

## ANNUAL REPORT ON ADOPTION ACTIVITY 2015-2016

### 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 associated regulations, The Children and Adoption Act 2006 and associated regulations and is subject to the Adoption Agencies Regulations (AAR) 2005, 2011, 2012, 2013 and the National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2011.
- 1.2 This report reflects the structure, functions and the activity of the Adoption Agency during 2015 – 2016.

### 2. Bromley Adoption Service

- 2.1 The Bromley Adoption Service is a borough wide service managed within the Children's Social Care Division of the Education, Care and Health 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 Service 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 Service, managed by the Group Manager, sits within the Care and Resources service area and has an Adoption Assessment and Family Finding team and a Post-adoption support team. The Adoption Service has a total of 11 FTE managerial and social work staff. Additionally the team has 2.0 FTE administrative staff who offer day to day business support to staff and also administer the letterbox contact arrangements and archiving of files. The team is supported also by a Business Analyst.
- 2.4 The Adoption Service takes responsibility for recruitment, assessment, approval and support of adopter's pre and post-order, family finding for looked after children with an adoption plan, post-adoption support services, inter-country adoption and non-agency adoptions. The team provides a duty service for prospective adopters and offers consultancy on adoption matters to social workers from the Referral & Assessment, Safeguarding and Children in Care Teams.
- 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 Children in Care Teams in relation to adoption work.

2.6 During 2014/15 Bromley continued to hold membership of Adoption UK, British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), Inter-Country Adoption Centre, London Region Adoption & Fostering Officers Group, The South East Adoption Consortium.

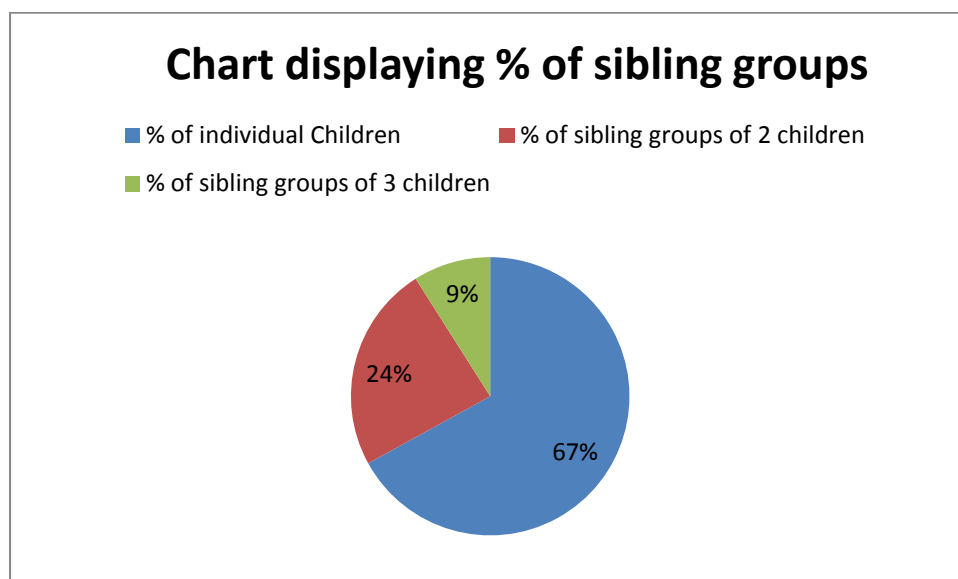
### 3. Children with an Adoption Plan and Awaiting a Match/Placement

3.1 As at the beginning of the financial year (1st April 2015), a number of 10 children were subject to an adoption plan and waiting to be found an adoption placement.

3.2. A further 23 children became subject to Adoption plans in 2015/2016. This was an increase from 22 children who had adoption plans approved in the previous year (2014/2015).

3.3. Children's demographics. In the cohort of 33 children, there were;

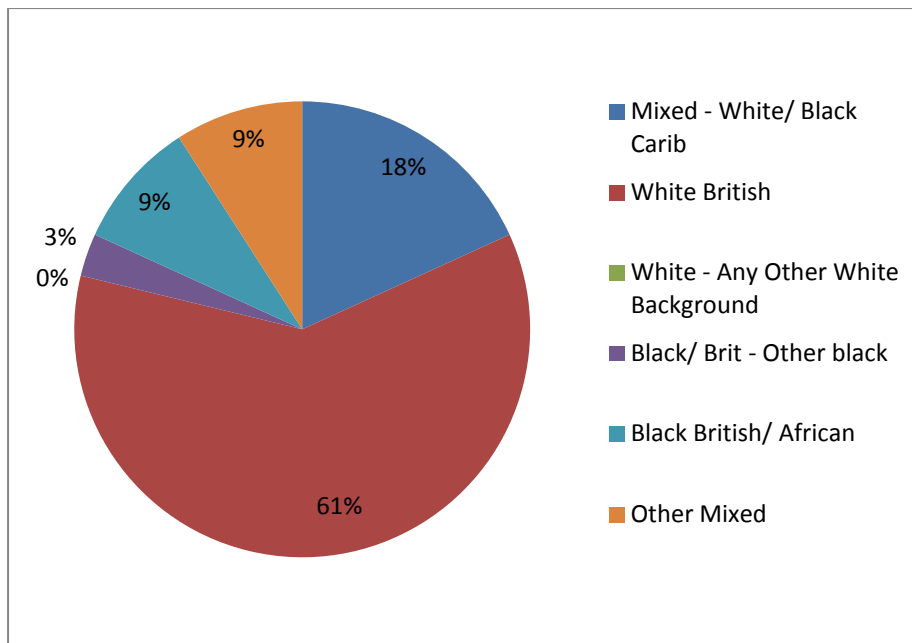
- 4 sibling groups of two (8 children) where the siblings required a placement together
- 1 sibling group of three (3 children) where the siblings required a placement together
- And 22 individual children.



In terms of the children's ethnic background, out of the 41 children:

- 20 were of White British heritage
- 0 of other White background
- 6 of mixed White and Black Caribbean heritage
- 3 of Black British/ African heritage
- 1 Black British/ Other Black
- 3 Other mixed

### Chart Displaying % of Ethnicity



In terms of children's age, the youngest child in the cohort was aged 6 months at the time the decision for adoption was made and the eldest child was aged 9 years and 4 months.

#### 3.4 Outcomes for children with an adoption plan

Of the total of 33 children with an adoption plan and awaiting an adoption placement we worked with during the year 2014/15:

- 16 children were matched with an adoptive family during the year 2015/16 (of which 16 children were also placed with their adopters during the year and 0 children were matched and awaiting placement as on 31st March 2016)
- 2 children had their adoption plan rescinded during 2015/16
- 14 children were actively being found an adoption placement as at 31st March 2016. These were carried over onto the year 2016/17.

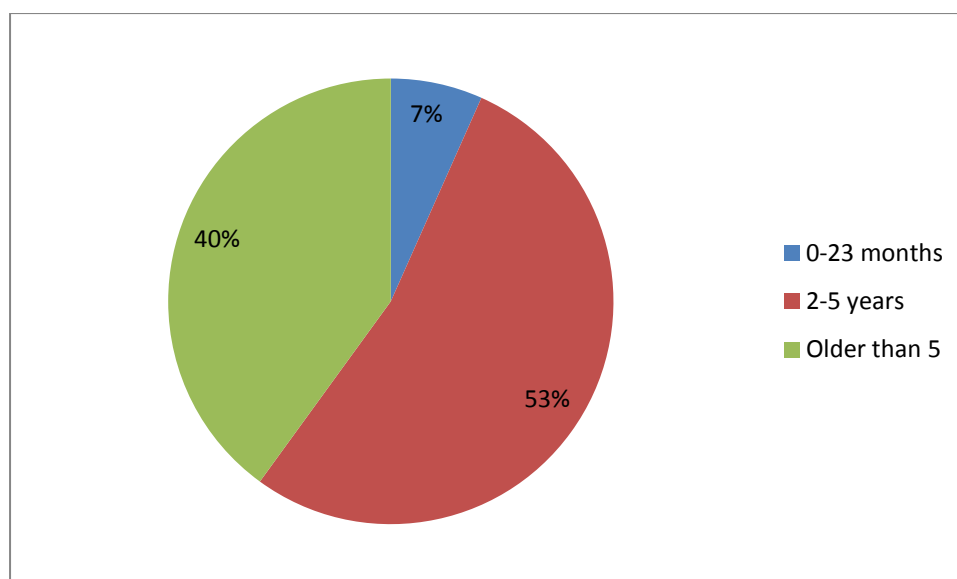
#### 4. Children Made Subject to Adoption Orders

4.1. 15 children were made subject to Adoption Orders in 2015/16. This was a decrease from 22 who were subject to Adoption Orders in the previous year.

Out of the 15 children subject to an Adoption order:

- 1 child was aged 0 – 23 months
- 8 children were aged 2 to 5 years
- 6 children were older than 5 years

## Chart Displaying % of Children's Age at Adoption Order



Out of the 15 children, the eldest child was aged 15 years at the time the Adoption order was granted and the youngest child was aged 1 year and 4 months.

In terms of children's ethnic background, out of the 15 children:

- 13 were of White British heritage
- 0 Black / British – Other Black
- 0 of Black British Caribbean heritage
- 1 of Mixed – White/ Black Caribbean
- 1 of Mixed – White/ Black African

## 5. Children Placed For Adoption in 2015/16

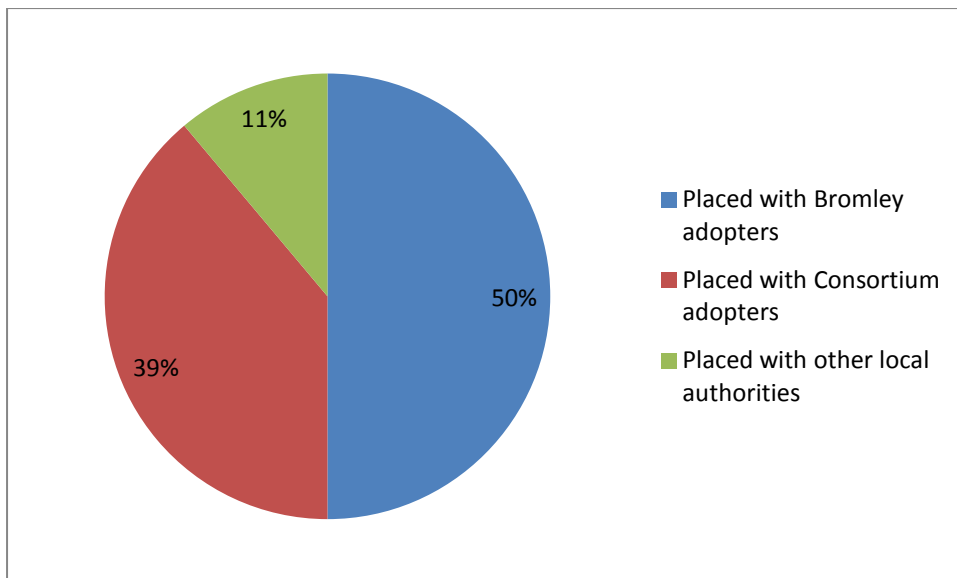
5.1 There were 18 Bromley looked after children placed with prospective adopters during the year. In the cohort of 18 Bromley children placed with adopters, there were;

- 2 sibling groups of 2
- 2 sibling groups of 3
- And 8 individual children

Out of the 18 children placed:

- 9 children were placed with in-house Bromley adopters
- 7 children were placed with Consortium approved adopters
- 2 children were placed with other local authorities' approved adopters under inter-agency agreements

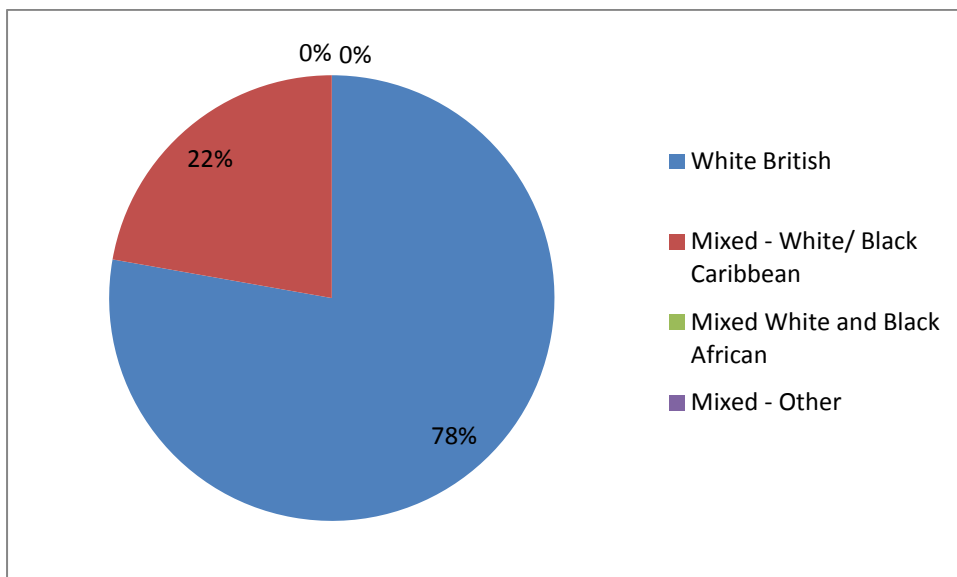
### Chart Displaying % of Placement



In terms of children’s ethnicity, out of the 18 children placed with adopters:

- 14 were of White British heritage
- 4 of mixed White and Black Caribbean heritage
- 0 of mixed White and Black African heritage
- 0 Mixed – Other

### Chart displaying % placed children’s ethnicity



Out of the 18 children placed in the year 2015/16:

- 8 children were granted the Adoption order during the year
- 10 children were in their pre-adoptive placements as 31st March 2016 and we are working with them and their adopters to ensure they achieve permanency through adoption order in 2016/17.

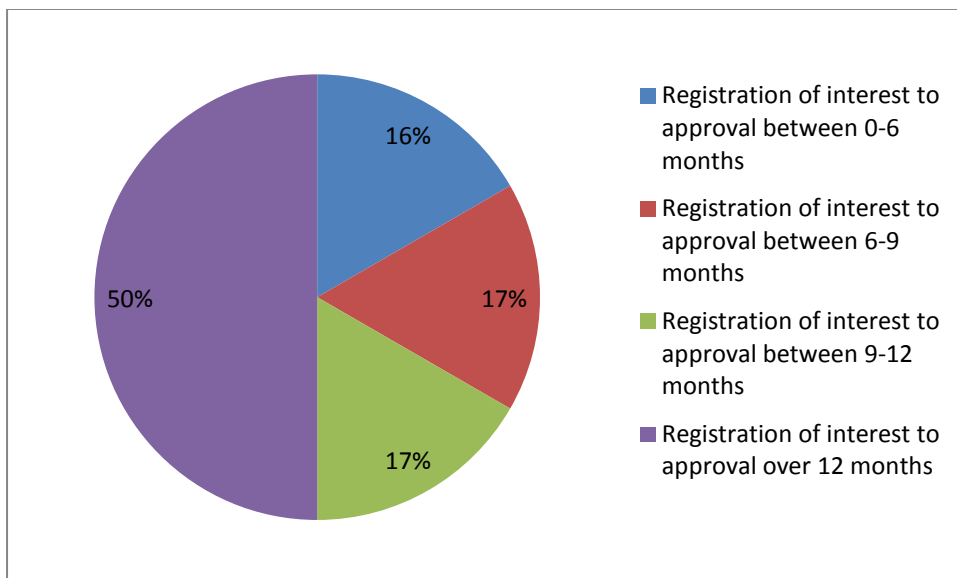
## 6. Profile of Adopters

6.1 The number of adopters approved during the year was 12 units.

6.2 Of all the 12 adoptive families who were approved during the year;

- 2 units had waited between 0-6 months between the date of their registration of interest and the date of their approval decision,
- 2 units waited between 6 - 9 months between the date of their registration of interest and the date of their approval decision,
- 1 unit waited between 9 - 12 months between the date of their registration of interest and the date of their approval decision,
- 7 units waited between 12 + months between the date of their registration of interest and the date of their approval decision. In all but one of these occurrences this was at the request of the adopters who needed longer to complete the stage one process.

**Chart showing % timescales of the 12 approved adopters**

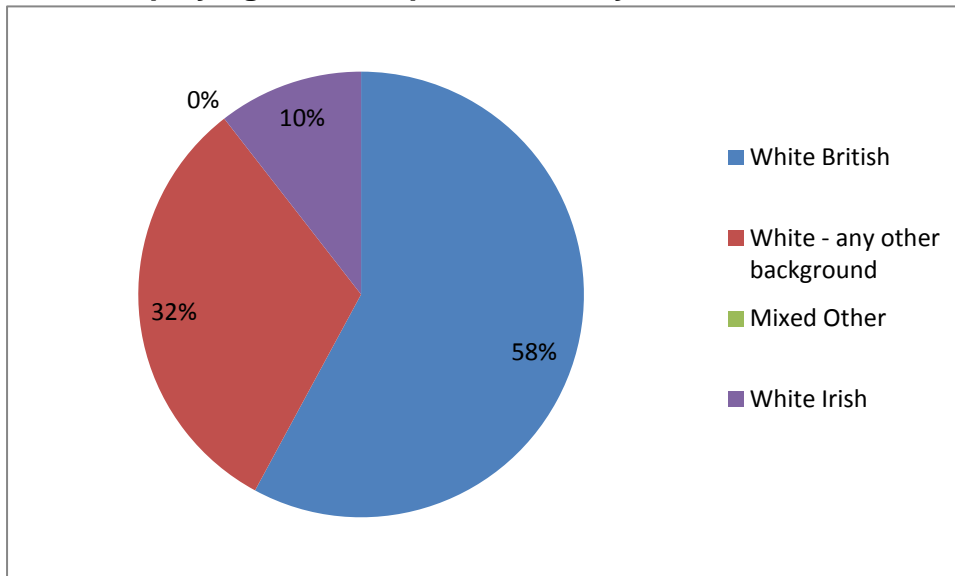


6.3 Adopters Demographics

The ethnicity of 12 new approvals:

- 11 White/British
- 6 Other White background
- 0 Mixed other
- 2 White Irish

**Chart Displaying % of Adopters Ethnicity**



The relationship status of total pool of 12 adoptive units (new approvals) was:

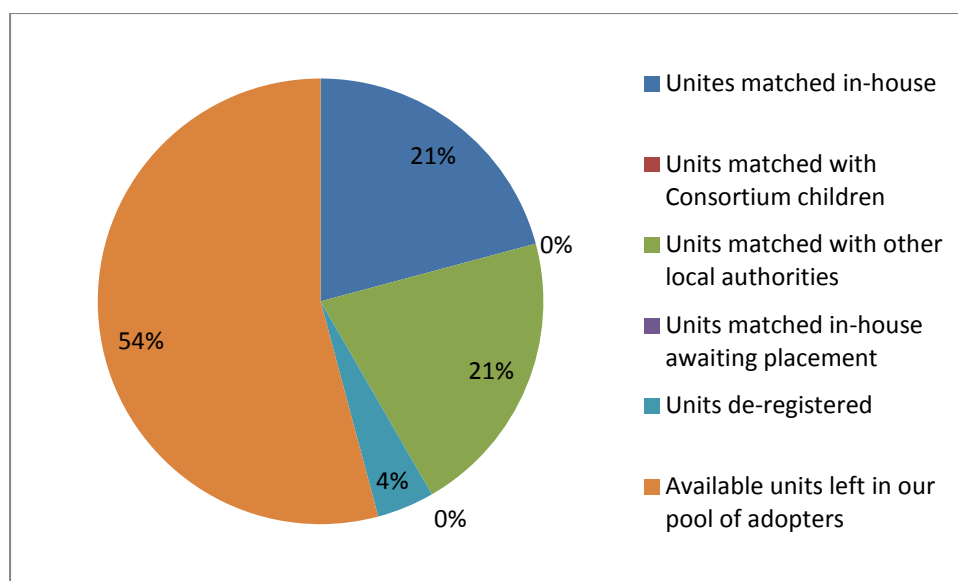
- 5 single adopters
- 5 heterosexual couples units
- 2 same sex couple units

6.4 There were also a number of 12 units approved adopters as at 31st March 2015 waiting for a match; these were carried over into 2015/16.

6.5 Out of the total pool of 24 adoptive units (new approvals and carried over from the previous year):

- 5 adoptive units were matched and placed in-house with 6 Bromley children
- 0 adoptive units were matched and placed with 0 children from our Consortium partners
- 5 adoptive units were matched with 5 children from other local authorities from the UK (5 individual children)
- 0 adoptive unit was matched to a Bromley child at panel with the placement planned to take place in the year 2016/17
- 1 adoptive unit was de-registered at panel as no longer meeting the adoption regulation requirements to be an approved adopter
- 13 adoptive units were left in our pool of approved adopters as at 31st March 2016; these were carried over into the 2016/17 financial year

**Chart Displaying % of Outcome of the 18 Adoptive Units**



6.6 During the year 2015/16 the Assessment and Family Finding team have also supported 2 Bromley adoptive families who have had 2 children placed with them in the previous year through inter-agency agreements and were granted Adoption Order by 31st March 2016.

## 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 Scorecards were introduced as part of a new approach to address delays in the adoption system, as set out in 'an action plan for adoption: tackling delay'. These scorecards allow local authorities and other adoption agencies to monitor their own performance and compare it with that of others.

7.3 In December 2014 the Department for Education published the 2014/2015 Adoption Scorecard. This has showed that:

- The Average time between a Bromley child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted in 2015 was longer than in 2014;

Unfortunately our time scales have increased, which has added to delays.

The Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a Bromley child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family was longer in 2015 than in 2014; again this is leading to delays

30% of the children waited less than 18 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family compared to an England average of 47%.

7.4 There is still a challenge to further reduce this timescale in line with the targets set by the government and to keep scrutinising our performance, identify areas for improvement and ensure timely placements. We will have to



be more robust, and ensure that we are involved, at the beginning of any decision to adopt.

- 7.5 To ensure, an improvement in adoption times scales, Adoption social workers have now taken over case responsibility for all children who have an agency decision. Whilst this is a new initiative early indications show that timescales are improving. The adoption team ensures that it continues to focus on 'hard to adopt' children thus enabling all children to be considered as suitable for adoption even is this, on occasion, means that timescales are breached.

## **8. The Adoption Consortium**

- 8.1 The South London Cost comprises of Bromley, Croydon, Wandsworth, Greenwich, Lewisham, Coram and Tact. The consortium aims to maximise placement choice for children and to minimise delay in family finding across the consortium authorities by sharing prospective adopters. We are working closely with each other and sharing joint meetings, for example "While We Wait" as well as the recruitment of adopters, including those from different ethnic backgrounds.
- 8.2 The quarterly management meetings attended by the Adoption Lead 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.
- 8.3 Approved adopters are added to national database -Adoption Link under our the consortium section 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 practitioner and ASSA meetings during 2014/15 where social workers meet to discuss issues related to adoption practice.

## **9. Recruitment and Preparation of Adopters**

- 9.1 The Adoption Service received 229 enquiries to the duty service throughout the year.
- 9.2 Information sessions and Preparation Groups for adopters were held regularly throughout the year in partnership with two of our South East Adoption Consortium partners (London Borough of Bexley and Medway Council).
- 9.3 Considerable support was also received from Bromley's experienced adopters in delivering these sessions, offering prospective adopters an opportunity for individual discussion and learning from their adoption experience.
- 9.4 Our Recruitment Strategy aims to secure the approval of sufficient prospective adopters to respond to the anticipated needs of Bromley children requiring adoption in the immediate future, and as part of the national shortage of adopters.
- 9.5 During 2015/16, the Assessment and Family finding team continued to strive towards finding adopters for older children and sibling groups. These two areas remained a priority for the recruitment target for 2015/16, 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. By focusing on these specific areas of recruitment, the Adoption Team ensured that any purchase of inter-agency placements was targeted on the 'harder to place' child.

- 9.6 Bromley have recruited families who live outside of the borough as well as families who live in the borough during the year 2015/16. However out-of-borough placement are in most cases most suitable for Bromley children with an adoption plan as opposed to in-borough placements as to reduce the possibility of members of the birth family coming in contact with adopted children or establishing their whereabouts.

## **10. Intercountry Adoption**

- 10.1 The Adoption Team is responsible for providing a service to people living within the borough that wish to consider inter-country adoption. Through membership of the Inter-country Adoption Centre (IAC) additional information on inter-country adoption; preparation groups for first and second time adopters and training is provided.
- 10.2 During 2015/16 there were 10 country specific enquiries about inter-country adoption. There were three Inter-country adoptive families approved in the year 2015/2016, one of which has a child placed with them.

Our adoption service is also responsible for providing support to applicants waiting for a match. Support was given to one adopter awaiting a match from Bangladesh during the year **2014/15**.

## **11. Adoption and Post Support Services**

- 11.1 All staff within the Adoption Team is involved in some way with adoption support cases including contact work, work with adopted adults and adoption support undertaken by assessing social workers immediately post-placement.
- 11.2 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.
- 11.3 The post-adoption support team delivered 9 developmental workshops for adoptive parents and they co-presented 2 educational workshops presented to 67 participants during the period of 2015/16. The annual picnic event was held in the summer which was attended by 76 adults and 62 children from adoptive families. 11.4. Our agency has embedded the Adoption Passport: A Support Guide for Adopters in the adopter information, preparation and support work (a copy of the Adoption Passport is included in the Adoption Information pack). The Passport sets out the support services adopters can expect from local authorities, including:

- Paid adoption leave at similar rates to maternity and paternity leave
- Priority access to social housing, and access to additional support to cover a spare room whilst adopters wait for their child to arrive in their new home;
- Priority admission for school places, including Academies and Free Schools
- A range of adoption support services, including access to counselling, information and advice for both adoptive parents and birth parents.
- Access to in house developmental workshops to assist adopters to meet the needs of their adoptive children.
- Financial support, priority access to social housing and social activities for adoptive families.
- It is a statutory duty to undertake Post Adoption Needs Assessment when requested.

11.4 In January 2014, Bromley adoption agency, together with two of our Consortium partners (Bexley and Medway) entered a partnership with “After Adoption” to provide the SafeBase parenting programme as part of a planned adoption support strategy to benefit children placed for adoption by the three local authorities. Bromley will be able to access support for seven adoptive families through the SafeBase Parenting Programme each year for the three years. One Bromley adoptive family was referred to the programme during the year 2015/16, completing the programme in the same year.

## **12. Education Support**

12.1 Support to adopters around education issues was provided by Bromley’s Head Teacher of a virtual school for Looked After Children who is responsible for supporting schools in the education of Looked After Children, promoting their opportunities, monitoring their performance, preventing exclusion and enabling a smooth transition between schools, to enable them to achieve the best possible outcomes, and to ensure that the needs of Looked After Children and Adopted Children are a priority in every school.

## **13. Post Adoption Contact**

13.1 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.

13.2 As at 31st March 2016, 344 letterbox contact arrangements were in operation with 495 exchanges for 193 children. 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 be allocated for further work.

- 13.3 During 2015/16, there were 38 children in adoptive placements with direct contact arrangements in place with birth families members. The contact was mostly with siblings, but there is an increase in the number of direct contact arrangements involving both birth parents and grandparents. Each child will have one, two or more direct contacts annually with one or more parties, total currently 63 contacts. These arrangements continue until the child is 18 or until either party requests a review of arrangements.

#### **14. Work with Birth Families**

- 14.1 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 referral to the adoption support team.
- 14.2 The take up of this service is low and this reflects the fact that birth families are often still in dispute with the local authority regarding the plans for adoption at the time they are referred. 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.
- 14.3 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.
- 14.4 Any birth relative who requests an intermediary service is provided with support and advice and their details are added to the allocation list. There were 5 such enquiries in 2015/2016.

#### **15. Birth Records Counselling**

- 15.1 The local authority has a legal responsibility to provide a birth records counselling service, and an Access to Information (ATI) service, which may lead to an intermediary service and possible reunion. There were 15 new referrals from adopted adults during 2015/16. The waiting time has significantly reduced to immediate allocation for this service. People adopted before 1975 are given priority because of the possible age of their birth parents if they wish to locate them. The adoption support senior practitioners take the lead role in providing this service.

#### **16. Adoption Allowances**

- 16.1 This was primarily to pay regular adoption allowance payments in relation to adopted children. There were in addition one-off payments made towards the costs of introductions and settling in expenses/reviews.
- 16.2 This payment is reviewed annually, and is means tested. We have recently moved over to the DFE rates, as our base. This will lead to a reduction in allowance, as it is lower, than previous rates (BAFF) we had used. These reviews are undertaken by a social worker, and are very time consuming. We

are looking at ways of the assessment being undertaken by an admin worker, and being signed off by a manager

## **17. Training and Consultancy**

- 17.1 The staff within the service were involved in delivering Information sessions for prospective adopters or post adoption support training to approved adopters. Follow up training for newly approved adopters on attachment, contact, and explaining adoption to children was also delivered by team members. Specific guidance and advice has been provided to Safeguarding team staff on the preparation of child's permanence reports and permanency planning for children with an adoption plan.
- 17.2 All Adoption Team members have access to a relevant training programme organised by the Learning and Development Department in order to maintain and update knowledge and skills. All staff complete an Annual appraisal which includes a professional development plan.

## **18. Adoption Panel**

- 18.1 It is the responsibility of the service to ensure the effective running of the Panels. 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.
- 18.2 Bromley Adoption Panel has met 13 times throughout 2015/16 and heard and made recommendations on a total of 31 cases (13 adopter approval, 14 matching cases, 3 Inter Country adoption approval, 1 adopter de-registration and 0 deferments).
- 18.3 The Panels have met as planned and have been quorate. Panel is kept up to date with practice and legal developments by the advisors to Panel. The independent chair of the panel has commented that the quality of reports continues to be good.
- 18.4 During 2015/16 the service has ensured that Panel members' records are maintained to National Minimum Standards, and that all members of the panel benefited of training, have been subject to an annual review and that their DBS checks were current.
- 18.5 We continue to use the good practice and quality assurance tools- for example adoption panel feedback and quality assurance forms.

**Designing an adoption panel leaflet remains an area of development for the year 2016/17.**

## **19. Disruptions**

- 19.1 No placement disrupted during 2015/16.

## **20. Complaints/Compliments/Allegations**

- 20.1 There were no complaints received by the Adoption Team in 2015/16.
- 20.2 Neither allegations of misconduct against staff nor allegations relating to child protection against adopters were received during the year.
- 20.3 Several compliments were received by the adoption team in 2015/16 from adopters.

## **21. Future Developments**

- 21.1 We will need to work closely with the consortium, regarding the ongoing development of regionalisation and how this is going to affect the Agency, although at this point, it looks very fluid, this is a government backed in and it, will eventually affect the whole face of adoption.
- 21.2. As an Agency it is our intention, to push forward with foster to adopt, we have sent two staff on training and will be looking to implement this ASAP. Foster to adopt, will also help, and decrease some of the time scales
- 21.3 An analysis of our enquiries in the financial year 2015/2016 suggests that the largest number of enquiries were generated via the website. As such the continuation of developing adoption website remains an area of priority for 2015/16.
- 21.4 The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) will continue to be available to all children adopted and their families across England who are in need of therapeutic services, for the next four years at least
- 21.5 This will continue be an area of development for our team this year, putting in place processes and procedures to undertake post-adoption support needs and make applications to the Adoption Support Fund. We will also be looking at more dynamic ways of accessing the fund, i.e. making group applications
- 21.6 We are looking at ways of having the financial reviews removed from the Social work staff, as this can led to tension, and possibly stop adopters approaching us

## **22. Future Reports**

- 22.1 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:
  - Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency
  - 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
  - Satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

- 22.2 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.
- 22.3 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.