



THE LONDON BOROUGH  
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## **Annual Report on Adoption Activity**

**2016-2017**

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## **1. Key Messages**

The number of children placed for adoption is declining significantly over the last 2 years, with 8 children placed for adoption in 2016/17 compared to 18 placed in 2015/16, which represents a 44% decrease. However there has been an increase in Adoption Orders granted over the same period, with 20 Adoption Orders granted in 2016/17 versus 15 in 2015/16.

The number of prospective adopters approved is reducing with 9 approved in 2016/17 compared to 11 in 2015/16. This is reflective of the national picture with the changing profile of children placed for adoption.

There have been significant developments within the national landscape of adoption over the last 12 months. In March 2016, the Department of Education (DfE) published a paper - *Adoption, A Vision for Change* which sets out planned reforms to the adoption system to avoid unnecessary delay in the adoption process and to increase the support available to children and their families.

A number of initiatives are currently in progress which include:

- Increase in the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) and a pledge to increase year on year until 2018
- Extending ASF support to Special Guardians caring for children who were previously looked after and Inter Country Adoption
- Increasing support for adopted young people up to the age of 21

A significant development and announcement in the Queen's Speech of June 2016, is a requirement that all Councils combine their adoption functions within the next 2 years. Bromley is currently reviewing their adoption service in response to the transition to a regional adoption agency by 2018.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of the document is to report on the activity of the adoption service, fulfilling obligations in the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) to report to the executive side of the local authority. It will include performance and developments in Bromley's delivery of adoption services; how the Council is compliant with key national minimum standards and the service offered to those seeking to adopt and those affected by adoption through the provision of adoption support. This report details the work of Bromley Council Adoption Service from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to end of March 2017.

Adoption is one of the most important and significant decisions that can be made for a child. Bromley Children's Services wants every child to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. For those young children who cannot remain or return safely to their birth families, adoption offers them the best opportunity to experience a warm and loving family environment throughout life.

The adoption of children from care has a high profile nationally, with 2016 highlighting key adoption reforms being implemented. *Putting Children First: delivering our vision for excellent children's social care* (July 2016), sets out the programme of reforms to children's social care over the next four years. A critical development is that all Councils are required to combine their adoption function by 2018. This changing and challenging landscape will see Bromley form part of a Regional Adoption Agency within the next couple of years.

The Adoption Service is responsible 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. 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. The team also manages domestic, inter-country and step parent adoptions; birth parent counselling; post placement and post adoption support and a range of intermediary services.

The Adoption Agency Advisor is the Adoption Group Manager who 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. Children with an Adoption Plan**

2.1 There were 21 children with an Agency decision for adoption in 2016/17, of which 13 were male and 8 were female. Of this cohort, there was 1 sibling group of 2 to be placed together and three sibling groups of 3; with 2 groups to be placed together and 1 group to be placed as 2 and 1 respectively.

The ALB adoption returns confirm that as of 31.3.17, 1 child had been adopted, 2 were placed for adoption, 2 had been matched, 1 child had not yet entered care and 15 were waiting to be matched, with active family finding in progress.

The ages of this cohort of children when an adoption decision was made were as follows:-

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>
0	8
1	4
2	1
3	1
4	2
5	4
6	1

2.2 There was a decrease in the number of (ADM's) Adoption decisions granted, with 21 ADM's in 2016/17, compared to 23 in 2015/16.

2.3 There is a noted increase in the number of sibling groups requiring a placement together in 2016/17, with only 1 sibling group of three requiring an adoption together in 2015/16. Bromley undertake a comprehensive Together or Apart assessment in circumstances where separation of siblings may be required to determine the best permanence option.

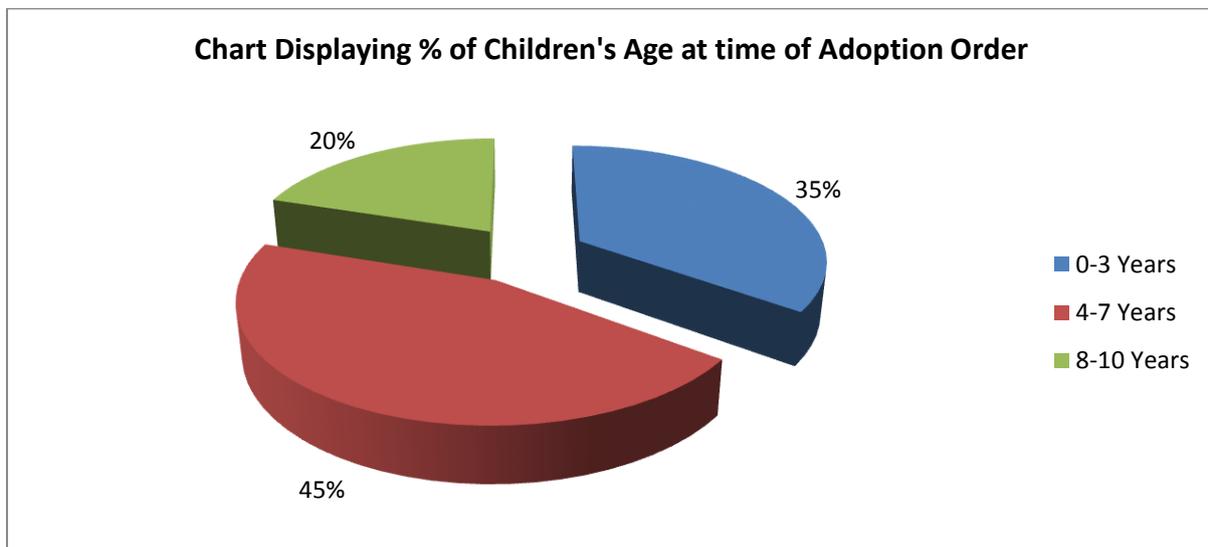
### **3. Children Made Subject to Adoption Orders**

3.1. 20 children were made subject to Adoption Orders in 2016/2017. This is 12% of children ceasing to be looked after, with 1% more than last year, but below the national average of 15%.

Out of the 20 children subject to an Adoption order:

- 13 children were aged 2 to 5 years
- 7 children were older than 5 years which reflects the national picture where older children (above 3 years) are being placed for adoption.

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

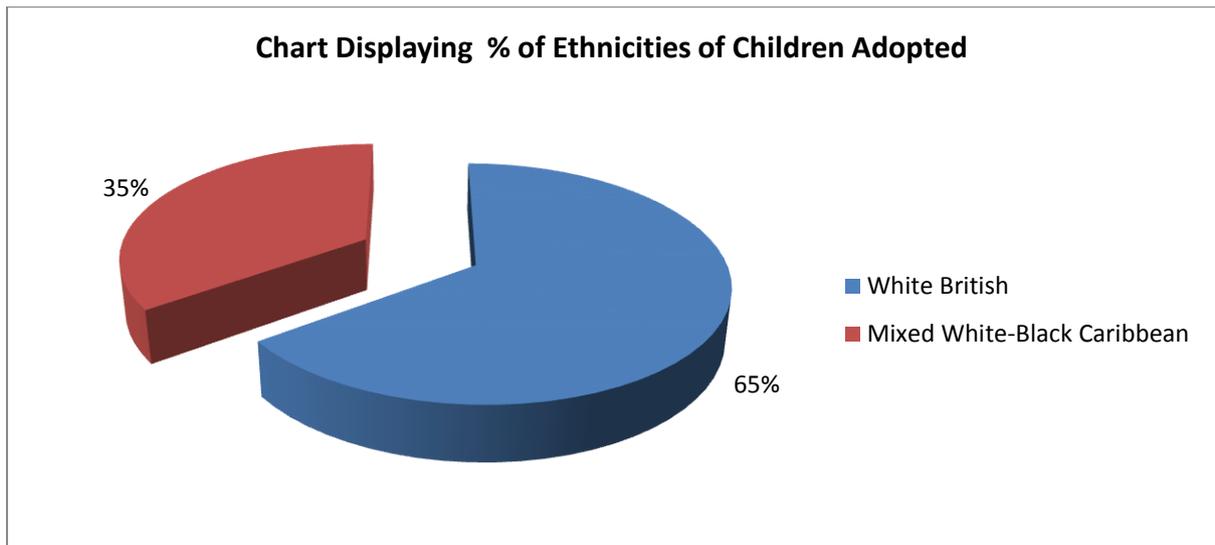


Out of the 20 children, the eldest child was aged 8 years at the time the Adoption order was granted and the youngest child was aged 21 months. It is worth noting that the eldest child adopted in this cohort was an 8 year old female placed with a voluntary adoption agency. There was considerable delay for this child from the time the child had an adoption decision to the time she was placed with her adopters and latterly formerly adopted. The contributory factors to delay were her age and the fact she was originally placed with her sibling which required a reassessment to determine separation.

3.2 Of the 20 cohort, there was 1 sibling group of three and 2 sibling groups of 2 adopted together, plus 13 individual children. 9 of the children were adopted by Bromley adopters, 7 by Voluntary Adoption Agencies and 4 by other Local Authorities under the inter agency arrangement.

3.3 In terms of children's ethnic background, out of the 20 children:

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



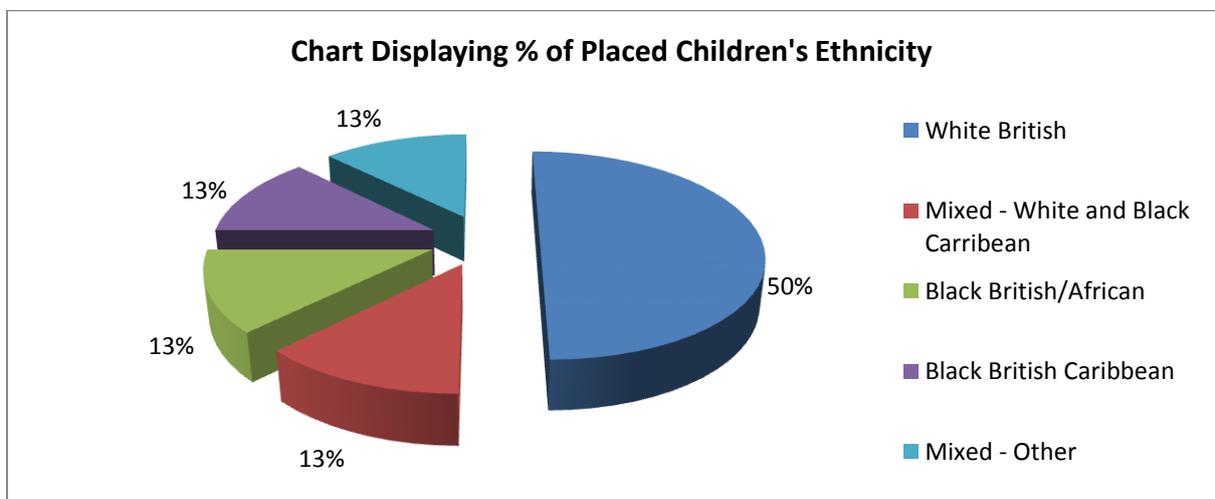
**4. Children Placed For Adoption in 2016/2017**

4.1 There were 8 Bromley looked after children placed individually with prospective adopters during the year, compared to 18 in 2015/16. In this cohort there were no siblings groups and 2 of the 8 were also adopted in 2106/17 and included in the cohort of 20 children adopted last year.

Of the 8 children placed, 3 were placed with Bromley adopters, 4 with Voluntary Adoption Agencies and 1 was placed with another Local Authority under the inter agency arrangement.

4.2 In terms of ethnicity out of the 8 children placed:

- 4 were of White British heritage
- 1 of mixed White and Black Caribbean heritage
- 1 of Black British/African heritage
- 1 of Black British/Caribbean heritage
- 1 Mixed – Other



## **5. Adoption Panel**

- 5.1 Bromley Adoption Panel recommends prospective adopters for approval as adopters; matches of approved adopters with specific Bromley children; and the suitability of relinquished children for adoption. The final decision, in all of these cases, based on the panel's recommendation is made by the Agency Decision Maker, the Director of Children's Social Care.

The Agency Advisor is the Group Manager for Adoption and 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.

- 5.2 Bromley adoption Panel meets on a monthly basis, though the frequency does increase if required. Panel Members meet once a year to review panel performance and development. Between 2016/2017, panel met on a total of 10 occasions and made recommendations on a total of 19 cases of which there:

8 adopter approvals

1 refusal (subsequently approved by the ADM following appeal)

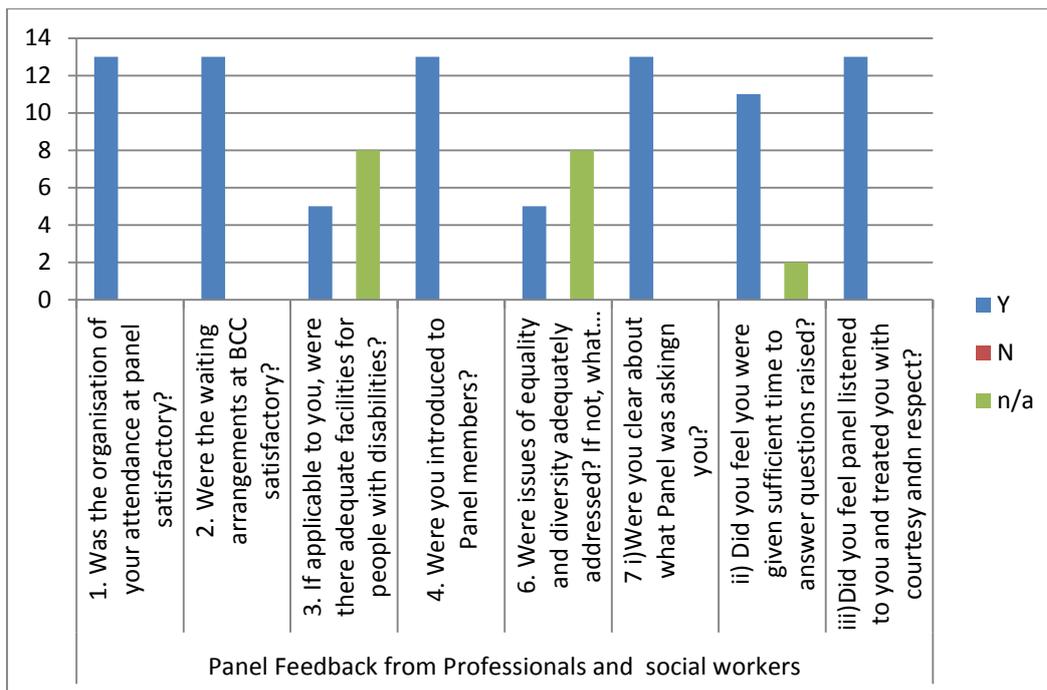
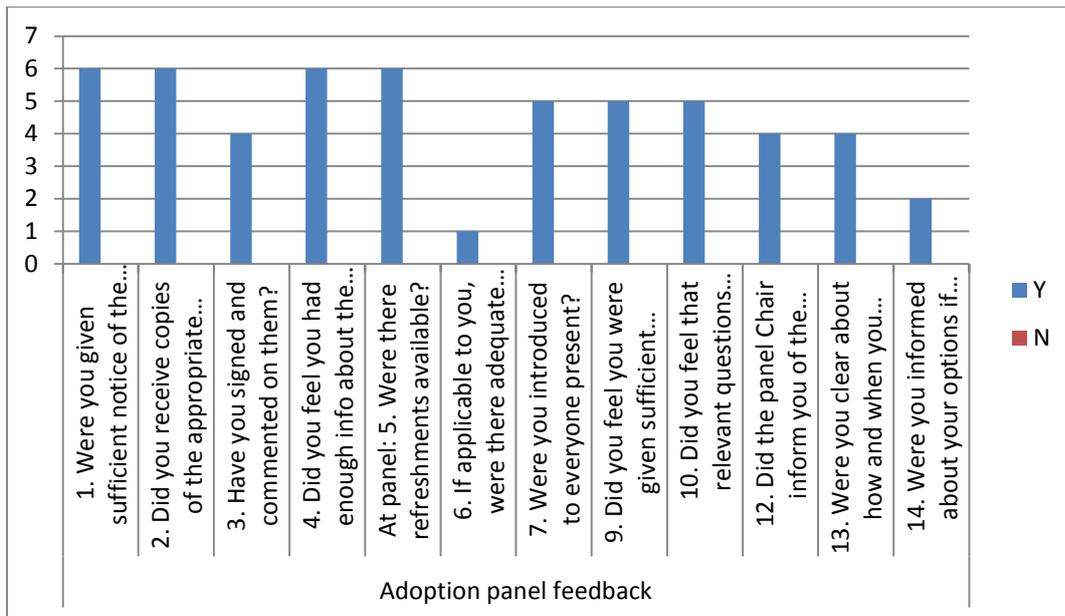
10 matches of which includes 1 foster to adopt

0 Inter Country adoption approvals

0 adopter deregistration

- 5.3 The adoption panel have a quality assurance role to support and challenge performance within the adoption service. Quarterly meetings will commence in 2017/18 with the management group, independent chair and vice-chairs as well as other key staff to facilitate good communication between the panel and the agency to focus on continuing improvement.

| The first chart below captures adopters' feedback, with second chart representing feedback from professionals presenting at adoption panel within the last year.



These are a sample of comments collated by the adoption chair on the positive aspects of adoption panel:

- Appropriate questions. Good feedback for adopters.
- Making the adopters feel welcome which made them feel relaxed.
- Positive feedback about the report that fully represented the couple.
- Questions indicated panel had grasped relevant issues.

- Panel showed real appreciation of child's needs and genuine interest.
- Their acknowledgement of the work the foster carers had done with the child being placed for adoption.

Aspects of panel which were more challenging:

- Large panel member group 11 panel members and 2 observers
- Waiting to go into panel
- Talking about the child

5.4 Updating the adoption panel leaflet remains an area of development carried over from previous year.

## **6. Disruptions, Complaints & Allegations**

6.1 No placement disrupted during 2016/17 and 2015/16.

6.2 There was a slight increase in complaints with 3 in 2016/17, compared to 2 in 2015/16.

Adoption quarterly returns data confirms there were no allegations in 2016/17, compared to three in 2015/16.

A record of compliments was not maintained in the last year, however anecdotally there have been noted compliments from some adopters.

## **7. Adopters Approved and Adopters Waiting**

7.1 There was 9 adopter households approved in this year whom had 12 children placed for adoption from the following Local Authorities: Southwark, Brighton & Hove, Greenwich, Hackney, Kent, Cambridgeshire, Bradford and Wokingham.

The average assessment timescale for Bromley to complete Stage 1 and 2 is 7 months, which is higher than the adoption scorecard. The breakdown on timeliness of the 9 cohort is as follows:

- 3 households waited between 0-6 months between commencing Stage 1 to the date the approval decision was ratified
- 6 households waited between 6 - 9 months between commencing Stage 1 to the date the approval decision was ratified
- Of the 9 approved adopter households, 4 were heterosexual and 4 were same sex couples

7.2 As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, there were 8 approved adopter households waiting of which:

1 Bromley foster to adopt child was being placed with adopters

Matching process for 1 child underway with adopter

Linking of 1 Bromley child with an approved adopter

Annual review of 1 adopter household

Reassessment of 1 adopter with new partner

Matching panel scheduled for 1 Bromley child with adopter household

1 Bromley child linked and panel scheduled for end of July

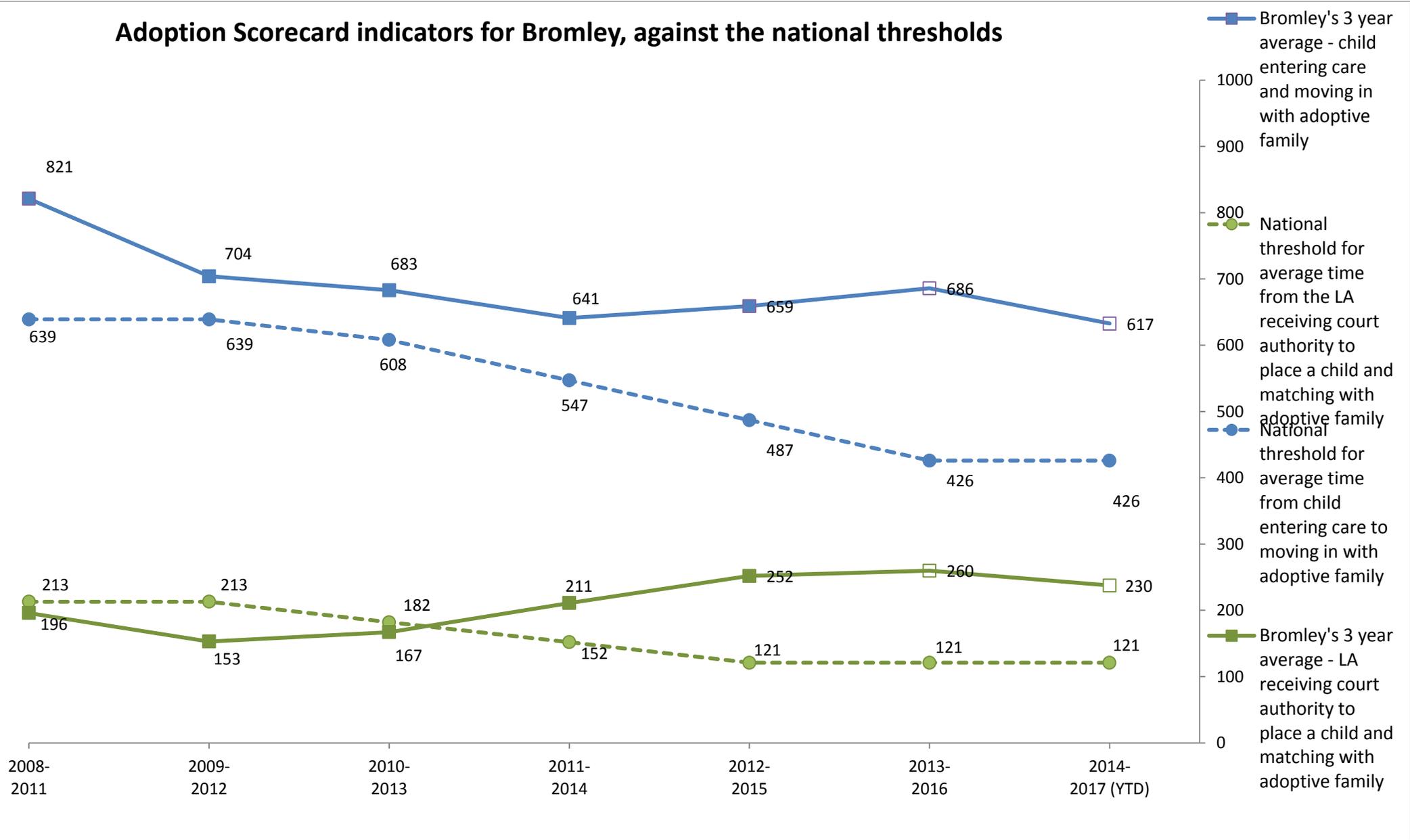
Active family finding for 1 newly approved adopter household

## **8. Adoption Timescales**

Bromley Adoption is required to monitor its performance against timescales which 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.

Adoption Scorecards were introduced as part of an 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 performance and compare it with statistical neighbours.

# Adoption Scorecard indicators for Bromley, against the national thresholds



Indicator	Accumulation of data	Bromley 2014/15	Bromley 2015/16	Apr 16	May 16	Jun 16	Jul 16	Aug 16	Sep 16	Oct 16	Nov 16	Dec 16	Jan 17	Feb 17	Mar 17	Year to Date 2016/17	DoT	2016/17 Target	National Average 2014/15
<b>Adoption</b>																			
Children (newly) placed for adoption	In Month	22	18	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	8			
Children Waiting to be placed (panel decision for adoption but not yet placed)	Snapshot	12	15	14	15	14	18	18	18	13	10	10	13	16	19	19			
Children adopted from CLA	In Month	20	15	4	2	0	3	0	2	3	2	0	0	0	4	20			
SGO's granted from CLA	In Month	23	13	1	0	1	6	1	1	1	3	3	1	0	5	23			
Days between child entering care and moving in with adoptive family (single year)	YtD	623	849	328	356	356	366	366	374	442	442	442	442	442	436	435.5	↓		
Days between child entering care and moving in with adoptive family (3 year average)	3YtD	659	686	680	667	667	648	648	637	641	633	633	633	633	617	616.6	↓	426	593
Days between LA receiving court authority to place a child and matching with adoptive family (single year)	YtD	290	212	133	142	142	137	137	149	163	171	171	171	171	159	158.5	↓		
Days between LA receiving court authority to place a child and matching with adoptive family (3 year average)	3YtD	252	262	250	247	247	240	240	239	238	238	238	238	238	230	230.0	↓	121	223
Children waiting less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with adoptive family	YtD	16 months 42%	37%												44%	44.4%	↑		47%

The two main adoption scorecard indicators for 2016/17 are moving in the right direction with improved performance from 2015/16. The published scorecard reviews data over the last 3 years which will continue to be affected by legacy cases and a specific long adoption timeframe of a 15 year old in 2015/16.

Adoption timeliness is improving and requires consistent review and management oversight to maintain appropriate pace and challenge for children and adopters. However the Department for Education thresholds have not yet been met.

As of 1 April 2017 the approach to Early Permanence Adoption tracking is now covered across 4 categories which allow for greater scrutiny to understand where drift and delay can occur:

1. Early Family Finding - ADM agreement of adoption plan
2. ADM to Placement Order
3. Placement Order to adoptive placement
4. Adoptive placement to Adoption Order

2017/18 will see the adoption diagnostic assessment being undertaken by Coram to ascertain Bromley's adoption performance and benchmark against other LA's. The purpose of this review will be to put the spotlight on areas that require improvement i.e. early permanence for young children, pace and timeliness of adoption placements.

The challenge remains to further reduce timescales in line with the targets set by Government. 2017/18 will see two adoption workers forming part of the children looked after service to ensure consistent and efficient case responsibility for children with adoption plans.

## **9. Adoption Consortium**

- 9.1 The South London Consortium comprises of seven local authorities Bromley, Croydon, Wandsworth, Greenwich, Lewisham, Lambeth, Southwark and four voluntary agencies Coram, Mosaic, Diagrama 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.
- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 Approved adopters are added to national database Link Maker 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.
- 9.4 A steering group has been established to develop the foster to adopt scheme, along with training and support groups available to foster to adopt carers and led by Coram BAAF.

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

- 10.1 There have been 157 adoption enquiries in the last year, which represent a reduction from the previous year. Enquiries are defined as a person contacting Bromley to discuss their interest in becoming an adopter. Telephone enquiries are managed by the adoption team.

Information sessions and Preparation Groups for adopters were held regularly throughout the year in partnership with two South Adoption Consortium partners Greenwich and Lewisham.

Bromley's experienced adopters continue to contribute delivering these sessions, offering prospective adopters an opportunity for individual discussion and learning from their adoption experience.

- 10.2 The number of approved adopters has decreased in 2016/17, with 9 approved last year compared to 11 in 2105/16. Of the 9 adopters approved, 12 children are placed on inter agency arrangements with the following Local Authorities: Southwark, Brighton & Hove, Greenwich, Hackney, Kent, Cambridgeshire, Bradford and Wokingham.

Bromley have improved their performance with the number of adopter approved and waiting as 8 for 16/17 compared to 12 in 15/16. However our need to recruit and develop adopters able to adopt harder to place children remains crucial, which include older children and sibling groups.

- 10.3 Our Recruitment Strategy needs to be refreshed to increase and maintain a pipeline of adopters to reflect service need. 2016/17 will see the development of a foster to adopt scheme for children and will be incorporated in the recruitment strategy for the year ahead.

### **Intercountry Adoption**

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 are provided.

There has been more activity in inter country adoption last year with 1 child matched via inter country, 2 children placed and 1 Adoption Order granted.

The service is also responsible for providing support to applicants waiting for a match, which last year included children being matched and adopted from Nigeria, Bangladesh and India.

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

- 11.1 The post adoption support team delivered 6 developmental workshops for 36 adoptive parents between 2016/17, in addition to an educational workshop for adopted parents facilitated by Bromley virtual head, 6 adopters attended. Funding from the Adoption Support Fund enabled Bromley commission a three day parenting workshop titled the "Great Behavioural Breakdown" for 22 adopters which was

positively received. This led to a group of adopters accessing therapeutic family work with therapists who delivered the training via the ASF fund.

The workshop programme for 2016/17 has included a range of topics and themes:

- Playful communication with children using Theraplay and play therapy techniques
- Sharing difficult and traumatic histories with children
- Keeping your child safe on social media
- Managing challenges in adolescence
- Managing transitions
- Contact

11.2 In 2016/2017, the service received 45 requests for post adoption support which resulted in 44 full adoption support assessments being conducted. This resulted in 19 successful Adoption Support Fund applications, all of which were and successful in funding private therapeutic resources to support families with complex needs.

Of the 19 cohort, the resources purchased comprised of a range of strategies with therapeutic parenting course being the most in demand. Family therapy, specialist assessments, sensory integration programme, therapeutic parenting courses, family mediation provisions, play therapy, music therapy, young people's workshop provision and child psychotherapy. In addition the post adoption support team provided family mediation, Theraplay, therapeutic life history work, family work and direct work with children.

11.3 A successful annual picnic event was held in the summer of 2016; attended by 76 adults and 62 children from adoptive families. Feedback from the event was extremely positive with adoptive parents having an opportunity to network and children engaging and participating with other adopted children. This event allows direct contact between adopted siblings in a safe and playful environment.

### **Education Support**

Educational support to adopters is provided by Bromley's Head Teacher of virtual school for Looked After Children. The Virtual Head supports adoption via workshops and consultations with adoption service to support adopters in accessing the right educational provision for Looked After Children.

Additionally the Adoption Support Fund has been used to provide play therapy resources in schools and this has reduced the need to access Pupil Premium Plus fund being used.

### **Post Adoption Contact**

The letterbox arrangements are managed as part of the post adoption support duty system which operates three days a week currently. At 31st March 2017, 494 letterbox contact arrangements were in operation with 683 exchanges for 218 children. The adoption support duty social worker provides the initial point of contact for information, advice and support to all those involved in indirect contact between adopted child and their birth families. If counselling or intensive support is required a designated social worker will be allocated for further work.

There were 59 children in adoptive placements with direct contact arrangements in place with birth families members in 2016/17. 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. The total currently is 91 contacts. These arrangements continue until the child is 18 or until either party requests a review of the arrangement.

Contact arrangements require a great deal of time and sensitivity from the service. The post adoption social worker prepares adoptive family members and birth family members to ensure the best possible outcomes from these contacts. The contacts are emotional and require sensitivity and empathy on the part of the adoption support social worker. Direct contacts are an important piece of work for the child as it assists identity formation, reinforces important attachments made to significant people and promotes the cultural identity. Direct contacts continue until the child is 18 or until either party requests a review to either increase or changing contacts arrangements to better meet the needs of the child.

### **Work with Birth Families**

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. We offer a counselling service to birth parents affected by adoption to help assist them with loss and separation. As part of this work we offer advice with letter writing and at the end of the continuum, preparation for direct contact should there be a plan for this to occur when the adopted young adult reaches majority.

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 but they have successfully reunited three adopted adults with their birth family members in 2016/17.

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 4 such enquiries in 2016/2017.

### **Birth Records Counselling**

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 35 new referrals from adopted adult's during 2016/17. This is a very important part of the continuum of the adoption process and for many adopted people (particularly for those who were adopted before 1975) as they were informed that they would never have contact with their birth family members. Often this group of people are not even aware of their birth name nor have even seen a photo of their birth parents. This part of the service is a life changing and emotional journey for individuals who have been separated for many years without contact since early childhood.

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 team take the lead role in providing this service.

### **Adoption Allowances**

The Adoption Team have reviewed 59 adoption allowances in 2016/2017. This was primarily to pay regular adoption allowance payments in relation to adopted children. There were in addition to one-off payments made towards the costs of introductions and settling in allowance.

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 overseen by the Adoption Team Manager.

### **12. Future Developments**

- ✓ Participate in Adoption diagnostic assessment to enhance improvements with pace and timeliness of adoption performance.
- ✓ Contribute to London wide projects in preparation for Regionalisation so that Bromley adoption is ready to implement the changes required.
- ✓ Initiate early family finding to commence as soon as adoption is confirmed as the plan.
- ✓ Formalise and publicise “early permanence consultation offer” with childcare colleagues to ensure adoption is considered at earliest opportunity.
- ✓ Develop and implement a foster to adopt scheme enabling children to be placed early.
- ✓ Be creative in utilising and engaging adopters waiting to support adoption activities
- ✓ Plan and implement transition of two adoption workers to relocate within the CLA team to support adoption timeliness and afford better management oversight.
- ✓ Maintain a pipeline of adopter recruitment by assessing adopters that are reflective of service need.
- ✓ Devise an Adoption recruitment strategy that incorporates a clear foster to adopt scheme
- ✓ To devise and implement a clear Quality Assurance framework for adoption panel to improve its quality assurance potential that offers challenge and support to adoption performance.
- ✓ Annual review of Statement of Purpose and children’s guide to be completed in line with standard 18.3 of the National Minimum Standards.