

ASSEMBLY

25 November 2020

Title: Adoption and Corporate Parenting Annual Reports – a new approach	
Report of the Report of the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care Integration	
Open Report	For Information
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: No
Report Author: Chris Bush, Commissioning Director for Care and Support	Contact Details: Tel: 020 8227 3188 E-mail: christopher.bush@lbbd.gov.uk
Accountable Director: April Bald, Operational Director for Children’s Care and Support	
Accountable Strategic Leadership Director: Elaine Allegretti, Director of People and Resilience	
Summary	
<p>The Council is required to produce annual reports on Corporate Parenting and Adoption, both of which are included in the agenda for your consideration today.</p> <p>Compared with previous years the reports presented are distinct in their origin. The Corporate Parenting Annual Report is produced, as it always has been, by Council Officers. The Adoption Annual Report is the first produced since the Council joined the Regional Adoption Agency (Adopt London East) as mandated to so by government. The appended Adoption Annual Report has, therefore, been produced by Adopt London East and covers the period of 1st October 2019 to end of March 2020.</p> <p>Whilst these reports are important documents, it should be noted that they are required to be produced as stand-alone documents, and are do not necessarily reflect our more considered approach to system-wide improvement for our children and young people, something which is more clearly reflected in our Annual Self-Evaluation that is presented to Cabinet at the start of each calendar year.</p> <p>This report introduces the two annual reports.</p>	
Recommendation(s)	
<p>The Assembly is recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) Note the contents of the two annual reports on adoption and corporate parenting respectively; and(ii) Note developments in children’s social care over the last 6 months and support their reflection in a more useful, timely and purposeful strategy.	

Reason(s)

The Council is required to produce Adoption and Corporate Parenting Annual Reports, and present these to elected members in their capacity as corporate parents.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most important jobs that councils do and when a child, for whatever reason, can't safely stay at home, it is up to us as the local authority to step in and give them the care, support and stability that they deserve.
- 1.2 This is not just up to the lead member or director of children's services – we need everyone looking out for our most vulnerable children and young people, and every councillor has a role to play. Being a corporate parent means doing everything we can for every child in the council's care – and every care leaver – to give them the opportunities that other children get. This covers everything from keeping an eye on their progress at school, to looking after their health and wellbeing, to preparing them for life as independent adults – and supporting them when they get there. We need to be ambitious for the children in our care, encouraging them to dream big and take chances even if they do not feel like that has been an option in the past.

2. Adoption Annual Report

- 2.1 All Local Authorities were required to join a Regional Adoption Agency by April 2020. Feedback from Regional Adoption Agencies in operation for a year or more is positive. Adopters report on improved services and staff on improved job satisfaction. Ofsted reports on Local Authorities with adoption services delivered regionally have been universally positive.
- 2.2 The government continues to drive forward with the structural reform programme regarding regionalising adoption and all, but a handful of authorities are either in a live Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) or in an RAA which will go live by October 2020. The government have noted the significant progress in cutting the time children wait to be placed with their adoptive parents and this is a positive outcome for children. However, both the number of registrations of interest and approved adopters nationally, regionally and locally within East London have fallen in recent years. An increase in expressions of interest has been sustained since the service went live last October and we anticipate this will increase the number of adopters approved in 2020/21.
- 2.3 Adopt London East is a regional adoption agency, hosted by Havering, providing adoption services for Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Tower Hamlets and Newham. Adopt London East (ALE) formally commenced operational activity on the 1st October 2019.
- 2.4 The Annual Report for Adopt London East is attached as Appendix A. The report is the first annual report of Adopt London East and provides a summary of the development and functions of the agency and contains performance information for 2019/20. As the ALE went live on 1st October 2019, this report focusses on

performance in quarter 3 and 4 of 2019/20. The report has been produced by the Head of Service for the ALE and all four Local Authorities receive this report.

- 2.5 The first six months of the ALE has been challenging with regards to staffing and managing the transitional responsibilities. This is the case for RAA Adoption agencies across the country. An increase in expressions of interest has been sustained since the service went live last October and this is continuing this financial year. We anticipate that this will increase the number of adopters approved in 2020/21. The campaign on recruitment of black adopters, although delayed from March to September because of COVID-19, has now commenced.
- 2.6 The next ALE annual report will cover April 2020 to March 2021, and we will ensure that future reports include key areas of success, areas for improvement and plans for future years with a strengthened focus on Barking and Dagenham adoption performance within the ALE.
- 2.7 Appendix B sets out Barking and Dagenham's specific adoption performance information (2019/20).
- 2.8 In 2019/20, 15 children achieved permanence through adoption (the same as 2018/19), representing 7% of all children leaving care - above London, but below the national and similar areas averages. 33 children (16%) had become subject to special guardianship orders (SGOs) same as 2018/19, and higher than all comparators. These are permanent care arrangements with reduced likelihood of breakdown compared to children who remain in long term care of the local authority. Strong performance has been maintained with no adoption breakdowns in 2019/20 and none so far this year.
- 2.9 Our adoption scorecard performance is improving year on year. The average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family for children adopted decreased in the last 12 months from a three-year average of 504 days to 476 days. This remains above the nationally set target of 426 days but reflects improving Barking and Dagenham adoption practice.
- 2.10 Conversely, the average time between the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match to an adoptive family remained relatively stable with a three-year average of 241 days and 247 days over the last 12 months. This is also above the nationally set target of 121 days but does reflect to a certain extent the complex nature of some of the children placed in Barking and Dagenham.
- 2.11 Our adoption scorecard improvement has been recognised by the DfE and we are no longer on the adoption task force improvement radar. This is very positive. The Children's Care and Support Permanence Taskforce continues to keep oversight of adoption and the adoption scorecard indicators. Improving adoption timelessness remains a priority area.

3. Corporate Parenting Annual Report

- 3.1 2019/20 has been another busy year with many key achievements and improved outcomes for our looked after children and care leavers. The MCPG has focused its attention on the Ofsted Inspection carried out in February 2019 and kept a close eye

on the subsequent LBBB Ofsted improvement plan to ensure changes have been made with performance and outcomes improving.

- 3.2 The work of the MCPG has also concentrated on delivering the promises we have made to our looked after children and care leavers. We are ambitious for children and young people and want them to lead happy, safe and successful lives.
- 3.3 Our children in care council is pivotal to the work of the MCPG and we have strengthened their voice and participation in 2019/20. We highly value listening to our children and young people and want them to be at the heart of service improvement.
- 3.4 This Annual Report provides an overview of what we are doing well, our key achievements in the last year, what are our key challenges and our plans to address those challenges in 2020/21 and beyond. The report presents activity and performance data from 2019/20 and identifies the Board's plans and priorities for the year ahead.
- 3.5 We know we still have a lot to do to improve the lives of our children and young people in care and care leavers, but with our stronger invigorated MCPG and as committed Corporate Parents, we are relentless in our ambition to achieve this.
- 3.6 The Corporate Parenting Annual Report is attached as Appendix C.

4. Consultation

One key element of our work in corporate parenting and in planning for permanence is ensuring that children and young people are involved, both in their own plans and by feeding into broader service development through groups such as Skitz and the Corporate Parenting Board. The Corporate Parenting Annual report outlines activity in this area over the last year and the new strategy will seek to further improve opportunities for children and young people to meaningfully contribute to planning.

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report: None

List of appendices:

- Appendix A: Adopt London East Annual Report (2019/20)
- Appendix B: LBBB Adoption Performance Analysis (2019/20)
- Appendix C: LBBB Corporate Parenting Annual Report (2019/20)