

Adoption & Permanence Annual Report

2017-2018



Introduction

One of our key priorities is to secure permanence for our children from the day that they come into our care. Permanence can be achieved through a number of routes, children who return to their birth family, placed with friends or relatives, permanent new or existing families, adoptive families, carers that have been granted a Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order, or for a very small minority residential care. Whatever the route, the imperative is ensuring that they are brought up in secure, loving home that meets all of their individual needs.

This report provides an update on activity in the Adoption Service from 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018, and incorporates the activity in relation to Adoption, Special Guardianship Order and Long term fostering, and sets out plans for the new financial year. The Barking and Dagenham Adoption Service operates within the regulatory framework of the Children Act 1989; Adoption and Children Act 2002; and the Children and Families Act 2014, Adoption Regulations, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards.

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.

The Progress of Regionalisation

The plan for London has become clearer this past year, with the identification of four London regions. These will be North, South, East and West London. Barking and Dagenham will join with the East London boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Havering, Redbridge and Waltham Forest and potentially Newham. The London Borough of Havering has been identified as the local authority to be the Hub for East London.

A project manager has been employed at Havering Council, and the process of defining the structure and work parameters of the East London Region are in the process of being developed.

The aim is for the Hub to be set up by the spring of 2019, but this may be undertaken in stages from April 19 onwards. The final plans have yet to be agreed by the local authorities that will make up the East London Region and then the proposals will need to be ratified by each authority's Cabinet.

Adoption Issues

The main issues within LBBD's Adoption Service continue to be the time children wait to be placed in an adoptive home, and the mismatch between the adopters available and waiting and the needs of the children needing an adoptive placement. Whilst local authorities have tried to address these issues there has still been an impact on adoption outcomes. According to 'Adoption Match' "only 40% of children (443) on the Adoption Register as at the end of June 18 are seeking a single placement, whereas 74% of the families (423) on the Adoption Register are seeking a single placement".

In LBBD we have a number of sibling groups needing adoptive placements. The picture nationally mirrors this situation in other local authorities. According to the Adoption Register “The number of sibling groups of two or more remains high at 60% (671) but the number of families seeking 2 or more children at 26% (148) is still unbalanced.”

The legal processes continue to have an impact on the timescales for placing children in their adoptive placements. There have been continuous challenges from birth parents to the granting of Placement Orders and Adoption Orders. There is now caselaw which prohibits the placement of a child whilst an appeal is pending. This has impacted on the Adoption Scorecard adversely for a few children.

The aim of the adoption reform programme was that local authorities were expected to place children in permanent homes without undue delay. However, some of the ‘Harder to Place’ children, that characterise a good proportion of the children that have an adoption plan; such as children with special needs or sibling groups, take longer to find an appropriate family. Barking and Dagenham council are committed to ensure that these children are found adoptive homes, even if it takes longer and a number of such children have impacted on the Scorecard performance even though the eventual outcome has been an adoptive family that can meet their needs.

The inter-agency fund that the Government uses to refund payments made to other local authorities and agencies for the use of their adopters changed last year. Only children who are termed “hard to place” and whom have been waiting at least 18 months will now have their fees reimbursed. This has had financial implications for the Department, as we have bought families from other agencies in the reporting period that will no longer be refunded by the government as they do not fall within the criteria.

In addition, there have been changes to the Adoption Support Fund, in which the government placed a limit on funding to £5000 for each child has had some implications for children needing ongoing therapeutic support post adoption.

Decisions for Adoption

Nationally there has been a marginal increase in children being referred for adoption decisions. In 2017/18, LBBD saw a slight increase in the number of children who were given the decision that they ‘should be placed for adoption’ (SHOPA) decision. This was an increase from 18 cases to 22 cases between 2016-17 and 2017-18. A contributory factor was a number of sibling groups needing placements.

- 3 groups of 2 siblings
- 2 groups of 3 siblings
- 10 individual children

According to the Adoption Leadership Board the number of local authority decisions that a child should be placed for adoption has stabilised over the last 3 years. “The number of local authority decisions that a child should be placed for adoption and placement orders granted by courts fell in the second half of 2013-14. Approximately 21% fewer decision for adoption were made in 2015-16 compared to 2013-14.” The numbers have dropped over the following years. This has meant for last year we

have seen our numbers of children placed for adoption, and the corresponding number of adoption orders fall.

We have endeavoured to ensure that there is increased effective planning for permanence for the children, and we are now seeing children referred at an earlier stage. Our referrals have increased compared to other boroughs and more children given ADM decisions for adoption, but some plans subsequently changed to SGO within extended family. However, there is an increased awareness that adoption is a potential option for children resulting in an increase in referrals for an ADM decision.

Routes Through to Adoption

We continue to consider traditional and new initiatives to identify adoptive families for children needing placements. To this end, we are 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).

We also attended 3 Adoption Exchange Days and two Adoption Activity Days. 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. However, we did not make any matches through these events in 2017-18.

Fostering to Adopt

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.

We discuss with all our prospective adopters about ‘foster to adopt’. We currently have a case where the child has been placed with their siblings who have already been adopted. The child is doing well in placement and it is anticipated that the court will grant a Placement Order. However, during the reporting year of 2017-18 we did not have any children placed under this scheme.

Summary of the Children Referred for Adoption (SHOPA)

This year the total number of children with SHOPA decisions, was 22 children, compared to 18 in 2016-17 and 28 in 2015-16.

There were no relinquished children in this period.

Children's Plans for Adoption – Approvals and Rescinded Decisions

There were 3 children whose plans were rescinded from the 2017-18 list as alternative permanent plans were devised for these children.

- 1 single child and a sibling group of 2 children

Details of Children Approved for Agency Decision Maker

Boys	Girls	White British	European	Mixed heritage	Black African	Asian
13	9	15	3	1	2	1

Age Breakdown

0-1	1year	2years	3years	4years	5years
6	3	3	2	5	3

Summary of the children who were matched in 2017-18

Of the 11 children who were matched with families for adoption (where the adoption order has not yet been granted), there were 5 single children and three sibling groups of two children. Of these matches, 4 children were matched with in-house adopters. This consisted of 2 single children and a sibling pair. (See Appendix 4)

Of the remaining 6 children, who were matched to interagency adopters (adopters approved by other local authorities or voluntary adoption agencies), these were 3 sibling groups of two.

The cost of such inter-agency 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). The Adoption Reform Grant fund the purchasing of interagency placements, providing the child/ren are classed as 'hard to place' and has been waiting for 18 months or over for a family. The costs will be increased in 2018-19.

Summary of the children who were adopted 2017- 2018

The total number of children who were granted Adoption Orders during this period was 12 children. (See Appendix 1)

Boys	girls	White British	White European	Mixed Heritage	Black African	Asian
4	8	11	1	0	0	0

Age Breakdown

0-3 years	4-7 years
9	3

Sibling Groups and Individuals

Single children	Siblings (2 children)
6	3 groups

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.

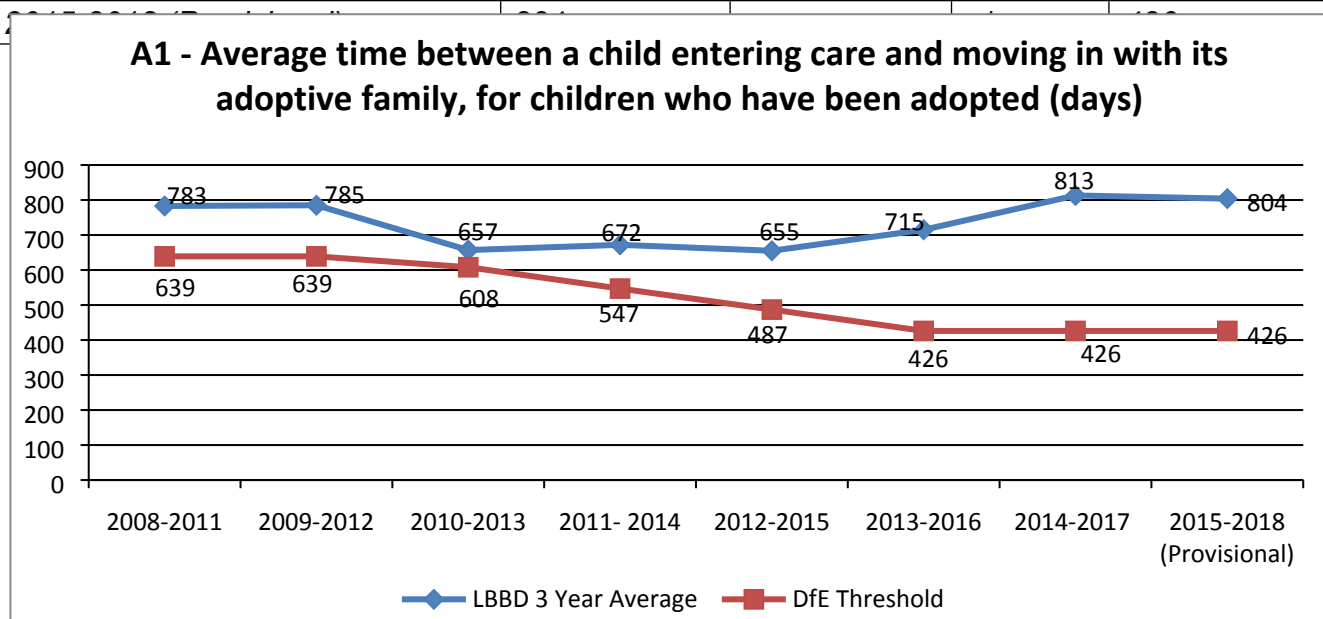
The Scorecard was published in April 2018 and takes account of the period 2014-17 so the children adopted in the reporting period of 2017-18 are not yet on the scorecard. However, the children who were added to this published scorecard (i.e. those adopted in 2016-17) were highly complex. Case summaries of the 3 children who took the longest were provided to the DfE and are attached as Appendix 2.

A1 - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (426 days)

Within 2014-17, Barking and Dagenham on average took 813 days (2 years 3 months) between a child entering care and moving into its adoptive family – 387 days above the national threshold of 426 days (1 year 2 months). This represents a longer time period for A1 when compared to 2013-16 performance (715 days) and is also significantly above the England average of 520 days. Barking and Dagenham's performance on A1 is also above our statistical neighbours' average of 565 days.

In 2017/18, 12 children were adopted (6%) and performance on A1 decreased from 1127 to 506 days which is much closer to the national threshold. This performance will reduce our 2015-18 performance from 813 days to 804 days. Once published in 2019 performance will be 378 days (1 year 2 weeks) off the national threshold set at 426 days.

A1 Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (426 days)	LBBD 3 Year Average	National	London	DFE Threshold
2008-2011	783	626	701	639
2009-2012	785	636	715	639
2010-2013	657	647	703	608
2011- 2014	672	628	662	547
2012-2015	655	593	619	487
2013-2016	715	558	599	426
2014-2017	813	520	574	426



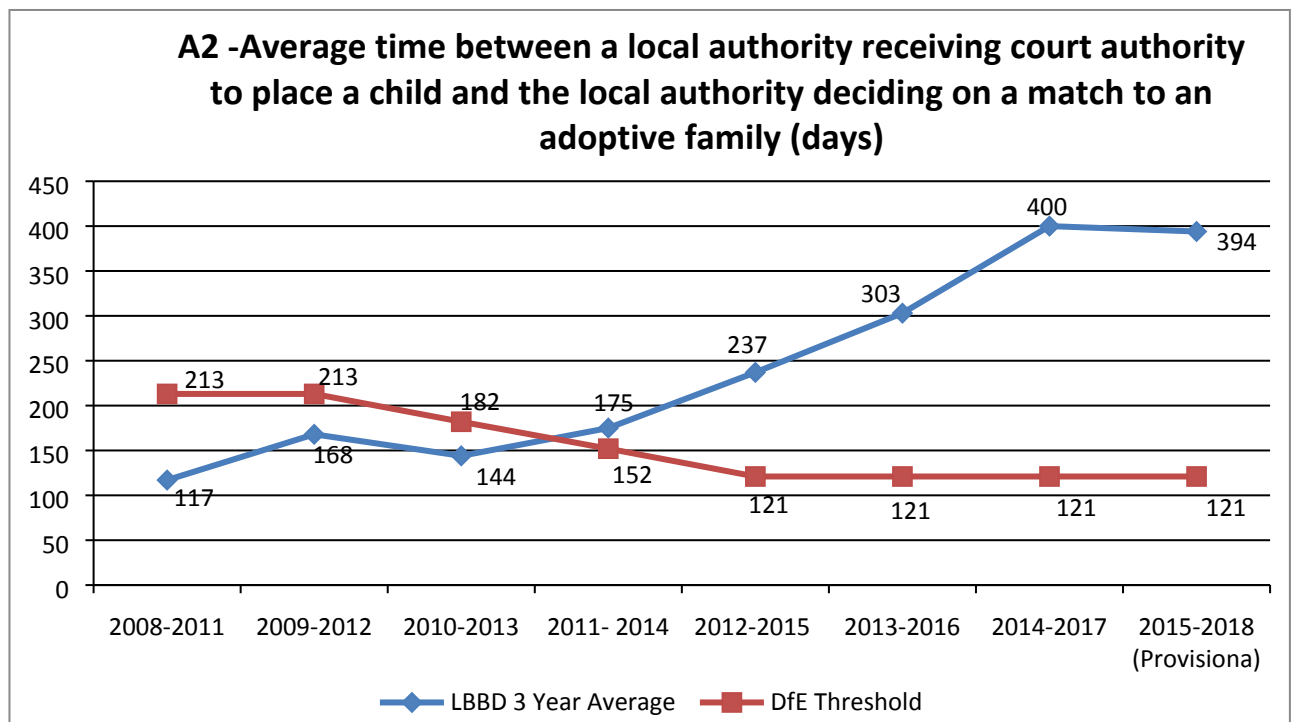
A2 - Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (121 days)

The national threshold for the average time between receipt of a placement order and the confirmation of a match is 121 days (4 months). Within 2014-17, on average, Barking and Dagenham took 400 days (13 months), which is 279 days (9 months) above the threshold. This also represents a longer time period for A2 when compared to 2013-16 (303 days) performance and is also above the England average of 220 days. Barking and Dagenham's performance on A2 is also above our statistical neighbours' average of 247 days.

The 2017-18 adoption performance for A2 is 262 days, 141 days (5 months) above the national threshold. This performance will reduce our 2015-18 adoption scorecard performance slightly from 400 to 394 days, which will be 273 days above the threshold.

However, from Appendix 1 it can be seen that we placed three sets of sibling groups in 2017/18. All the children placed in this period were placed well below the DfE average time, except for one child who was a Black child who had sickle cell disease.

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 (121 days)	LBBB 3 Year Average	National	London	DfE Threshold
2008-2011	117	173	147	213
2009-2012	168	195	173	213
2010-2013	144	210	197	182
2011- 2014	175	216	203	152
2012-2015	237	223	218	121
2013-2016	303	226	232	121
2014-2017	400	220	235	121
2015-2018 (Provisional)	394	n/a	n/a	121



[The key point to note is that the 2014-17 adoption scorecard has reached a peak in terms of numbers of days for both A1 and A2. The next two adoption scorecards to be published will see a reduction for both indicators.](#)

As a result of the newly published Scorecard data, the Local Authority received a letter from the Under Secretary of State due to the thresholds not being met and a detailed response has been provided to the Minister. A further meeting will be held with DfE representatives to further interrogate performance – date to be confirmed.

Disruptions

There have been no disruptions, post placement or post order, during this reporting period.

Adopters

Recruitment Activity- 2017-2018

Activity over the April 2017 to March 2018 period included:

- Taking part in 3 adoption events – national and local ‘Exchange’ events, covering Manchester, Leeds, and London.
- 9 adoption information events coordinated and promoted by ELPAC.
- Professional photography for all children with adoption as their plan
- Joint working with East London Adoption Marketing Group - boroughs are Havering, Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Newham and Tower Hamlets. Outcomes include a new website for East London Adoption
- Providing enquiry booklets for prospective adopters when asked and at information evenings.
- We continue to post a short film about adopters’ journeys with us – used on social media and Lbbd.gov.uk website
- Uploading profiles on Adoption Link and managing enquiries

Summary of Approved Adopters

Table 13. Number of approved adoptive families

No of Approvals (families)	4 Families
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6 families were approved in 2016-17 (12 families in 2015-16). In 2017-18 we approved 4 families that were home adopters, and two inter-country adopters who were adopting from India and Bangladesh. Adopter numbers have been low due to the fact that there are a number of adopters nationally who are waiting for placements. In order to place children quickly we have purchased adopters from other local authorities or independent agencies.

Approvals

Approved Adopters (Figures for 2015-16 in brackets)

Table 14. Number of couples/Single adoptive families

Couples	4
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Ethnicity of Adults Approved

Table 15. Ethnicity of Approved Adopters - Couples

Couples	
White British	3
Black British/African	1

Sexuality of Adults Approved

Table 17. Sexuality of approved adopters

Couples	
Heterosexual	3
Same sex (female)	1

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

Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

There were no appeals to the IRM this reporting year.

Panel Attendance April 2017 – March 2018

LBBD’s Adoption and Permanence Panel meets monthly to make recommendations to the Director of Operations, Children’s Care and Support, 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. Two panels were cancelled as there were no cases to present.

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. During the past year at least three panel members resigned for various personal reasons, and we have recruited a further three members to replace them.

Panel Training

Panel members identify areas of training that they feel they need, as well as the Department offering training that may be of interest.

Over the past year the Panel was provided with training on Life Story Work.

Panel members were also offered training organised by the East London Permanency and Adoption Consortium (ELPAC).

The Panel Chair attended a 'Refresher Workshop' for Panel members on 26th January 2018 offered by ELPAC.

All Panel members have a yearly appraisal with the Panel Chair and 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. This funding is for therapeutic support for adopters and children which can be purchased externally and funded by ASF. Since April 2017 there has been a limit placed on the ASF payments to £5000 per child per year, unless there are very specific circumstances. During the past year we made 8 successful bids to the ASF.

In total, we claimed £20,417.75 from the Adoption Support Fund in 2017-18. In addition, we spent a further £31,078 on post adoption support that we could not claim from the ASF as it did not fit their criteria.

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

The play therapist has worked individually with 45 adoptive families providing therapeutic support. She works with the adoptive families both pre-order and post adoption order. **Please see attached case study for further information - Appendix 3**

Other post adoption support work included family days and support groups, provided through our contract with Adoption UK. Post adoption support is also provided by staff within the team which includes ongoing support and 'one off' advice to families. They have been working with 18 families supervising contact between birth relatives and the adopted child. This can vary for each child from twice a year or more when there is separate contact for different members of the family. We have a social worker who provides life story books for the adopted child, and she has completed 10 books this year, and an independent worker has completed 4 books.

We also have an agreement with PAC via ELPAC to provide post adoption services to birth families and adoptive families.

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	20
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)	8
Total number of families in receipt of post-adoption support packages (not one off advice)	28

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	6
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)	6

Long Term Fostering

Long term fostering is formally considered to be a permanency option as outlined in the Care Planning and Review Regulations 2010. In 2017-18 we matched 30 children with long term foster carers at Fostering Panel.

25 matched with in-house foster carers

3 matched with IFA carers

2 matched with Connected Persons' carers

Special Guardianship

Nationally there has been a continual rise in the number of children placed with family under Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). What the evidence suggests is that children who would have previously been placed for adoption are now becoming subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs). We have placed 15 children under the age of three with family under SGO, who might otherwise have been placed for adoption. However, overall there has been a slight decline in SGOs granted in this reporting year compared to the previous year – 42 orders granted in 2017-18 compared to 45 the previous year.

The reduction of SGOs granted this year may be linked to the new initiative that has been developed within the Adoption Service. We have reconfigured staff resources within the team to enable us to undertake the majority of the prospective special guardianship assessments, reducing the reliance on independent social workers. The quality of in-house assessments are generally of a much higher quality and this has resulted in family members being robustly ruled out as being suitable to care for children, or they have made the decision that they did not want to continue with the assessment process once they were fully aware of their legal duties under special guardianship.

Special Guardianship Orders Granted April 2017- March 2018

- A total of 42 Special Guardianship Orders were granted.
- As can be seen the majority of the children were in the younger age group, which also affects the number of children available for adoption.

Age Breakdown

Ages	No. of individuals
0 – 3	15
4 – 7	13
8-12	7
13+	7

Number of Special Guardianship Breakdowns/Disruptions

- A total of 4 SGO's disrupted.

Special Guardianship Support Provided from April 2017 to March 2018

- Completed 43 Special Guardianship Support Packages
- Direct work with a significant number of families relating to contact, child's behaviour, and other matters including finances.

Training Provided

- Monthly 'Introduction to Special Guardianship' training for prospective Special Guardians.
- Two-day Special Guardianship training, taking place three times a year. It covers contact, relationships, attachment and understanding and managing needs and behaviours of children that have experienced abuse or neglect.
- Life Story Training for Special Guardians takes place three times a year for half day.
- Parents' Gathering: '*How to get the most out of contact*' three times a year.
- Domestic Violence training for Special Guardians to understand the impact of DV on children.

Other Activity

- Special Guardians' Support Groups 6 times a year (including two evenings).
- Parent Support Groups 3 times a year.
- Regular consultation to social workers re Special Guardianship issues.
- Presentations about special guardianship at team meetings twice a year at all the Children's Services' team meetings.

Events for Special Guardians and their Families

- Summer picnic for SG families.
- Special Guardians - Christmas lunch.

Summary of Activity for 2017-18

Achievements

- We have had no adoption disruptions for the fifth consecutive year.
- We have made a number of successful bids to the Adoption Support Fund, that have helped children with therapeutic support.
- We have completed 10 of Life Story Books for children who have been waiting.
- We have successfully placed a number of harder to place children in adoptive families.
- The Adoption Improvement Group has been meeting regularly and this has had a beneficial impact on the way we work in terms of communication with the different teams and monitoring the children whose care plan is adoption.

Challenges

- Continuing to improve the Scorecard performance.
- Finding families who are suitable to be matched with our children.
- There continues to be parental challenges to the Placement Order applications that delay cases in court.
- The team have had an increase in the number of court statements, both Family Finding and SGO assessment and support packages, that have had an impact the work of the team, who have had to produce reports within short timescales.

Priorities for 2018 - 19

The priorities related to Adoption & Permanence in 2018-19 are:

- Continue with the Adoption Improvement Group to address in particular, the scorecard performance and delays in care proceedings and family finding.
- To Improve on our Score Card performance whilst still considering adoption for hard to place children.
- Further work with all teams in Children's Care and Support on improving permanency planning and creating a culture of 'Every Day Counts' for all children, but particularly those with adoption plans.
- Work with Legal to ensure that a meeting takes place with the Designated Judge for East London Court regarding the issues that are arising re early permanence/fostering to adopt.

- Making use of Adoption Support Fund (ASF) initiatives locally, and regional through the East London consortium.
- Increase approvals of adopters to meet the needs of LBBB children, by targeting specific applicants.
- Prepare for the regionalisation programme and work closely with staff and partner local authorities to achieve improved services for LBBB.
- Working 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 ASF resources.
- PAC (Post Adoption Centre) and the East London Consortium have a contract for PAC to provide some post adoption support services. This will be continued.
- Further develop LBBB's permanence procedures to support staff in ensuring that all permanence options are explored and progressed in a timely manner.
- Outsource inter-country adoption to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre.
- Continue to increase the use of SGOs as an alternative appropriate option for permanency where adoption is not achievable.
- Ensure that there is appropriate joint staff and Panel training for the coming year.

Joanne Tarbutt
 Head of Service – Looked After Children, Adoption and Prevention
 31.7.18

