

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Notice of Meeting

THE EXECUTIVE

Tuesday, 19 July 2005 - 7:00 pm
Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Dagenham

Members: Councillor C J Fairbrass (Chair); Councillor T G W Wade (Deputy Chair); Councillor J L Alexander, Councillor G J Bramley, Councillor H J Collins, Councillor C Geddes, Councillor S Kallar, Councillor M A McCarthy, Councillor M E McKenzie and Councillor L A Smith

Declaration of Members Interest: In accordance with the Constitution, Members are asked to declare any personal or prejudicial interest they may have in any matter which is to be considered at this meeting.

8.7.05

R. A. Whiteman
Chief Executive

Contact Officer Barry Ray
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AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence**
2. **Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2005 (to follow)**

Business Items

Public Items 3 to 4 and Private Items 8 to 11 are business items. The Chair will move that these be agreed without discussion, unless any Member asks to raise a specific point.

Any discussion of a Private Business Item will take place after the exclusion of the public and press.

3. **Budget Monitoring Report (April to May) 2005 / 2006 (Pages 1 - 13)**
4. **Adoption Service Statement of Purpose (Pages 15 - 22)**

Discussion Items

None.

5. **Any other public items which the Chair decides are urgent**
6. **To consider whether it would be appropriate to pass a resolution to exclude the public and press from the remainder of the meeting due to the nature of the business to be transacted.**

Private Business

The public and press have a legal right to attend Council meetings such as the Executive, except where business is confidential or certain other sensitive information is to be discussed. The list below shows why items are in the private part of the agenda, with reference to the relevant legislation (the relevant paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972).

Discussion Items

7. **Children's Services Inspections**

The contents of this report are embargoed by the Commission for Social Care Inspection, in accordance with the Council's Constitution (Part B, Article 14, paragraph 10.1) until after 19 July 2005. Copies of this report will be circulated to all Members and be available on the Internet after this date.

Business Items

8. **Gascoigne Regeneration - Agreement of Brief for Appointment of the Lead Developer/s (Pages 23 - 43)**

Concerns a Contractual Matter (paragraph 9)

9. **Re-Tendering the Citizen's Panel Contract (Pages 45 - 48)**

Concerns a Contractual Matter (paragraph 8)

10. **William Bellamy Infant School - Children's Centre Development (Pages 49 - 53)**

Concerns a Contractual Matter (paragraph 7 and 9)

11. **Award of Tender for Provision of an Alcohol Service (Pages 55 - 59)**

Concerns a Contractual Matter (paragraphs 7, 8 and 9)

12. **Any other confidential or exempt items which the Chair decides are urgent**

THE EXECUTIVE

19 JULY 2005

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

BUDGET MONITORING REPORT APRIL TO MAY 2005 / 2006	FOR INFORMATION
<i>This report relates to the regular monitoring of the Council's budget.</i>	
Summary	
<p>The report updates the Executive on the Council's revenue and capital position from the beginning of April to the end of May 2005.</p>	
<p>For revenue, it highlights early pressures on Regeneration and Environment, Social Services and Housing and Health departmental budgets totalling about £0.9 million with other remaining Council services broadly on target to meet their budget requirements by the year end. This is slightly offset by a favourable position of interest on balances of about £50,000 giving an overall projected overspend for the Council's budget of around £0.9 million by the year end.</p>	
<p>In order to alleviate the projected service overspends by the year-end the relevant Director's are currently reviewing elements of their Service budgets to ensure a balanced budget is achieved by the year end. If the need arises for an action plan to address these early pressures then these will be reported, as necessary, in future monitoring reports.</p>	
<p>For the Housing Revenue Account, minimal pressures currently exist but these are being favourably offset by better income through service charges, rental income and interest. The resultant position expected is for the relevant working balance to marginally increase by £100,000 to £3.0 million by the year end.</p>	
<p>For capital, the latest position is that there has been spend of around £4 million on the overall budgeted programme of £96.3 million, with a current projection of a total spend of nearly £93 million (96%) by the year end. This aspect will need to be closely monitored by Directors early in the year to ensure maximum programmed spend is achieved by the year end.</p>	
Recommendation	
<p>The Executive is asked to:</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the current position of the Council's revenue and capital budget. 2. Note that the Directors of Regeneration and Environment, Social Services and Housing and Health are currently reviewing their budgets to ensure a balanced position. 3. Note the position and projected out-turn for the Housing Revenue Account. 	

Reason		
As a matter of good financial practise, the Executive should be regularly updated with the position on the Council's budget.		
Contact Officer Joe Chesterton	Head of Financial Services	Tel:020 8227 2932 Minicom: 020 8227 2413 E-mail joe.chesterton@lbbd.gov.uk

1. Overview for Revenue Budget

- 1.1 At the end of May 2005, the Council has an initial projected overspend of around £0.9 million for the year end. Current projections indicate that there are early financial pressures within the Regeneration and Environment, Social Services and Housing and Health budgets. The update position at the end of May is that for Regeneration and Environment there is a projected over-spend of about £630,000. For Social Services there is a projected overspend of £158,000 and for Housing and Health of £111,000. Slightly offsetting these factors is currently a favourable position on interest on balances of around £50,000.

2. Service Position

2.1 General

- 2.1.1 Details of each service's current financial position are provided in Appendix A. It is expected such variances are early initial pressures and should not impact on the outturn position for the year but in these areas of service overspend continual work is required by Directors to ensure a reduction in these current forecasts.
- 2.1.2 At the Executive meeting on 12 July, Members approved that roll forwards from 2004/05 for the revenue budget amounting to some £3.0 million (2003/04 £1.9 million) be added to the relevant Departmental budgets for 2005/06. It is important to remind Members that Directors need to use these funds to deliver the relevant services associated with the agreed roll forwards and that the appropriate work is undertaken to ensure delivery of full spend by the year end. Further updates on progress will be provided in future budget monitoring reports.

2.2 Corporate Strategy

The overall position for the Department is indicating a £19,000 underspend by the year end.

Corporate Human Resources (HR)

Corporate HR is projecting an over-spend of £25,000. This movement is due to the need for agency staff to cover the Principal HR Officer vacant post until a fulltime person is recruited. As the year progresses, actions will be taken to ensure that the Department remains within the budget through the centralisation of HR activities.

Legal Services

Legal services are projecting a broadly balanced position. The main issue arising is that Land Charges income, is anticipated to be £485,000 against the budget of £659,000. However, £200,000 is available if required, from the contingency reserves to cover the actual shortfall at year end, as agreed at the Assembly on 2 March 2005.

Corporate Communications, Democratic Services and Policy and Performance

All of the above services are not projecting any material variance on their budgets at the year end.

2.3 Education

The Education budget is currently projected to break-even for the year without the Executive's recently agreed decision for the reduction in its 2005/06 budget from the over-spend in 2004/05. The Arts and Libraries element of the departmental budget is indicating a balanced position by year end.

The outturn position for 2004/05 for the Education budget has shown that the Department has made significant progress in its budget position for that year. The final position showed that the Education budget overspent by £224,000 for the year. However, after taking into account the reduction of £300,000 in the 2004/05 budget for the 2003/04 over-spend this highlighted a positive in-year position of £76,000 for 2004/05. The Executive at its meeting on 12 July agreed that the remaining overspend for 2004/05 needs to be met from the Department's 2005/06 budget.

2.4 Finance

The Finance Department has projected an over-spend of £41,000 against the budget. The main reason for the overspend is within the employee expenses budget. However, this projection includes uncommitted contingencies for the use of agency staff in the overall Finance budget. As the year progresses, action will be taken to ensure that the Department remains within the budget by managing vacancies and the use of agency staff.

Financial Services

Financial Services has a projected under-spend of £23,000. This is mainly due to staff vacancies.

Internal Audit

Internal Audit has a projected under-spend of £17,000. This is mainly due to the delays in filling staff vacancies.

Information Management & Technology (IM&T)

IM&T has a projected under-spend of £67,000.

The projection for employee expenses is the main reason for the underspend. The projected under-spend on staffing are expected to be spent on staffing costs for projects, backfill for e-government team and infrastructure development.

Revenue Services

Revenue Services has a projected over-spend of £123,000.

The overspend is mainly within employee expenses due to the use of agency staff to cover vacancies at higher rates than budget salaries.

Finance and Support Services

The Finance and Support Business Unit is projected to overspend by £46,000 in employee expenses. The over-spend is due to the use of agency staff to cover vacancies in Senior Management, Administrative Support and Customer Services. Also, there is significant spending on advertising as a result of difficulties encountered in finding suitable candidates for Senior Managers positions.

Revenues Collection

The Revenues Collection Business Unit is projected to overspend by £59,000 in employee expenses. This is mainly due to the use of agency staff to cover vacancies for Council Tax and Revenues Officers.

Rents and Benefits

The Rents and Benefits Business Unit is projected to overspend by £18,000 in employee expenses. This is mainly due to the use of agency staff to cover vacancies for Rent Account Assistant and Visiting Welfare Officers.

Housing Benefits is currently projected to be within Budget, but on going work is being undertaken on this budget to ensure that the projection is realistic.

Efforts are being made to successfully recruit to vacant posts in order to reduce the reliance on agency staff and therefore reduce the projected overspend.

Business Services

Business Services has a projected overspend of £26,000 on employee expenses mainly due to the Pension and Payroll Business Units which currently have no vacancies resulting in an overspend of £11,000 and £30,000 respectively which is partially offset by savings from vacancies within other Business Units.

2.5 **Housing and Health**

Housing General Fund

Although the Housing General Fund is forecast to spend to budget in 2005-06, significant budget pressures need to continue to occur on Temporary Accommodation for the Homeless but this will need to be offset by underspends on other Housing General Fund activities.

Health and Consumer Services

Health and Consumer Services is expected to overspend in 2005-06 by £111,000. This is from Trading Standards where this area is forecast to overspend by £90,000 and Environmental Health is forecast to overspend by £21,000, both due to the capital cost of Early Retirement now being charged to revenue. Further work is being undertaken by the Director to balance this projected overspend position.

2.6 **Regeneration and Environment**

Overall, the department is projected to overspend by £631,000 by the year end. This position primarily relates to Sports Centres showing a net projected overspend of £505,000. Additionally, increased income from commercial tenants and car parking generated in 2004/05 is not available to the same extent in 2005/06 to offset the projected overspends.

Regeneration Partnerships

Regeneration Partnerships are expected to breakeven in 2005/06.

Planning and Development

At this stage in the year Planning and Development are projected to spend to budget.

Land and Property

Land and Property income budgets for 2005/06 were increased to reflect the strong performance in 2004/05. Based on 2004/05 outturn property insurance costs are projected to be £75,000 underspent.

Environment, Highways, Roads and Transport

Parking income has performed well, including a fee increase the projected additional income is £160,000. However, Highways improvements is showing signs of pressure on this budget. The cost of the stores function is not being met by income as usage has declined and the overspend in 2004/05 is projected to continue into 2005/06 of around £80,000.

Leisure and Amenities

The over spend in Leisure presents a major financial risk for the Department in 2005/06. The requirements of the 2005/06 savings programme means that the off setting under spends in 2004/05 from other divisions within the Department will not be available to meet this pressure in 2005/06.

Salaries are projected to overspend by £130,000, which is partly offset by additional income generated from schools of £67,000. Despite the re-opening of Goresbrook Leisure Centre other income continues to project below budget by £442,000, giving a net projected overspend in this area of £505,000.

Community Halls planned savings of £65,000 (of the total £173,000 savings) are now projected not to be achieved as a result of slippage in agreeing the transfer of functions, responsibilities and leases.

2.7 Social Services

The Department is presently projecting a £158,000 over-spend position for the 2005/06 financial year (less than one fifth of a %), although caution is advised on full year projections after only two months' activity, it is envisaged by year end that the overall position will be neutral.

Within the Gross expenditure budget of £102 million, there are four issues arising namely Older Persons Care Management / Social Work, Physical and Learning Disability care packages – and Learning Disability residential services. These are being partially off-set by favourable budget positions in Residential budgets in Children's and Older Persons, and other areas.

Children's Services

Pressures are continuing in Social Work recruitment, especially around high cost agency staff usage. The budget position is favourable regarding out-borough placements.

Older Persons Services

In aggregate, the £41 million service budget is on target, but financial pressures in Care Management staffing area, which is being off-set by favourable position in residential placements. Home Care and Care Packages are broadly neutral at this stage of the year.

Adults with Disabilities

Significant pressures on budgets in Physical Disability and Learning Disability particularly around Packages of Care at home/community - also residential care in Learning Disability and Mental Health currently projecting overspends. Factors contributing to this position include additional costs and volumes, particularly in Learning Disability service area. However, due to continuing delays in the implementation of new mental Health initiatives, there is presently an underspend of circa £300,000 which is helping the overall position in Adults.

2.8 Customer First

The budget for Customer First is contained within the Corporate Strategy Department's overall budget and is £3.072 million for 2005/06. The current position is that full spend is anticipated for this budget, which is primarily the running costs associated with the call centre, the project implementation team and customer service team.

3. Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

- 3.1 The HRA working balance as at the 31st March 2006 is originally estimated to be £2.9 million. Underspends are arising from additional income from leaseholder service charges due to more sales of flats than originally estimated. Additional benefit has also arisen from better rental income as sales of Council property are currently not as high as forecast. It is, therefore, anticipated at this stage of the year that the working balance will rise to around £3.0 million by the end of 2005/06.

4. Interest on Balances

- 4.1 The current position is that this area of the budget is starting to show signs of improved performance and that current projections show a very marginally favourable variance by the end of the year. As at the end of May this is estimated at about £50,000. The favourable position is arising due primarily to increases in interest rates, performance on investments being slightly better than expected coupled with a larger investment base due to a much lower than expected spend on the Capital Programme in 2004/05, which was identified in the outturn report to Members on 12th July. This positive position will allow the strengthening of Council balances at the year end.

5. Savings and Pressures – Budget Decisions 2005/06

- 5.1 The Savings and Pressure items approved by Members as part of the 2005/06 budget process is being closely monitored by relevant Directors and the Director of Finance. Total savings for the EPCS block amounted to £7.017 million and pressures of £3.424 million. A summary by Department on their performance to date for meeting these targets is shown at Appendix B.
- 5.2 The latest position for 2005/06 is that the majority of the level of savings required and pressures commitment is being contained within relevant Departmental budgets. Where specific savings items are not being actioned the relevant Directors have reviewed their budgets appropriately. This relates to the Regeneration and Environment Department where the Director is identifying other areas of savings to ensure the identified target has been met for the year.

6. Capital Programme

- 6.1 The Capital Programme is being managed by the Capital Programme Management Office (CPMO) team in the Department of Regeneration and Environment alongside financial input from the Finance Department. A Summary of the latest position for the 2005/06 programme is shown in Appendix C.

- 6.2 As at the end of May, approximately £4 million of this year's programme has been spent out of an overall original budget for the year of around £96.3 million. It is quite usual for the majority of spending on capital schemes to occur in the latter part of the year as a result of tender exercises, consultation etc, however, the spend to the end of May is only 4.2% of the total programme.
- 6.3 The current projections indicate that there will be an overall spend by the year end of some £92.8 million, this is already some £3.5m lower than the original budget for the year. The projected percentage final spend of the capital programme is 96.4% of the original budget and working budget.
- 6.4 Regular liaison between the CMPO and project sponsors is taking place to ensure that projections of spend on capital schemes are robust and achievable by the year end. It is important, therefore, that Directors are closely monitoring this position to achieve identified spend of their programmed budgets by the year end. The CPMO are now regularly challenging projections by Departments and the intention is that reasons for major variances will be identified and reported as part of future monitoring reports.
- 6.5 Members will be aware that at the meeting on 12 July, that the Executive approved net roll forwards from the 2004/05 programme totalling £14.1 million. These will be added to the base 2005/06 programme and the updated position will be reported in the next monitoring report. The early approval of these roll forwards will greatly assist project sponsors to fully deliver their requirements for the year.

Background Papers

Oracle reports
CPMO reports

REVENUE BUDGET 2005/2006**SUMMARY OF POSITION - APRIL TO MAY 2005**

	<u>Original Budget</u>	<u>Working Budget</u>	<u>Budget to date</u>	<u>Actual to date</u>	<u>Projected Outturn</u>	<u>Projected Outturn Variation</u>
	<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>
<u>Department</u>						
Corporate Strategy	5,118	5,164	861	649	5,145	-19
Education, Arts & Libraries	141,359	141,359	23,630	24,239	141,359	0
Finance	-	-	-	-124	41	41
Housing & Health	4,260	4,260	473	870	4,371	111
Regeneration and Environment	29,910	29,910	5,931	6,027	30,541	631
Social Services	71,263	71,263	15,664	13,972	71,421	158
Total for Department's	251,910	251,956	46,559	45,633	252,878	922
<u>Other Services</u>						
Corporate Management	5,673	5,673	961	876	5,673	0
General Finance	-32,319	-32,319	-5,387	-5,770	-32,369	-50
Contingency	1,082	1,036	-	-	1,036	0
Levies	5,906	5,906	1,456	1,456	5,906	0
Total for Other Services	-19,658	-19,704	-2,970	-3,438	-19,754	-50
Total Council Budget	232,252	232,252	43,589	42,195	233,124	872

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BUDGET SAVINGS AND PRESSURES 2005/06

SAVINGS

BUDGET SAVINGS 2005/06		
SUMMARY		
Department	Amount £'000	Projected Outturn £'000
Corporate Strategy	687.7	*687.7
Education, Arts and Libraries	77	77
Finance	2,445	2,445
Housing and Health	645	645
Regeneration and Environmental Services	1,592	1,487
Social Services	1,570	1,570
TOTAL	<u>7,016.7</u>	<u>6,911.7</u>

Comments:

*In addition to these EPCS savings there are savings to ring-fenced areas of £90.9k which are on target to be met.

Additionally a saving of £225k within the Housing Revenue Account has been made, as a contribution to Corporate and Democratic Core costs.

PRESSURES

BUDGET PRESSURES 2005/06		
SUMMARY		
Department	Amount £'000	Projected Outturn £'000
Corporate Strategy	1,541.5	1,541.5
Education, Arts and Libraries	33	33
Finance	833	833
Housing and Health	0	0
Regeneration and Environmental Services	491	399
Social Services	0	0
Corporate	525	525
TOTAL	<u>3,423.5</u>	<u>3,331.5</u>

Comments:

All services are currently intend to utilise all additional budget pressures apart from Regeneration and Environment.

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CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2005/2006SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURE - APRIL TO MAY 2005

	<u>Original Budget</u>	<u>Working Budget</u>	<u>Actual to date</u>	<u>Projected Outturn</u>	<u>Projected Outturn Variation against Working Budget</u>	<u>Projected Outturn Variation against Original Budget</u>
	<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>	<u>£'000</u>
<u>Department</u>						
Corporate Strategy	4,069	4,069	115	3,809	-260	-260
Education, Arts & Libraries	20,287	20,287	851	14,771	-5,516	-5,516
Finance	4,041	4,041	30	4,430	389	389
Housing & Health	38,627	38,627	1,079	40,634	2,007	2,007
Regeneration and Environment	25,942	25,942	1,275	25,690	-252	-252
Social Services	3,286	3,286	655	3,286	0	0
Total for Department Schemes	96,252	96,252	4,005	92,620	-3,632	-3,632
<u>Accountable Body Schemes</u>						
Regeneration and Environment	-	-	-	217	217	217
Total for Accountable Body Schemes	-	-	-	217	217	217
Total for all Schemes	96,252	96,252	4,005	92,837	-3,415	-3,415

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THE EXECUTIVE

19 JULY 2005

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

ADOPTION SERVICE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE	FOR DECISION	
<i>This report seeks the approval of the Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Service which is an annual requirement.</i>		
Summary		
The Commission for Social Care Inspection will be conducting an inspection of Barking and Dagenham's Adoption Service between 8 and 18 August 2005. Preparation for the Inspection is underway. It is a requirement for the Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Service to be formally approved by the Executive annually. The Statement of Purpose sets out the role and duties of the Adoption Agency, and the service that it offers to the public.		
Recommendation		
The Executive is asked to agree the Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Agency attached as Appendix 1.		
Reason		
It is a requirement of the current National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services in England and Wales (2003) that all Statements of Purpose are formally approved by the relevant Executive and reviewed on an annual basis.		
Contact Officer: Tolis Vouyioukas	Head of Children's Services	Tel: 020 8227 2233 Fax: 020 8227 2241 Minicom: 020 8227 E-mail: tolis.vouyioukas@lbbd.gov.uk

1. Background

- 1.1 Adoption Agencies are being inspected against the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services introduced from 1 April. Barking and Dagenham's Adoption service is due to be inspected between 8 and 18 August 2005 (4 days). There are 29 standards that will be used to make judgments about the quality of the service. The inspection will be carried out by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).
- 1.2 It is a requirement of the current National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services in England and Wales (2003) that all Statements of Purpose are formally approved by the relevant Executive and reviewed on an annual basis.

- 1.3 This is the first time this requirement will be measured by The Commission for Social Care Inspection; hence the Statement of Purpose has not been to the Executive before. The Adoption Panel has already agreed the Statement of Purpose, attached as Appendix 1.
 - 1.4 The Statement of Purpose sets out the objectives of the Adoption service and the service it offers to the public. It describes the organisational structure of the service and the arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of its activities.
- 2. Performance**
- 2.1 The Adoption Service achieved 15 adoptions last year (PAF C23 6.35% equating to ●●● three blobs) and has set a target of 8% equating to approximately 20 adoptions for 2005 / 2006. The Head of Children's Services holds regular meetings with the chair of the Adoption Panel.
- 3. Consultation**
- 3.1 Legal services, the Adoption service and the Adoption Panel have been consulted in preparation of this report. There are no legal, human resources or financial implications.

Background Papers

- National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services

ADOPTION AGENCY STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Aims and Objectives

1. To provide an adoption service which meets the needs of
 - a) Children who have been, or may be adopted
 - b) Parents and guardians of such children
 - c) Persons who have adopted or may adopt
 - d) Birth families who have had a child adopted, either with or without consent
2. To provide a range of adoptive families to meet the religious, racial and cultural needs of children waiting for a permanent family, the needs of sibling groups to be kept together, and the needs of older children to maintain some form of contact with siblings or birth family.
3. To ensure that plans for adoption, where this is deemed to be in the best interest of the child, are pursued without undue delay.
4. To ensure that all children, whose plan is for adoption, have been properly prepared for this major life change and have a Life Story Book which enables them to understand and value their past.
5. To ensure that all people have equal opportunities to become adopters and that they are treated with respect and courtesy.
6. To ensure that reasonable timescales are adhered to in each area of adoption work
7. To establish and maintain a professional and competent Adoption Panel which can effectively deal with all the statutory requirements of an adoptive service.
8. To ensure that Adoption Agency Regulations are followed at every stage of the adoption process for both adults and children.
9. To ensure that as many children as possible, within the care system, who cannot return to their birth family, are given the opportunity of permanence through adoption.

Adoption Manager

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Pauline Phillips has been Manager of the Adoption Team since 28 January 2005. She has worked in Permanency since 1993. Pauline has over 20 years experience in field social work in both Children & Families and the Mental Health Service.

Adoption Team

The Adoption Team is made up of five social workers. There are four full time posts and two part time. There is also an adoption administrator.

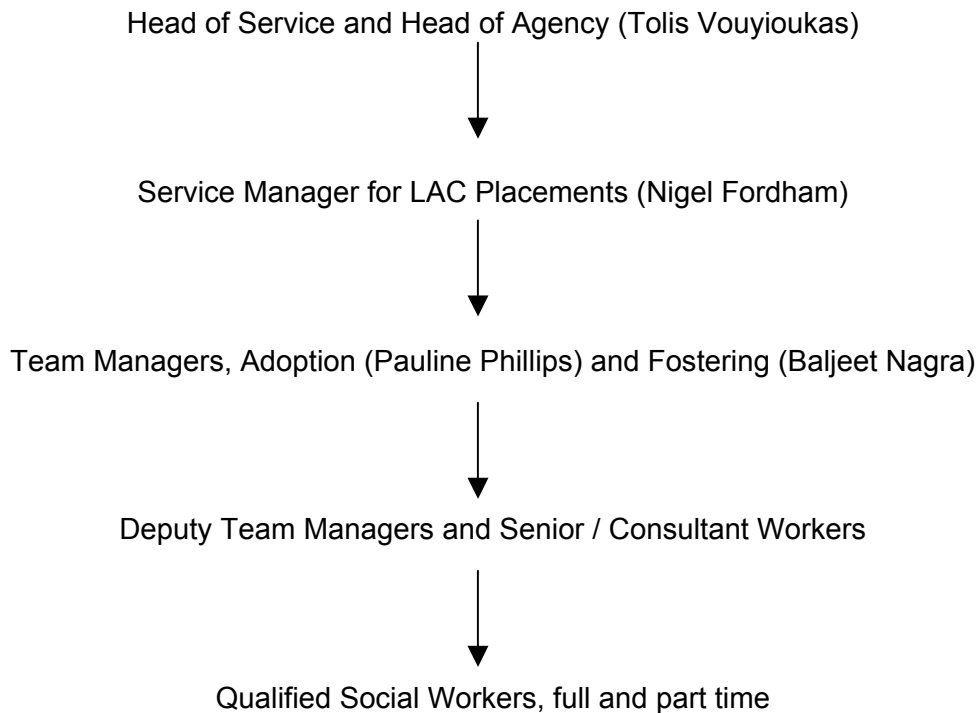
All social workers are qualified social workers and all except one have had at least two years post qualifying experience in an area childcare team. They all have experience in fostering and adoption.

In addition there is a post for Deputy Team Manager, Post Adoption Support Co-ordinator and half a social work post is filled by a Consultant Social Worker – Direct Work.

The team is based at the Heathway office.

Rita Dael is the Adoption Administrator and is available on 020 8227 5854.

Organisational Structure



Monitoring and Evaluation

The adoption service is monitored and evaluated on a number of levels, mostly through performance indicators set by Central Government, as well as Council targets and expectations.

The service is required to place a certain percentage of its looked after children in permanent and adoptive homes. There are timescales in which this must be achieved. The Service has developed a monitoring system which “tracks” the path of both adults and children from their initial point of contact with the Team. Areas of delay can be highlighted and the service reviewed as a result.

Children’s needs are under constant review so that appropriate placements can be recruited. This does mean that some applications from prospective adopters are dealt with as a higher priority than others, but essentially our service is one for children and their needs are paramount in any decision making process.

Service users’ evaluations are reviewed to improve service delivery. Prospective adopters are asked to evaluate the service through questionnaires and also through their regular Newsletter and feedback to the Adoption Panel.

Prospective Adopters

1. Recruitment

The Adoption Team has a number of regular journals and newspapers which it uses for recruitment, both locally and throughout London and the South East. Adverts go out on a monthly basis, and we aim to attract adopters from different cultures to meet the diverse needs of our children. We also use Adoption UK and Be My Parent for specific recruitment and for individual children. We are members of a consortium, the North East London Adoption Consortium, and this is another avenue for prospective families, as well as networks and advertising with all other Local Authority Adoption Agencies and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. We respond to the needs of our local community and assess a number of families within the Borough.

2. Preparation and Assessment

All applicants receive an information booklet on initial enquiry and then meet the adoption manager to discuss the process of assessment and approval. Applicants are invited to attend an Open Evening for further information and are then visited at home by a member of the Adoption Team. If it is felt they would be a good resource for the Borough, or that they have the potential to parent someone else's child, they will be invited to attend Preparation Workshops. This forms part of the assessment. Discussions following the groups will lead to some applicants going on for a home study, and some being counselled out. Some families also withdraw at this stage. A home study can take up to six months to prepare and involves the whole family in addressing issues related to their own circumstances and values, the types of background and behaviour they can deal with, and the skills they have to deal with the needs of any child placed. They are actively involved in the preparation of the Form F and sign to agree its contents before it is submitted to Panel. References are also taken up according to the Regulations to ensure the family can offer a safe place for a child.

3. Approval

Applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel for discussion about their approval. If the Panel recommend approval, and this is ratified by the Agency Decision Maker, the couple / applicant join our own register of approved families and wait for a suitable placement. Their approval will state the age band and number of children it is felt they could successfully parent. If a placement is not made within three months, their names go forward to the National Register and also our Consortium, widening their opportunity for a suitable match. If they are not approved, they are informed of the reasons and have the right to appeal by writing in to the Head of the Agency. They must be offered an interview within 28 days of their letter and have received a response. They do not ultimately have the right to be approved; this remains the Panel and Head of Agency's final decision.

The applicants also have the opportunity to appeal to the Independent Reviewing Panel, who can look at their appeal and make recommendations to the Panel refusing approval. This Reviewing Panel cannot, however, instruct the Adoption Panel to change its recommendation.

4. Support

Under the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2003, any family who has been involved in the adoption process will have the right to be assessed for a support plan. This could be in the form of counselling, financial help, therapy, information or advice. If the family meet agreed criteria, they will be offered the appropriate support for the time specified. These plans will be subject to review.

Support is offered to adoptive families in various ways. Some families and looked after children will have met the criteria for ongoing financial support (previously known as an adoption allowance).

Support by way of a counselling service is also offered to birth parents who have been affected by adoption. This service is offered by partnership with Barnardo's.

Within the Adoption Team there are workers skilled in direct work with children, including anger, grief and attachment work. Workers specialise in preparing children and families for adoption and in supporting the placement once the children move in.

The Adoption Team also has workers who are experienced and skilled in Post Adoption Support, and in counselling adoptees who wish to contact their birth family. (Section 51 of the Adoption Act 1976).

Complaints Procedure

The Complaints, Suggestions and Compliments booklet is available at all Social Services and Council Offices.

The Complaints Procedure has three stages:

1. Stage One: Involves talking directly to the person providing the service or their Manager. Most complaints can be resolved at this stage.
2. Stage Two: A written complaint should be registered with the Customer Care Manager, informing them that the issue was not satisfactorily resolved at Stage One. An independent officer will be appointed to investigate the complaint, and this will be completed within 28 days.
3. Stage Three: An independent review panel will be set up, if requested, within 28 days of receiving a Stage Two report which is unsatisfactory.

If the complaint is still unresolved, the Local Government Ombudsman may be contacted:

The Local Ombudsman
21 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9BU

Tel: 020 7915 3210

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Ferguson House
113 Cranbrook Road
Ilford
Essex IG1 4PU

Tel: 020 8477 0960

Fax: 020 8477 0984

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