

**London Borough of Bromley**  
**Education and Care Services**  
**Bromley Adoption Agency**

**Annual Report on Adoption Activity**  
**2011 – 2012**



# **ANNUAL REPORT ON ADOPTION ACTIVITY 2011-2012**

## **CONTENTS**

1. Bromley Adoption Agency
2. Bromley Adoption Team
3. Children Approved for Adoption
4. Children Made Subject to Adoption Orders
5. Children Placed for Adoption in 2011/12
6. Profile of Adopters
7. National Adoption Standards Timescales
8. The Adoption Consortium
9. Recruitment and Preparation of Adopters
10. Intercountry Adoption
11. Adoption Support Services
12. Support Groups
13. Education Support
14. Post Adoption Contact
15. Work with Birth Families of Adopted Adults
16. Birth Records Counselling
17. Adoption Allowances
18. Training
19. Adoption Panel
20. Disruptions
21. Complaints/Compliments/Allegations
22. Future Developments
23. Future Reports

## **1. BROMLEY ADOPTION AGENCY**

- 1.1 The London Borough of Bromley is a registered Adoption Agency (known as Bromley Adoption Agency). The work of Bromley Adoption Agency is governed by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and is subject to the Adoption Agency Regulations (AAR) 2005 and 2011 and the National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2011.
- 1.2 Adoption agencies are also subject to Ofsted inspections, the last inspection of the Bromley Adoption Agency was carried out in 2009 and the service was judged as 'good'.
- 1.3 This report highlights the activity of the Adoption Agency during 2011 – 2012.

## **2. BROMLEY ADOPTION TEAM**

- 2.1 The Bromley Adoption Service is a borough wide service managed within the Social Care Division of the Children and Young People Service. It has developed close links with other borough wide services and key stakeholders. The work of the Adoption Service contributes to improving outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the borough and reflects the priorities outlined in the Children and Young People's Plan.
- 2.2 The Adoption Team is responsible for all the adoption work undertaken within the Department. This involves domestic, inter-country and step-parent adoption; birth parent counselling; post placement and post adoption support and a range of intermediary services.
- 2.3 The Adoption Team, managed by the Group Manager, sits within the Care and Resources service area. The Adoption Team has a total of 9.0 FTE managerial and social work staff. Additionally the team has 2.0 FTE administrative staff who administer the Adoption Panel, letterbox contact arrangements, and archiving of files.
- 2.4 The managerial and social work staff within the Adoption Team take lead responsibility for different aspects of the service, namely adoption support services, family finding, and the recruitment and preparation of prospective adopters. The team provides a duty service for prospective adopters and to social workers from Safeguarding and Social Care. Team members take lead roles in providing other services such as birth records counselling, adoption support work and inter-country and step-parent adoption. The Group Manager acts as the Agency Adoption Adviser and directly manages staff that have a dedicated role in providing post adoption support services including letterbox, support to direct contact arrangements and independent support to birth families affected by adoption. The Deputy Manager, directly manages the staff

involved in family finding for children and adopter recruitment. One of the two adoption support senior practitioners is the nominated Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA).

- 2.5 The Adoption Agency Advisor plays a key role in ensuring the effective running of the Adoption Panel, providing a quality assurance role in relation to reports being prepared for panel and for providing specialist advice to staff within Safeguarding and Social Care in relation to adoption work.
- 2.6 During 2011/12 Bromley continued to be a member of the South East Adoption Consortium. The Group Manager attends the quarterly meetings of the Consortium Managers as well as representing Bromley at the British Agencies of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) and London Councils quarterly meetings of London adoption and fostering agencies.

### **3. CHILDREN APPROVED FOR ADOPTION**

- 3.1 In 2011/12 there were 25 children presented to the Adoption Panel. This is the same figure as for 2010/11.

### **4. CHILDREN MADE SUBJECT TO ADOPTION ORDERS**

- 4.1 Ten children were made subject to Adoption Orders in 2011/12.

### **5. CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION IN 2011/12**

- 5.1 There were seventeen children placed with prospective adopters during the year. Thirteen of the children placed with adopters were White British; two were mixed white Asian, one was Bangladeshi and one mixed white African. Eleven of the children were placed with in-house adopters, four with other local authority adoption agencies and two with a voluntary adoption agency.
- 5.2 The Team continues to strive towards recruiting more BME adopters and adopters for older children and sibling groups. These two areas again remained a priority recruitment target for 2011/12 in terms of putting more energy into focusing on current children waiting for adoptive families and children who are in the early stages of the adoption planning process. We have therefore increased the number of workshops/preparation groups from 2 to 3 per year. We continue to recruit families who live outside of the borough to reduce the possibility of parents establishing the whereabouts of their birth children. Demand for placements for white babies aged between 0-2 years continues to be low and as a consequence they are not a priority area for recruitment. By focusing on these specific areas of recruitment, the Adoption Team ensures that any purchase of inter-agency placements is targeted on the 'harder to place' child.

## **6. PROFILE OF ADOPTERS**

- 6.1 The number of prospective adopters approved during the year was 23 individuals (13 units) which was slightly below the team's performance target of 15.
- 6.2 The ethnicity of the 23 adopters was predominantly White/British (21); and 2 white/other.
- 6.3 There were five new initial step-parent adoption enquires in 2011/12.

## **7. NATIONAL ADOPTION STANDARDS TIMESCALES**

- 7.1 The Adoption Agency is required to monitor its performance against a range of timescales. The timescales relate to the decision to place a child for adoption, assessing and approving prospective adopters and the proposal to place a child with particular adopters.
- 7.2 Of the seventeen children placed with prospective adopters, as outlined in paragraph 4.1, 8 were placed within the required statutory timescale of 12 months from the approval of the plan for adoption. The reasons for the remaining children not being placed within twelve months of the approval to place for adoption was predominantly due to delays in the conclusion of Court proceedings or that the child had significant additional needs that protracted the length of time to family find for them.
- 7.3 All completed Child Permanence, Prospective Adopter and Adoption Placement reports were presented to Panel within the required timescale; all agency decisions and notifications were also made as required.
- 7.4 The agency met the timescale in relation to sending out an information pack to inquirers within 5 working days in 90% of cases and in 98.5% of cases inviting prospective adopters to an information session.

## **8. THE ADOPTION CONSORTIUM**

- 8.1 The South East Adoption Consortium comprises Bexley, Medway, Bromley, Brighton and Hove, East Sussex and Kent. The consortium aims to maximise placement choice for children and to minimise delay in family finding across the consortium authorities by sharing prospective adopters.
- 8.2 The quarterly management meetings attended by the Adoption Group Manager are used to clarify and develop policy and practice issues across the consortium. The sharing of local practice guidance and procedures facilitates good working relationships and avoids duplication of work across the consortium. A key theme of the discussions during 2011/12 has been the need to increase the

recruitment of adopters for older children and Black and Minority Ethnic [BME] adopters across the whole of the consortium.

- 8.3 Approved adopters are added to the consortium database every 20 days after their approval thus ensuring that family finding workers have access to a wider pool of adopters for the children they are finding families for.
- 8.4 There have been 4 practitioner meetings during 2011/12 where social workers meet to discuss issues related to adoption practice. One of the meetings held in Bromley was a very useful discussion around confidentiality and the impact of social networking sites on adoption.
- 8.5 The Adoption Support Services Advisors across the consortium also meet regularly to ensure that adopters within the consortium receive a good and consistent standard of service from each of the 6 authorities.

## **9. RECRUITMENT AND PREPARATION OF ADOPTERS**

- 9.1 The Adoption Service received 133 enquiries to the duty service throughout the year. Four information sessions were held throughout the year. These events receive considerable support from Bromley's experienced adopters who attend to ensure that all prospective adopters have the opportunity for individual discussion not only with a member of staff but also with experienced adopters.
- 9.2 The Adoption Team held three sets of preparation groups during 2011/12. The groups comprise an initial workshop entitled *'Adoption : Is this the Right Journey for Me?'* followed four weeks later by three preparation group sessions looking at all aspects of the adoption process. The preparation groups provide advice, information and individual counselling where necessary to ensure that people can make an informed decision on whether to make a formal application to adopt a child.
- 9.3 The recruitment strategy for the service is based on the profile of the children in care in Bromley and in the Consortium that need to be placed for adoption and also takes account of the number of approved adopters waiting for a placement. Most enquiries are from adopters that are interested in adopting a child under 6 years, often younger and from childless individuals or couples. Priority in relation to recruitment would be given to BME applicants, or applicants that are interested in child aged over six years, in sibling groups of three or more children or children with complex needs.

## **10. INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION**

- 10.1 The Adoption Team is responsible for providing a service to people living within the borough that wish to consider intercountry adoption. Through membership of the Intercountry Adoption Centre (IAC) additional information on intercountry adoption; preparation groups for first and second time adopters and training is provided.
- 10.2 During 2011/12 there were five initial inquiries about intercountry adoption which resulted in three initial interviews.

## **11. ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES**

- 11.1 Since the implementation of the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 there has been a legal duty on the local authority to provide adoption support services to both adoptive families, adopted children and birth families.
- 11.2 There has been an ongoing increase in the demand for such services, as well as an increase in the complexity of such cases. The past 12 months have seen a number of well established adoptive families in crisis, leading to 2 children from 2 adoptive families becoming looked after.
- 11.3 There have been additional stresses placed on the adoption and post adoption support services due to a lack of capacity within the local CAMHS services to meet therapeutic needs.
- 11.4 A consequence of the increased demand for worker's time in relation to adoption support, means there has been an increase in waiting times for allocation and completion of adoption support assessments, access to information, intermediary services and assessment times for new adopter assessments.
- 11.5 All the staff within the Adoption Team is involved in some way with adoption support. At the end of March 2012 there were 17 active open adoption support cases that were allocated within the team [this excludes contact work, work with adopted adults and adoption support undertaken by assessing social workers].
- 11.6 The service also provides a duty service to respond to enquiries from adoptive families. These may be from Bromley adopters, adopters from other agencies living in the borough or adopters that have relocated into the borough. Some enquiries involve signposting to other services whilst others involve a more intensive assessment of adoption support services.

## **12. SUPPORT GROUPS**

12.1 The service is currently running drop-in support groups in the day time for approved adopters with or without children. The service links with other support groups including the support for BME adopters run by BAAF in London. The service ran two very successful social events for adoptive families during the year.

## **13. EDUCATION SUPPORT**

13.1 Support to adopters around education comes from the Safeguarding and Social Division extending the service from the LAC Education team and from Bromley's Parent Partnership worker.

## **14. POST ADOPTION CONTACT**

14.1 Almost all children being placed for adoption retain some form of contact with their birth families and the Adoption & Children Act 2002 emphasises the importance of supporting such arrangements. This area of work continues to be a significant pressure for the service and one which merits a high level of input as contact managed well can be a critical factor in the successful placement and emotional well-being of the adopted child. It is clear that arrangements for contact have to be kept under review and may need to change and adapt as the child gets older or if there are significant changes within the birth family network.

14.2 At the end of March 2012, 271 letterbox contact arrangements (for 147 children) were in place. The letterbox coordinator provides the initial point of contact for information, advice and support to all those involved in this indirect contact between adopted child and their birth families. If counselling or intensive support is required they will refer onto the ASSA.

14.3 The service is working with 39 children in adoptive families where direct contact arrangements with birth families are in place. The contact is mostly with siblings, but there is an increase in the number of direct contact arrangements involving both birth parents and grandparents.

## **15. WORK WITH BIRTH FAMILIES**

15.1 Under the National Adoption Standards it is the responsibility of local authority adoption agencies to ensure that birth families affected by adoption have access to independent advice, information and support when the plan for the child becomes adoption. This is provided in Bromley through the Independent Adoption Development Worker for Birth Families. During 2011/12, 31 new referrals were received and ongoing services were being received by a total of 51 individuals or



families. A very successful birth parent's support group continued to meet on a monthly basis.

- 15.2 The take up of this service is increasing slowly and this reflects the fact that birth families are often still in dispute with the local authority about the plans for adoption at the time they are referred. The number of referrals increased in 2011/12. The Adoption Development worker is continuing to promote her role with social workers in the children social work teams so that she can support more birth families. Birth families are also provided with details of agencies who can offer support other than the local authority but experience suggests that some birth family members only feel able to take up this type of support sometimes years after the adoption has concluded.
- 15.3 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced the provision of an access to information and intermediary service for birth relatives of adopted adults (to complement that existing for adult adoptees) which would trace the adoptee and seek their views on contact. The Adoption Team have limited resources to meet the needs of this service.
- 15.4 Any birth relative who requests an intermediary service is provided with support and advice and their details are added to the waiting list. They are also given the details of intermediary services offered by NORCAP. Bromley Adoption Service pays an annual subscription to NORCAP, a voluntary organisation which helps adults affected by adoption.

## **16. BIRTH RECORDS COUNSELLING**

- 16.1 The local authority has a legal responsibility to provide a birth records counselling service. There were 31 new referrals from adopted adults during 2011/12. There is a waiting time of up to 12 months for this service although people adopted before 1975 are given priority because of the possible age of their birth parents if they wish to locate them. In total at the end of March 2012 there were 24 active birth records cases. The adoption support senior practitioners take the lead role in providing this service.

## **17. ADOPTION ALLOWANCES**

- 17.1 The total Adoption Team Budget is £752,960 for 2011/12. Expenditure on Adoption Allowances during 2011/12 was approximately £308,564 This was primarily to pay regular adoption allowance payments in relation to 45 children. There were in addition a number of one off payments made towards the costs of introductions and settling in expenses.

## **18. TRAINING**

- 18.1 Most staff within the service are involved in delivering preparation groups for prospective adopters or input into support groups or post adoption training. Follow up training for newly approved adopters on attachment, contact, and explaining adoption to children was also delivered by team members. Specific training has been provided to area team staff on the preparation of child's permanence reports.
- 18.2 All Adoption Team members have access to relevant training in order to maintain and update knowledge and skills.

## **19. ADOPTION PANEL**

- 19.1 It is the responsibility of the service to ensure the effective running of the Panels and the Agency Advisor is responsible for effective operation of the Adoption Panel, agenda setting, the quality assurance of panel papers and takes a lead in the recruitment of panel members. Panel contributes significantly to the positive work of the Safeguarding and Social Care Division in planning for children and providing a key quality assurance role. The Adoption Panel has met 16 times throughout 2011/12. The Panels have met as planned and have been quorate. Panel training took place on the 1 April 2011 and discussed the new National Minimum Standards. Panel is kept up to date with practice and legal developments by the advisors to Panel.
- 19.2 During 2011/12 the service has ensured that Panel members' records are maintained to National Minimum Standards, and that all members of the panel have been subject to an annual review and that their CRB check is current.

## **20. DISRUPTIONS**

- 20.1 During 2011/12 there was one disruption of a Bromley child placed for adoption. There were 2 adoption breakdowns of established adoptions where orders were obtained years previously. Both related to a child placed by another local authority with adopters living in Bromley and where the Bromley Adoption Team were providing adoption support services.

## **21. COMPLAINTS/COMPLIMENTS/ALLEGATIONS**

- 21.1 There were three new complaints received by the Adoption Team in 2011/12.

## **22. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

- 22.1 Adoption and post adoption support continues to be an area of work to develop and expand as most adopters continue to maintain a link with the service post adoption.

- 22.2 On the 31 October 2012 the Department for Education published the performance of local authorities against 15 key indicators into a suite of 'league table'. The league table measured the percentage of children adopted during the year who were placed for adoption within 12 months of a decision being made as an average at the 31 March 2008, 2009 and 2010. Bromley scored 130<sup>th</sup> out of 142 local authorities. Close analysis of this data illustrates that performance dipped during 2008/2009.
- 22.3 However, in 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 performance improved.
- 22.4 In March 2012 the Coalition Government published 'An action plan for adoption: Tackling delays'. The aim behind the publication was to speed up the adoption process. The Government aims to overhaul the system for prospective adopters and strengthen the performance regime for local authorities.
- 22.5 The action plan includes proposals for:
- New adoption scorecards to hold local authorities to account
  - Revised approval process for new adopters, cutting the time to six months
  - A national gateway for adoption, providing a first point of contact for anyone interested in adoption.
- 22.6 Using the methodology applied for the Department of Education in the new adoption scorecards, we have been able to analyse the data for 2011-2012. Performance had dramatically improved and means that Bromley is well placed to meet the demands of the action plan.

## **23. FUTURE REPORTS**

- 23.1 Standard 25.6 of the National Minimum Standards 2011 requires the Adoption Agency to produce a six monthly report on adoption activity to the Agency Executive, to:
- a. Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency
  - b. Monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users
  - c. Satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

- 23.2 It is therefore proposed that a report be presented to the Executive Working Party for Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting on a six monthly cycle with an annual report being presented to the Care Services Portfolio Holder following scrutiny by the Care Services PDS.
- 23.3 In addition, it is a requirement under standard 18.3 of the National Minimum Standards that the Adoption Agency approves and annually reviews the Statement of Purpose and children's guides. The annual report to the Portfolio Holder following scrutiny by the Care Services PDS will satisfy this requirement.