and 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)

This has increased from 198 days in 13/14 to 313 days in 14/15 – that is performance has declined. This has increased our three year average from 175 to 220 days. The DfE threshold is 121 days – which is 99 days over. During 2014-15 the Adoption Team placed a number of ‘harder to place’ children such as a 9 year old boy, a boy with a diagnosis of autism, 10 sibling groups, families with a history of violence which impacts on adopters wishing to pursue a match.



The quickest match to placement was 3 days – a case of foster carers adopting a sibling group of two (the match has to be ratified by the Agency Decision Maker before it can be an official adoptive placement, even though the children were already in the foster placement); the longest time was 970 days for the 9 year old boy identified above.

Disruptions

There have been no disruptions, post placement or post Order, during this reporting period, which is an improvement on the previous year where we had 1 disruption post placement (not order). However, this child is now being adopted by his foster carer.

Recommendation: Although improvements have been made in timescales, the impact of delay on children’s lives is significant. Reducing this must be a priority for 2015/16.

Adopters

Recruitment Activity- 2014-2015

The team has worked creatively to find news ways of attracting adoptive families. A summary of the activities is set out below. The majority of these activities were funded by the Adoption Reform Grant, which is no longer available. In total we received approximately £600,000 over a 2 year period but this money was not renewed in 2015.

Activity over the April 2014 to March 2015 period included:

- Targeted church adopter recruitment campaign launched by the Bishop of Barking, short 'church and adoption' film produced by LBBB as part of the campaign
- 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'
- 12 adoption information events coordinated and promoted
- Professional photography for all children with adoption as their plan
- Family finding films 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 identity for adoption rolled out across all materials including adopter and children's profiles, stands and give-aways
- A new initial enquiry booklet for prospective adopters
- Production of a new short film about adopters' journeys with us – used on social media and Lbbd.gov.uk website
- Articles on local blogs (netmums)
- Social media updates via the LBBB accounts
- Local newspaper advertising
- Uploading profiles on adoption link and managing enquiries

The top line key targets and measures for the period April 2014 to March 2015 were as follows:

1. Increase number of adopters
2. Monitor initial enquiries numbers
3. Monitor the number of 'hits' on www.lbbd.gov.uk/adoption
4. Continuously benchmark successes and activity against members of ELA, other successful agencies and other Local Authorities
5. Monitor the number of people that watch the new 'our adoption story' film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQmgDFfZ8P8>
6. Monitor the number of adoption placements (aided by new photography, films, presence at events and adoption link website)

Results:

1. The team had its highest number of adoption orders during this period, with 32 Adoption Orders granted
2. 11 adopters were approved during this period. 11 adopters were also approved in 2013-14, but we anticipate a rise in these figures for 2015-16 as a result of the recruitment campaign
3. Number of initial enquiries - 88 (2014-15 was 78)
4. 1359 hits on the new website since its launch (15 December 2014 to 31 March 2015)
5. Other teams within the East London Consortium have complimented LBBB on the quality of our presentation and materials at Adoption events

6. The number of people who have watched the new LBBB adoption case study film 'our adoption story' film is **610** (correct on 21/04/15) – an average of 87 views per month, which is over double the number of views per month of the old adoption film (40 views per month)

Summary of approved adopters

Table 13: Number of approved adoptive families

No of Approvals (families)	11
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The figure of 11 families approved is down from the figure in 2013 – 14, which saw 19 families approved. This reduction is a reflection of the low numbers of prospective adopters that had been recruited in the preceding 18 months. It is for this reason that we employed a marketing and recruitment specialist from the dedicated Adoption Grant from Central Government, on a fixed term contract (until March 2015); and this has seen an upturn in the numbers of adopters recruited, which should be reflected in the figures of approvals for 2015 – 16.

However, it should be noted as stated above, that there as there has been a significant drop in the numbers of children with SHOPA decision, which in turn will require us to balance the numbers of prospective adopters recruited in the future, so that there is not such a significant disparity in numbers, as is currently the case.

Breakdown of Approvals

We have made efforts to recruit a more diverse group of prospective adopters, as it appeared that the cohort of children who had SHOPA decisions was beginning to reflect the growth in BME communities in LBBB. We approved more single adopters, a same sex couple and adopters from BME communities than was the case in the last reporting period.

Approved Adopters (Figures for 2013-14 in brackets)

Table 14: Number of couples/Single adoptive families

Couples	8 (8)
Single Adopter (female)	3 (1)

Ethnicity of Adults Approved

Table 15: Ethnicity of Approved Adopters - Couples

Couples	
White British	6
White British/Black British	1
White European/Black British	1

Table 16: Ethnicity of Approved Adopters – Single carers

Single Adopters	
Asian Pakistani	1
Black British	1
White British	1

Sexuality of Adults Approved

Table 17: Sexuality of approved adopters

Couples	
Heterosexual	7
Same sex (male)	1

To provide additional support to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender adopters, as mentioned above, we joined, “New Family Social” a registered charity that works closely with adoption and fostering agencies across the UK.

Table 18: Sexuality of Single Adopters

Single Applicants	
Heterosexual	3

Table 19: Types of Adopters

Types of Adopters		
New adopters (families) Including 1 foster carer couple	9	
	3 single applicants	6 couples
2 nd Time adopters	1 single applicant	1 couple

Recommendations: Although good progress has been made to recruit adopters, there is still a need to increase numbers of adopters, particularly those who are willing and able to meet the needs of sibling groups and children with a disability. This should be a priority for 2015/16.

In addition, we need to prioritise working with partners in the region to improve performance and meet gaps in service, e.g. continuation of monthly family finding meetings, sharing of information regarding adoption resources and access to Consortium’s preparation groups so there is no delay for prospective adopters

Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

1 adoptive family sought redress through the Independent Review Mechanism IRM, which is an independent panel organised through BAAF, in relation to a decision to review their approval after a placement could not continue after a very concerning introduction period. The IRM upheld this adoptive family's objection and recommended that their approval as adopters be reinstated. This was accepted by the ADM.

Adoption Support Services

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.

Currently 1½ social work posts, supported by our in-house Play Therapist, provide support to birth and adoptive families who require a service.

Extract from Dataset return to Ofsted:

Table 20: Requests for Assessments

How many requests for assessments for post-adoption support did you receive from families	13
Of the requests for assessments, how many assessments resulted in the provision of support	13
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

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:

Post Adoption Support Packages

Table 21: Number of families receiving Adoption Support packages

Number of families in receipt of post-adoption support packages (not one off advice) funded by LBBB	14
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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)	0
Total number of families in receipt of post-adoption support packages (not one off advice)	14

Adult Adoptee support

Table 22: Number of families receiving Adoptee Support

Number of families in receipt of adult adoptees support packages (not one off advice) funded by LBBB	14
Number of families in receipt of adult adoptees support packages (not one off advice) funded by another local authority or voluntary adoption agency	0
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)	14

Adoption Reform Grant (ARG)

The Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed that the ARG will not continue in 2015-16. The ARG was initially intended as a one-off £150 million grant in 2013-2014 to boost adopter recruitment and support adoption reform on the ground. It was extended in 2014-2015, providing a further £50 million to continue to support nationwide local authority efforts to reform and improve adoption services.

The ARG has proved beneficial to the service as monies from this grant was funding 1 x Deputy Team Manager post, 2 x family finding social workers and a Marketing Officer, whose contracts were not able to be renewed for 2015 -16 . It has also enabled us to place children in interagency placements, which has helped in achieving the significant numbers of placements and Adoption Orders. Interagency placements occur when LBBB places children with another local authority or voluntary adoption agency.

Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) (Figures for 2013-14 in brackets)

LBBD currently have for 176 children within 118 Special Guardianship (SG) families, and were the placing authority in 115 cases.

Table 23: Special Guardian Orders Granted

Total number of Special Guardianship Orders Granted: April 2013 - March 2014	36 (32)
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Table 24: Gender Breakdown

Gender Breakdown	
Boys	15 (16)
Girls	21 (16)

Table 25: Age Breakdown

Ages	No. of individuals
0 - 3	10 (4)
4 - 7	12 (13)
8-12	8 (13)
13+	4 (2)

April 2014 - March 2015

From April 2014 - March 2015 there were 36 SGOs granted. The majority were granted to Special Guardians living in Barking and Dagenham. We currently have 28 cases where the current care plan is Special Guardianship or Special Guardianship Order applications are pending.

There have been 4 SGO disruptions for the following reasons:

- SG child presented with sexualised behaviour towards birth child of Special Guardian
- SG alleged SG child, (male age 15) stole from her and she relinquished him back into the care of the local authority and he returned to the care of his mother.
- SGO was made but child never moved to the SG placement as concerns came to light about the SG's lifestyle and partner
- SG used unreasonable physical chastisement against SG child so he was removed from her care and placed in Foster care.

Special Guardianship Support provided from April 2014 to March 2015

The Special Guardianship Social Worker has provided advice and support by phone to approx 73 Special Guardians on one or more occasions. She has also provided one to one consultation with social workers and gave 6 presentations on special guardianship to social care teams.

The worker has undertaken 56 Special Guardianship Support packages providing advice and support throughout the application process.

Direct work

The worker has undertaken direct work with 28 Special Guardianship families:

- 12 relating to contact
- 4 relating to contact and child's challenging behaviour
- 4 relating to risk of placement breakdown
- 3 relating to child's challenging behaviour
- 5 relating to other matters
- In addition, she has reviewed three support packages and held several cases where there has been either a Supervision Order attached or if more specialist work was required

In January 2015 questionnaires were sent out to all Special Guardians asking them if they had received support within the last year and what their views were about the support they received. There were 30 responses.

Findings:

- 18 said they had received post order support in the last year, 12 had not
- 14 received advice and support relating to contact
- 12 relating to finances
- 9 relating to the child/children's behaviour or wellbeing
- 9 said they had attended training
- 3 had received support for other matters

12 Special Guardians received support from the Special Guardianship Consultant, 2 from Adoption Team Duty Social Worker, 3 from the child's Social Worker and 2 said they received support from either one or more of the following CAMHS, school nurse, school or a family support worker. All were satisfied with the support they received from those mentioned above.

Training provided

LBBB now run a two-day Special Guardianship training three times a year. It covers:

- Contact
- Relationships
- Attachment
- Understanding and managing needs and behaviours of children that have experienced abuse or neglect

LBBB provide Life Story Training for Special Guardians twice a year. Its aim is to show Special Guardians how to:

- Tell their children their story, age appropriately and in a sensitive way and through play/reading books
- Complete pictorial charts and life story books

We also hold a Parents Gathering: '*How to get the most out of contact*' three times a year. This provides parents with an opportunity to talk about their feelings prior, during and after contact. They are empowered to recognize that their children have similar feelings which are likely to impact on their behaviour and emotional wellbeing. The aim is to get parents to put aside what they want or what they believe to be their rights and focus on the needs of their child.

Support groups

Special Guardian Support Groups are held 6 times a year and Parent Support Groups 3 times a year.

Events for SGs and their families

- Summer picnic
- Children's Christmas activity i.e. pantomime
- Special Guardians -Christmas lunch

Priorities for 2015-16

In reviewing our work over the last year and analysing progress against our OFSTED Action Plan, the following areas have been recommended as priorities for the next year:

The top priorities related to Adoption and Permanence in 2015-16 are to:

1. Reduce timescales for placing children and approving adopters
2. Increase approvals of adopters to meet the needs of LBBB children
3. Review and redesign the Adoption Team to meet the changing needs with adoption and special guardianship
4. Work with partners in the region to improve performance and meet gaps in services, e.g. continuation of monthly family finding meetings, sharing of information regarding adoption resources, access to Consortium's preparation groups so there is no delay for prospective adopters
5. Continue 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

6. Further develop LBBD's permanence procedures to support staff in ensuring that all permanence options are explored and progressed in a timely manner
7. Ensure that parallel permanency plans continue to be considered from the start of a child's social care experience, so that if permanent placement is necessary and appropriate, this is well planned and all options have been fully explored ahead of any court process
8. Continue to increase the use of SGOs as an alternative appropriate option for permanency where adoption is not achievable or appropriate
9. Increase induction training and training for permanent staff to ensure that good permanency and parallel planning is embedded throughout the social work team

These priorities will be developed into an action plan which will supplement the OFSTED Action Plan (Appendix 1, Section 7). The progress against these priorities will be reported in next year's Annual Adoption Report.