

ASSEMBLY

31st January 2024

Title: Adopt London East Annual Report 2022-23	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care & Disabilities	
Open Report	For Information
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: No
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Summary All Local Authorities were required to join a Regional Adoption Agency by April 2020. Ofsted reports on Local Authorities with adoption services delivered regionally have been universally positive. 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 on the 1 October 2019 and has now been in place for 4 years. The Annual Report for ALE is attached as Appendix A. The report has been produced by the Head of Service for the ALE and all four Local Authorities receive this report. The ALE report provides a comprehensive overview and evaluation of adoption activity for 2022-23 in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruitment and training of adopters.• Family finding for children with an adoption plan; and• Post adoption support to children, adoptive families, and birth families. Some key highlights from the 2022/23 ALE report are as follows; adoption preparation training continues to be developed and improved. In 2022-23 a total of 21 households were approved, which included 1 foster carer wishing to adopt. Just over a quarter of those adopters wanted to be approved as Early Permanence Carers. Adopt London East continue to offer all four boroughs' consultations to support the care planning for adoption. There was an increase in the number Adoption Plans being made by the ADMs - a total of 43 made across ALE, with 6 being LBBB children. As far as	

possible, ALE places children with inhouse adopters or from the Adopt London pool to ensure quality of assessment and preparation support to families.

Across ALE, 25 children were placed with 8 being from LBBD. 76% of the children were between the ages of 0-2 years with the oldest child being matched was 5 years old. Of the 25 children placed, 10 were placed via Early Permanence.

Support to adopted adults is another area of responsibility for ALE although there is no national collection of Adoption Support Data. This is a priority for ALE in 24-25 so that tracking and performance of this area becomes more robust.

The demand for adoption support remains high and many of the cases are complex. In 2022/23, there were a total of 239 new referrals to the service. The Family Connections Team support maintaining relationships between birth families and adoptive families, and this is an of national interest and therefore likely to grow over the coming years.

Key recommendations for 2024-25 building on the progress made to date include: the Black Adopters Project, increasing the number of approvals of prospective adopters, increasing the use of Early Permanence and reducing the barriers, adoption support and continue to work as part of Adopt London.

Participation in the Black Adopters project will be important for LBBD given our diverse population. The project thus far has been focussed on scoping and initial research in response to the disparities facing Black children with plans for adoption – compared to children of other ethnicities. In summary they are:

- Less likely to be adopted after having a Placement Order made
- More likely to have 'adopters could not be found' as the reason for an adoption plan being rescinded.
- Spend 6.5 – 8 months longer on a Placement Order before moving in with an adoptive family
- Black prospective adopters are more likely to drop out during the assessment process and not go on to adopt a child.

LBBD Children's services were subject to an Ofsted ILACS inspection in July 2023 – they set out the following finding:

'Barking and Dagenham works closely with the regional adoption agency to ensure that the agency understands the needs of the children in the borough and finds adoptive parents for them. Early permanence planning is increasingly embedded and successful. However, some children who need adoption wait too long for decisions to be made about where they will live.'

The ALE plan for 2024-25 will support the improvement work that Children's services are embarking on, ensuring more timely permanence plans are achieved for all our children in care.

Appendix B sets out Barking and Dagenham's specific adoption performance information (2022/23).

In 2022/23, 4 children achieved permanence through adoption (a decline on 2021/22 which is a national trend. This represented 2% of all children leaving care - below

London (4%), national (9%) and similar areas (12%). 26 children (11%) had become subject to special guardianship orders (SGOs) up by 1% on the previous year and higher than London (7%) and statistical neighbours (10%). These are permanent care arrangements with reduced likelihood of breakdown compared to children who remain in long term care of the local authority.

Our adoption scorecard performance is variable year on year, but overall trend is one of improvement against a challenging set of targets set by the DfE. Many factors impact on timeliness of adoption such as length of court proceedings, complexity of children's needs and identifying a suitable match to a family. The average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family for children adopted increased from 549 days in 2021/22 to 656 days in 2022/23. Our 3-year rolling average, therefore, increased from 492 days (2019-2022) to 515 days (2020-2023) and performance is 89 days above the DfE threshold of 426 days.

Conversely, the average time between the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match to an adoptive family decreased from 224 days in 21/22 to 206 days in 22/23. This decreased our 3-year rolling average from 219 days (2019-2022) to 198 days (2020-2023). Performance is now 77 days above the DfE threshold of 121 days.

The Children's Care and Support Performance Board and Permanence Taskforce continues to keep oversight of adoption and the adoption scorecard indicators. Improving adoption timelessness remains a priority area.

Recommendation(s)

The Assembly is recommended to note the report.

Reason(s)

The Council is the corporate parent to all of our children in care and care leavers, including children awaiting adoption.

1. Financial Implications

- 1.1 As it is a report of past performance it does not give rise to any future financial implications beyond the agreed annual contributions from Local Authorities including LBBD,

2. Legal Implications

- 2.1 A child may be looked after during care proceedings by virtue of an interim care order (s.38 Childrens Act 1989) and on conclusion, a care order (s.31(1)(a)) or outside of care proceedings (s.20 Childrens Act 1989).
- 2.2 If the care plan for the child is to be placed for adoption a placement order must be granted at the conclusion of proceedings (s.21 Adoption and Children Act 2002) this order authorises the local authority to place a child with prospective adopters, alternatively if a child's parents have relinquished care they may consent to the

adoption however the Local Authority remains responsible for the child until the adoption order is granted (s.46 Adoption and Childrens Act 2002).

- 2.3 Adopt London East via functions delegated to it act as an adoption Agency on behalf of the Local Authority. Local Authorities who act as an adoption agency must recruit, assess and approve suitable prospective adopters (section 3A, ACA 2002) Page 112
- 2.4 The Report is for note only and the contents of the report do not raise any issues that fall outside of the powers of the council and the report does not require a decision for which a legal implication would arise

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

List of appendices:

- Appendix A - Annual Report for ALE
- Appendix B – LBBD Adoption Performance Information (2022/23).