

Report of the
**Children's Services Select
Committee:**

Improving the council's adoption
scorecard performance:
Scrutiny Review 2016/17



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Lead Member's Foreword

This year, Barking and Dagenham Council's Children's Services Select Committee (CSSC) agreed to undertake a Scrutiny Review on 'Improving the Council's Adoption Scorecard Performance'.

Children who are looked after by the local authority, or are in need of an adoptive family, often come from difficult backgrounds or face complexities which make them very vulnerable, and are in great need for stability, love and affection. There is evidence to show that adoption is a good outcome for these children, and that the earlier they are adopted, the better the outcomes for them and their families. As the Council's performance in the two key indicators for measuring how quickly local children are adopted is below the London and national average, we wanted to find out what the reasons were for this, what the Council was doing to address these challenges and what more could be done to improve performance.

As well as looking at the data and speaking to various professionals involved in the adoption process, we received a presentation from Professor Julie Selwyn, an expert in the field, to help us understand what questions the Council should be asking to challenge itself and improve practice. We also talked to residents who have been through the adoption process to gain their personal insight.

We learnt that certain categories of children can be 'harder to place' for adoption. These include children who are from ethnic minorities, are part of a sibling group, are older, or have complex needs. The Adoption Service's experience implies that when compared to London, the borough has a higher than average number of children who are in 'harder to place' categories because it chooses to pursue adoptive placements for them. We learnt that the Adoption Service has successfully placed children considered 'harder to place' for adoption which has been an excellent outcome for those children. However, due to the time it has taken to find adoptive families for such children, this good practice has had an adverse impact on the Service's Scorecard performance, which indicates that the Service is far from meeting the timeliness targets for finding children an adoptive family. As the Committee was concerned at this, it recommended that the Service undertake research to establish whether the borough truly does have a higher number of 'harder to place' children in its cohort, compared to other boroughs in London, so we may obtain a fair picture of the Adoption Service's performance.

We also asked for a breakdown of performance relating to children whom were not considered 'harder to place', to obtain a view of performance in that area, We found that there are lessons to be learnt from some of these cases and have recommended that the Service improves some of its processes to improve timeliness of family finding. It is very important that the Council's Action Plan for the Service is closely monitored to ensure the changes to the culture and practices within the Service to improve timeliness do not lose momentum and are having the right impact. We also felt that more can be done to improve the recruitment of adopters, and so we have made recommendations which we hope will help address these issues.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Kangethe'.

Councillor Elizabeth Kangethe

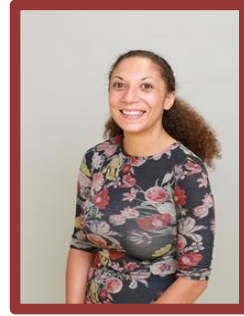
Lead Member, Children's Services Select Committee 2016/17 – 2017/18

Members of the CSSC 2016/17

The CSSC members who carried out this Review were:



Councillor E Kangethe (Lead Member)



Councillor M Bartlett
(Deputy Lead Member)



Councillor S Bremner



Councillor E Fergus



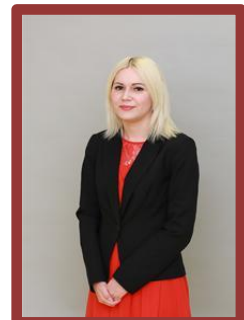
Councillor I Freeborn



Councillor S Ghani



Councillor A Oluwole



Councillor D Smith

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Recommendations arising from this Review

For ease of reference, the recommendations arising from this Review are provided below.

The CSSC recommends to the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration that:

1. The Cabinet Member report back to CSSC within six months' time, the impact of the Adoption Action Plan on timeliness performance for all adopted children;
2. The Adoption Improvement Group (AIG) continues to be held at the current frequency of bi-monthly and the challenge to timely performance remains a focus;
3. All children, who may potentially be placed for adoption, continue to have adoption plans made by the Local Authority and that these are advocated for during care proceedings;
4. The Cabinet Member requests that the Adoption Service undertakes research to gather data, which substantiates the claim that Barking and Dagenham has had more 'harder to place' children in its cohort than its statistical neighbours and other authorities in the East London Consortium, and that it has placed more of them for adoption than other authorities, and that the Cabinet Member reports the findings back to the CSSC within six months' time;
5. The Cabinet Member ensures that all children have the plan for adoption formally reviewed at 12 months, 18 months and two years after the granting of the placement order by the (AIG) to ascertain whether or not family finding should continue, or whether there should be an application to revoke the placement order. If family finding is going to go beyond two years the rationale for this should be formally recorded;
6. The Cabinet Member ensures that recommendations a – c in 5.12 of this report are implemented and that the AIG is made aware of these additional action points;
7. All family finding activity relating to each case is recorded in one place so that it is transparent and accessible. This could take the form of a Family Finding Record which is updated with every activity linked to family finding as a separate chronology attached to each child's file. The Family Finding Records should be reviewed by the AIG during Looked After Child reviews, as well as in staff supervision.
8. The Strategic Director for Service Development and Integration oversees the implementation of the Committee's suggestions to improve the recruitment of adopters at 6.2 of this report; and
9. The Cabinet Members asks the Adoption Service to undertake a review of resources to ensure that there is the correct allocation of staff to the various tasks within the team, taking account of the changing landscape of adoption nationally. This may be an interim measure pending the outcome of Regionalisation.

1. Background to the Review

Why did the Children’s Services Select Committee (CSSC) choose to undertake an in-depth scrutiny review on Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance ?

- 1.1 The Council’s scrutiny committees decide what topic to undertake an in-depth review on based on the ‘**PAPER**’ criteria. The Section below explains why according to these criteria ‘Improving the Council’s Adoption Scorecard Performance’ was a good topic to review.

PUBLIC INTEREST

Successive governments have been concerned about the low rate at which children in care become adopted because these children generally have poorer life outcomes than other children. For example, they are more likely to be unemployed, or to become homeless. Members felt that reviewing the rate at which children are adopted in the borough, and the reasons for this, was clearly in the public interest.



ABILITY TO CHANGE

Members felt by reviewing the actions being taken by the Adoption Service and talking to others involved in the adoption process, they could make recommendations that would help improve outcomes.



PERFORMANCE

The Council’s performance for two key measures on the Adoption Scorecard was below the national and London average. Members heard that there were a number of complex factors behind this, and felt it was necessary for the Committee to fully understand the reasons for the delay in some children being adopted and analyse whether the actions and approach taken by officers, to respond to this, were the right ones.



EXTENT OF THE ISSUE

As of the end of January 2017, there were 426 children in the care of the local authority, therefore, making adoption a significant issue to undertake a review on.



REPLICATION

Members were aware that the Adoption Service had set out its action plan to improve performance to the Council’s Corporate Performance Board. Members were clear that a scrutiny review on performance would not look to replicate this work, rather it would recommend additional areas of action to influence the Service’s outcomes positively.



2. Scope & Methodology

- 2.1 This Section outlines the scope of the Review which includes the areas the CSSC wished to explore and the different methods the CSSC used to collate evidence for potential recommendations.

Terms of Reference

- 2.2. Having received a final scoping report at its meeting on 19 September 2016, the CSSC agreed that the Terms of Reference for this Review should be:
1. What is adoption and why is this a good outcome for some children in care?
 2. Why is the Barking and Dagenham Adoption Scorecard performance off target and are officers taking the right action to address the issues?
 3. How might the views and experience of those adopted and those who adopt help improve our practice?
 4. How might the views and experience of others involved in the adoption process help improve our practice?

Overview of Methodology

- 2.3 The Review gathered evidence during the Committee's meetings held between 19 September 2016 and 8 February 2017. Details of stakeholders and their contributions to this Review are outlined below.

Scoping Report and Overview Presentation

- 2.4 On 19 September 2016 the Council's Adoption Service delivered a presentation to the CSSC to provide an overview of adoption, including what adoption means, the government's agenda around adoption, the key measures of the Adoption Scorecard, the Adoption Service's performance, issues impacting on performance, and action being taken to improve performance.

Presentation by Professor Julie Selwyn PhD, CBE

- 2.5 On 25 October 2016 Julie Selwyn, a professor of Child and Family Social Work at the University of Bristol, delivered a presentation on 'The Adoption of Looked after Maltreated Children: Challenges, Opportunities and Outcomes' which covered a range of areas including:
- The policy framework for permanence in England;
 - Adopted children in England,
 - Adoption reform;
 - The complex needs of children;
 - Why adoption and what do we know about adoption outcomes;
 - The sense of belonging and permanence,
 - Stability and safety;
 - Avoiding delay; and
 - Early permanence, and the challenges remaining.

Interviews with an Adoptee and an Adopter

- 2.6 On 21 November 2016, members carried out interviews with a resident who was adopted and a resident who had adopted to gain an understanding of their perspectives of the adoption process and experience.

Session with Others involved in the Adoption Process

- 2.7 On 6 December 2016 the CSSC met with the Chair of the Adoption Panel, the Council's Senior Solicitor for Safeguarding, the Head of Service for Looked after Children, and a Social Worker to discuss various aspects of the adoption process.

Presentation on the Adoption Scorecard

- 2.8 At the CSSC meeting on 8 February 2017, the Head of Service for Looked after Children provided a report and delivered a presentation to members on the Adoption Scorecard Performance for 2013 – 2016, which included:
- An overview of the Adoption Scorecard performance;
 - The key factors which have contributed to the 2013 -2016 under performance;
 - What the Service is doing to improve performance;
 - The challenges to being successful;
 - An analysis of performance for the 2013-16 cohort;
 - Children due to go onto Scorecard for 2014-17;
 - Children who are currently awaiting an adoptive family; and
 - What the Council could do to promote adoption.

Documents

- 2.9 During the Review, Members and Council Officers considered the following documents:
- Adoption: A Vision for Change, March 2016, Department for Education
 - BAAF Advice notes – if your child is being adopted (and you don't agree)
 - BAAF Advice notes – If your child is being adopted (and you don't agree)
 - Blogs from First4Adoption website - <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/blog/>

3. Introduction

What is Adoption?

- 3.1 Adoption is the only legal arrangement whereby parents lose parental responsibility and the adopters become the legal parents of the child. It can be achieved in the following circumstances:
- Babies relinquished by mothers who do not wish to, or are unable to care for their child, and give them up for adoption;
 - Care proceedings where children are removed from their families due to safeguarding concerns and the court agrees that adoption is the best care plan for the child;
 - Step-parent adoptions to enable the step-parent to become the legal parent to the child alongside the birth parent; or
 - Family members or foster carers making private applications to adopt children, following, for example, the death of the birth parents, or, the child has been under the care of the foster carer for over a year and the foster carer now wishes to adopt the child.

Is Adoption a Good Outcome for Children?

- 3.2 Care regulations state that social workers must consider permanence, the long-term plan for the child's upbringing, to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond, and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity, and belonging. Permanence can be achieved by reunification with the birth family, family and friends' care, a special guardianship order, adoption or, long-term foster care.

The CSSC heard evidence from Professor Selwyn that permanence for children via adoption can lead to good outcomes for children, particularly if they are adopted at a young age. Children report a greater sense of belonging in adoptive placements when compared to children in foster care. A study by Selwyn et al found that longer term foster placements were more likely to disrupt than the adoptive ones in their sample (the caveat being that the foster children were on average older at placement than the adopted children). The rate was much lower for children who were known to the foster carer and, disruption in both foster and adoptive placements tended to occur in the early stage of the placement.¹

There is research that shows that adoption provides greater stability than foster care, although this is influenced by factors such as age at placement and the child's background.² Studies also show that once children have been in care for some time, reunification with the birth family is the least successful option of adoption and

¹ Selwyn, J. Sturgess, W. Quinton, D and Baxter, C. (2006) Costs and outcomes of non-infant adoptions. London: BAAF

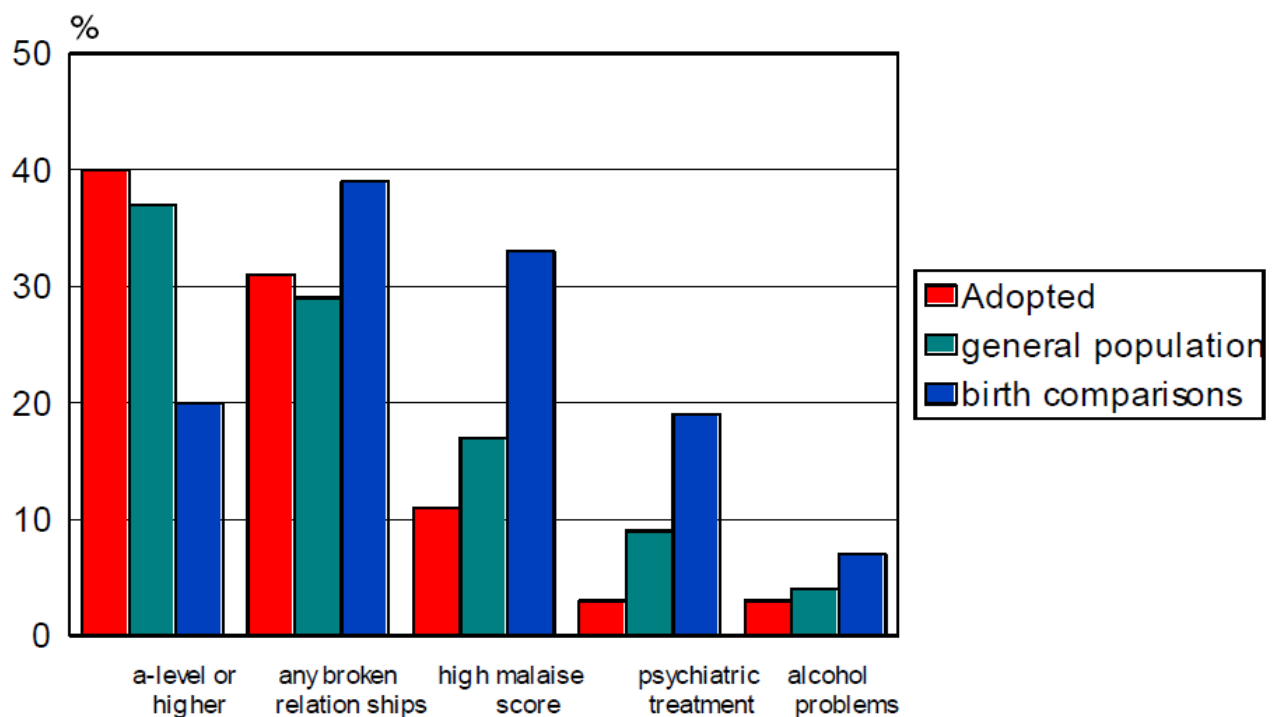
² Beihaal, N. Ellison, S Baker, C and Sinclair, I, (2010) Belonging and permanence: outcomes in long term foster care and adoption. London: BAAF

foster care.³ Younger children are more likely to return home successfully than those who are older.⁴ A US study comparing children who entered care before the age of one, who returned home, were adopted and remained in foster care, found that the children in foster care had the poorest developmental outcomes on nearly all measures, even though the reunified children had less responsive parents and were in significantly greater poverty. However, children in permanent foster care placements can also do well.⁵

The Importance of Avoiding Delay

3.3 Graph 1 below shows comparative data on outcomes at age 33 for children who were adopted at a young age, against average outcomes in the general population and outcomes of those who grew up in single parent families from the same socioeconomic group.

Outcomes of infant adoptions at age 33 (NCDS data)



³ Thoburn, J and Courtney, M.E (2011) A guide through the knowledge base on children in out of home care, Journal of Children's Services, 6, 4: 210-277

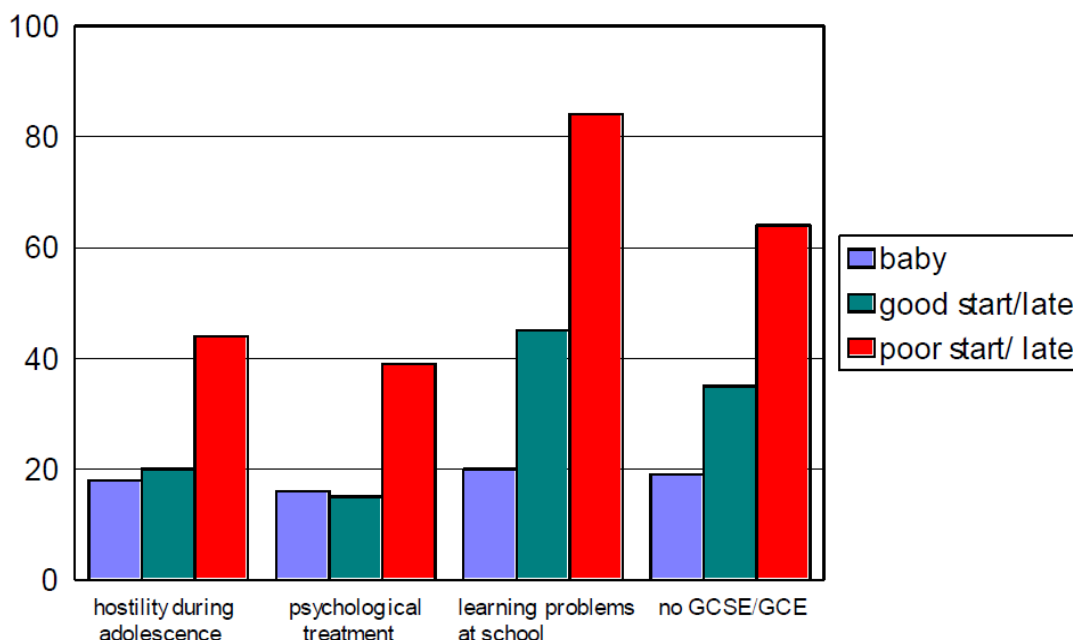
⁴ Farmer, E. and Lutman, E. Working Effectively with Neglected Children and their Families – Understanding their Experience and Long Term Outcomes. London: Jessica Kingsley publishers; Wade J., Beihal, N., Farrelly, N. and Sinclair, I. (2011) Caring for Abused and Neglected Children: Making the Right Decisions for Reunification or Long-Term Care. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

⁵ Selwyn, J et al (2006) ibid

Graph 2 below shows comparative data on outcomes of those who were adopted at birth against those who were adopted late after a good start in life and those who were adopted late after a poor start.

Comparative outcomes according to quality of start

(from Howe, 1997)



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This data shows that adoption can be a good outcome for children, particularly if they are adopted early. **Children who have a poor start in life, for example, due to abuse and neglect, and are adopted late, have much poorer outcomes, which is why timeliness in adoption is of crucial importance.**

What is the Adoption Scorecard?

- 3.4 The Coalition Government published 'An Action Plan for Adoption, Tackling delay', in March 2012 which introduced a performance scorecard to allow adoption agencies (including local authorities) to monitor their own adoption performance and compare it with that of others.

The Adoption Scorecard is used to measure performance in the timeliness of achieving adoption for children reported as a three-year rolling average and published by the Department for Education (DfE). The two key adoption indicators are:

- **A1** - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted, in days; and

⁶ Data from the 1958 National Child Development Study.
<http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/page.aspx?&sitesectionid=724&sitesectiontitle=National+Child+Development+Study>

- **A2** - Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and the local authority deciding on a match with an adoptive family, in days.

Local authorities have to submit this data to the DfE annually.

The Impact of Caselaw on Timeliness

- 3.5 Changes in the family courts mean that there is an expectation that all care proceedings will be concluded within 26 weeks. It is only in exceptional circumstances that the courts will allow a case to last longer than 26 weeks.

Members learnt from officers in the Council's Legal department that there has been a series of cases reported in the law reports in 2013 and onwards that has caused the courts to change the way that they consider care cases where the care plan is adoption. The most important of those cases is Re B-S where the Court gave direction that a care plan of adoption should only be endorsed if the court is satisfied that "nothing else will do". This case has had a substantial impact on Placement Order applications (the court order that allows social workers to begin looking for a new family for a child) and the challenges to Placement Order applications by birth parents. This decision has resulted in extended family members coming forward at a late date to be assessed as alternative carers for a child. Members noted that this may create delay and impact upon local authorities' adoption scorecards as the courts feel there is no option other than to assess those extended family members, due to the decision in Re B-S.

The decision in Re B-S, and the direction that at the end of the care proceedings all courts have to advise the parents that they have a period of 21 days to appeal any order, means that there are an increasing number of appeals by the birth parents. These appeals are often unsuccessful, but once an application has been made to appeal, if the child has not already been placed with prospective adopters, the local authority is unable to place the child until the court determines the appeal as unsuccessful.

Delays relating to Care Proceedings

- 3.6 As discussed above, there can be lengthy delays in care proceedings due to the courts requesting further assessments of family members, which impact on A1. Sometimes work is undertaken prior to a court hearing in line with good practice (such as, pre-proceedings work by social workers, as is legally required) which may then be marginalised by the court. The court then requests further assessments to be done, which is costly, as well as adding delay. There can also be difficulties in obtaining dates for cases to be heard at court due to the demand for hearings.

As mentioned, there appears to be an increase in parental legal challenge to placement orders resulting in delays placing children with adopters. This is an increasing but relatively new practice. A challenge will impact on A2 as despite having a Placement Order, the Service would be unable to match or place the child with an adoptive family until the appeal has been resolved.

Delays can also relate to the issue of children's guardians and courts having a say in what course of action should be taken, for example, that social workers should

provide further evidence of how many adoptive families and type of families are available for the child, rather than ratifying the social worker's care plan for adoption and allowing the local authority to progress the placement. Appropriate matches are not always available at the conclusion of care proceedings, particularly for 'harder to place' children (see Section 5) and family finding can take some time.

Delays in Social Care Teams

- 3.7 The CSSC heard that previously, there were internal delays, such as delay in the submission of social workers' reports and other paperwork to the Council's Legal Department and the lodging of the application, which officers felt may be attributed to the Service's workload being disproportionate to the resources of the Council.

Previously, there were also sometimes delays when transferring cases between social care teams that undertake adoption work and delays with Independent Reviewing Officers raising permanency planning (including adoption) at the relevant review for children in care. Furthermore, there were delays which related to the Adoption Team prioritising family finding in a timely way and managing high caseloads.

The Adoption Service's Action Plan

- 3.8 The Service recognised these issues, and in response, produced an Adoption Action Plan (provided at Appendix 1) to improve scrutiny of timeliness performance. (The Action Plan is discussed in more detail in Section 6 of this report).

Recommendation 1

The CSSC recommends that the Cabinet Member report back to CSSC within six months' time, the impact of the Adoption Action Plan on timeliness performance for all adopted children.

One of the key outcomes of the Action Plan was the implementation of the Adoption Improvement Group (AIG) where there is ownership of the Plan across Children's Services and the Legal Department. This Group would:

- Formalise a process to track and monitor performance at a senior management level to enable professionals to have a clearer understanding of delays for individual children, and
- Create a forum where issues or blocks could be addressed, where there could be challenge about performance, and care plans could be reviewed for those waiting a long time.

The CSSC heard that whilst the Action Plan has helped to resolve many of the challenges described above, historical delays may impact on current performance.

Recommendation 2

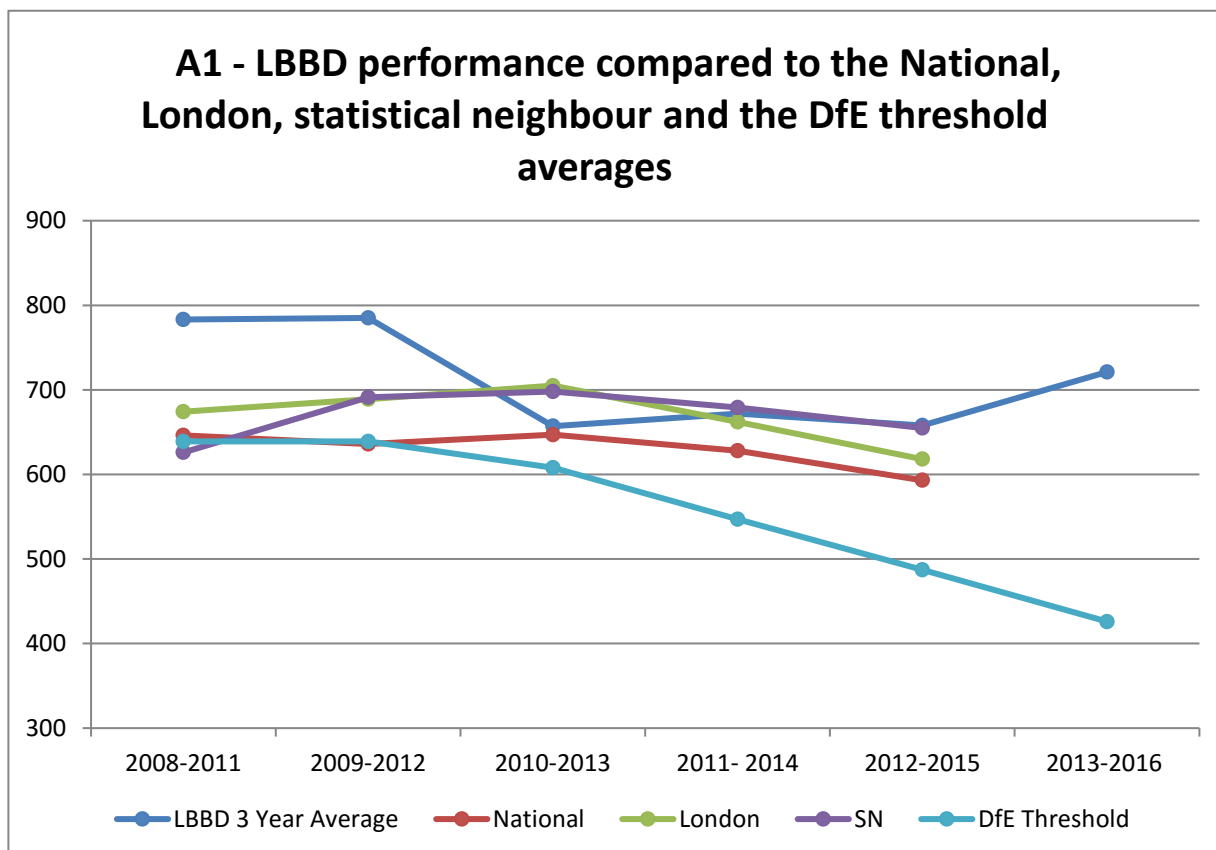
The CSSC recommends that the AIG continues to be held at the current frequency of bi-monthly and the challenge to timely performance remains a focus.

4. What is Barking and Dagenham's Adoption Service's Adoption Scorecard Performance?

4.1 We learnt in 3.4 of this report that the DfE have two key adoption performance indicators, known as A1 and A2. This Section will discuss Barking and Dagenham's Adoption's Service's performance on the A1 and A2 measures, compared with the performance of our statistical neighbours and the London and England average, against the DfE's thresholds. The DfE's thresholds have reduced between 2008 and 2016, making the targets more challenging. There is no indication that there will be a further reduction for 2017.

A1 performance over the last five years

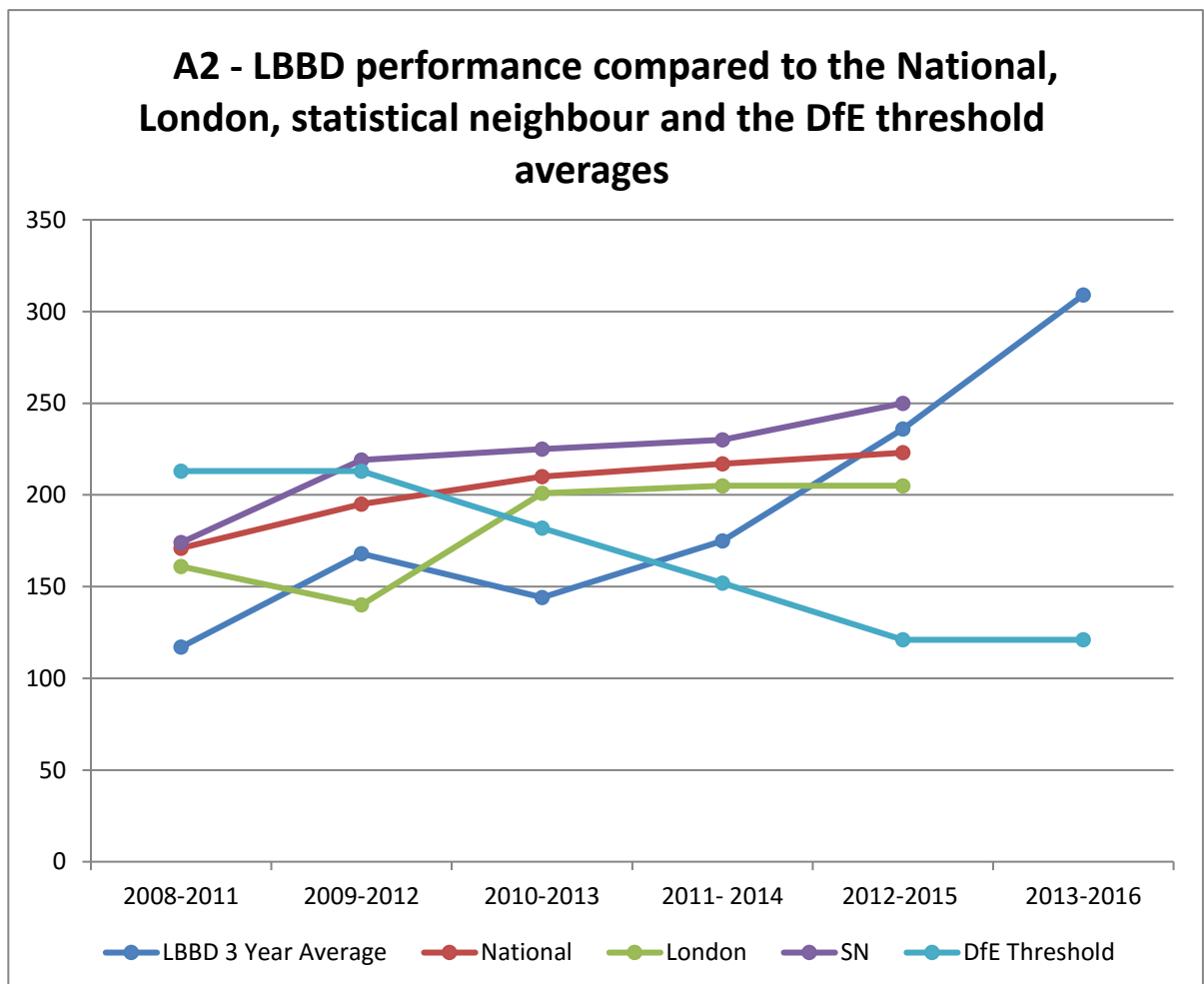
A1	LBBB	National	London	Statistical Neighbours	DfE Threshold
2008-2011	783	646	674	626	639
2009-2012	785	636	689	691	639
2010-2013	657	647	705	698	608
2011-2014	672	628	662	679	547
2012-2015	658	593	618	655	487
2013-2016	721	<i>This data was not available at the time of drafting this report</i>			426



4.2 As shown in the above table and graph, the Adoption Service’s rolling three-year average for 2012-15, as published on the Adoption Scorecard, is 658 days; 171 days above the DfE performance threshold of 487 days, and 40 days above the London three-year average of 618 days. Barking and Dagenham’s performance is also worse than the national average of 593 days. It is in line with the performance of our statistical neighbours, which have a three-year average of 655 days. In 2013-16, our three-year rolling average had increased to 721, which is 295 days above the DfE threshold of 426 days. (Comparator data for 2013-16 had not been published at the time of drafting this report).

A2 performance over the last five years

A2	LBBB	National	London	Statistical Neighbours	DfE Threshold
2008-2011	117	171	161	174	213
2009-2012	168	195	140	219	213
2010-2013	144	210	201	225	182
2011-2014	175	217	205	230	152
2012-2015	236	223	205	250	121
2013-2016	309	<i>This data was not available at the time of drafting this report</i>			121



4.3 **As shown in the above table and graph, our rolling three-year average for 2012-15, as published on the Adoption Scorecard is 236 days, 115 days above the DfE's performance threshold of 121 days, and 31 days above the London three-year average of 205 days.** Barking and Dagenham's performance is better than our statistical neighbours, which have a three-year average of 250 days, and broadly in line with the national average of 223 days. However, in 2013-16 our three year rolling average had increased to 309 days, which is 188 days above the DfE's threshold. (Comparator data for 2013-16 had not been published at the time of drafting this report).

The CSSC expressed concern at the Service's level of performance for the A1 and A2 measures and asked officers to give the potential reasons behind it, which are explored in the next Section.

5. Why is the Barking and Dagenham Adoption Service not meeting the DfE's A1 and A2 Targets?

- 5.1 In this Section the potential reasons why the Adoption's Service is behind the DfE's targets on the A1 and A2 measures are explored.

Delays relating to 'Harder to Place' Children in the Cohort

- 5.2 Officers explained to the CSSC that there was 'soft' evidence to suggest that there were a high number of children in 'harder to place' categories in Barking and Dagenham, compared to other London boroughs, which meant that family finding took much longer, and would explain the Service's A1 and A2 performance. This was possibly because other authorities were mostly finding adoptive placements for children who were less challenging to place, which meant that their cohort of 'harder to place' children for whom adoption is the plan, was smaller. (Children for whom adoption is not the plan, remain in long term foster care, and do not form part of the 'harder to place' cohort).

Whilst there is no formal definition of what constitutes 'harder to place', the definition widely adopted is that 'harder to place' children include older children, disabled children, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children and children in sibling groups. These categories have recently been included in the DfE's revised criteria for the Adoption Grant, in recognition of the challenges to place these children.

"Until now, there have been two major problems that delay the adoption process. The first is financial.

"But there is another, much trickier, bigger problem to navigate. The reality is that many adopters are searching for a healthy, single child under the age of two. But, of the 3,000 children waiting to be placed, many are older (although often only by a year or two), disabled, or have serious health conditions, or need to be placed together with their siblings. Many are also black or from minority ethnic communities. Such children are considered "harder to place", and wait much longer for a family to be found for them. For some children, a family cannot be found at all."

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Officers stated that this was the issue that was impacting most on the Service's Scorecard performance and they predicted it would continue to do so as there was no evidence that the children currently subject to family finding were considered less 'harder to place' (see 5.14 of this report).

⁷ See article by John Simmonds, Director of Policy Development and Research at the British Association of Adoption and Fostering, 9 July 2015: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/relationships/fatherhood/11729260/Getting-adopted-is-straightforward-as-long-as-youre-a-healthy-white-baby.html>
Accessed on 11 April 2017

Of the 66 children in the Service's 2013-16 Scorecard cohort, 48 fell into 'harder to place' categories – 72.7%, which officers felt was comparatively, a very high proportion of the cohort, according to anecdotal evidence. These harder to place children included:

- BME – 5 children;
- Special needs – 7 children;
- Siblings – 26 children; and
- Multiple categories – 10 children.

Officers explained that the Adoption's Service's approach to family finding was that an adoptive placement should be pursued for children who fall into a 'harder to place' category due to the evidence that showed that adoption was the best outcome for children, even though this approach was likely to have a negative impact on the Service's Scorecard performance. The Adoption Service visited the DfE to discuss its performance in summer 2016. The Service gave a number of case examples to illustrate the work being undertaken and the DfE was supportive of the Service continuing to pursue adoption for those children that are 'harder to place', notwithstanding the impact on performance.

Members recognised that family finding can take much longer for some children in 'harder to place' categories and careful consideration must be given to the robustness of adopters to cope and sustain more challenging placements to prevent placement breakdown. The Adoption Service's case was that given the significant number of children who fall into 'harder to place' categories in Barking and Dagenham, achieving adoption for them has been a successful outcome albeit that it has taken much longer than the government prescribed timescales.

The Service argued that this notion is backed up by the fact that:

- No children have had a placement breakdown in the last three years post the adoption order being granted.
- Only two children have had a placement breakdown in the last three years prior to the adoption order being granted – both broke down during introductions and did not disrupt during placement.

5.3 “Local authorities can decide to place a child with an adoptive family that was assessed and approved by a different adoption agency (this can be another local authority or a voluntary adoption agency. In these cases, the agency will charge a fee to cover the costs of recruiting, assessing and approving the adopters. This is called the inter-agency fee.

“The inter-agency adoption fee grant is a government grant that reimburses the money local authorities spend on inter-agency fees for 'hard-to-place' children.”⁸

The CSSC noted that more than two thirds of the Council's current three year rolling cohort fall into 'harder to place' categories (these categories are discussed further below) and family finding for some of these children has exceeded 18 months. 18 months of family finding is the current measure for the DfE for local authorities to

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/inter-agency-adoption-fee-grant-for-local-authorities> Accessed on 7 June 2017

apply for interagency fee reimbursement in recognition of the additional assistance required to family find for complex children. The extension of the interagency fee for children waiting 18 months or more indicates that the DfE are aware that some children will need an extended period of family finding. There is no formal consequence imposed by the DfE for exceeding 18 months, but there is inevitably an impact on the Scorecard and the DfE may make further enquiries regarding performance. Placement Orders, although having no expiry date until the child reaches the age of 18, should be formally reviewed at one year to confirm whether or not family finding should continue. There is a tension between the desire to exhaust all family finding options over a prolonged period for 'harder to place' children and the recognition of the impact of this on the Scorecard.

The CSSC agreed with the Adoption Service that meeting the DfE's performance targets should not be at the expense of the outcomes for our borough's children.

Recommendation 3

The CSSC recommends that all children, who may potentially be placed for adoption, continue to have adoption plans made by the Local Authority and that these are advocated for during care proceedings.

5.4 Officers provided the following summary of the amount of children adopted in LBBB in 2015, compared to other local authorities, to the CSSC;

	A1	A2	Number of Adoptions - raw numbers (Comparator data rounded to nearest 0 or 5)	% of children leaving care who are Adopted
LBBB	721	309	27	10.8%
Statistical Neighbours	655	250	390 (Average of 39 per authority)	14.0%
National	593	223	4690 (Average of 31 per authority)	14.8%
London	618	205	460 (Average of 14 per authority)	8.9%
Tower Hamlets	645	217	15	7.1%
Newham	502	141	15	5.0%
Havering	607	180	5	3.0%
Waltham Forest	622	247	10	5.6%
Redbridge	551	144	15	10.7%

The CSSC noted that this data indicated that the Adoption Service was adopting a significant number of children in comparison to the borough's Consortium partners and London. In 2015-16, LBBB was the third highest in London with regards to the number of children that were adopted. Members noted that the data indicated that other local authorities' timeliness performance was better and asked officers the possible reasons for this. Officers gave a possible explanation that these authorities were only finding adoptive placements for children who were less challenging to

place, which meant that their cohort of 'harder to place' children for whom adoption was the plan, was smaller.

- 5.5 The CSSC asked the Adoption Service for hard data which benchmarked the Service's number of children who were considered 'harder to place', against that of other local authorities in London. However, officers explained that this data was not currently collected. Given the Service's performance, the CSSC felt this was disappointing, as members felt that there should be evidence for the reasons behind the Service's poorer timeliness performance.

Recommendation 4

The CSSC recommends that the Cabinet Member requests that the Adoption Service undertakes research to gather data, which substantiates the claim that Barking and Dagenham has had more 'harder to place' children in its cohort than its statistical neighbours and other authorities in the East London Consortium, and that it has placed more of them for adoption than other authorities, and that the Cabinet Member reports the findings back to the CSSC within six months' time.

- 5.6 Officers explained that in addition to the Adoption Action Plan, work has been taking place to improve performance generally within Children's Care and Support Services, which has also had an impact. The Adoption Tracker is a tool used by the AIG, the Adoption Team and the Court Progression Officer to monitor and drive the issues of timeliness. The tracker also records reasons for delay.

Case Study

Officers presented the Case Study below to illustrate the kinds of issues that may arise whilst family finding for a child.

Sibling Group A

A sibling group of two, one boy and one girl of White British descent with no special needs, were granted a placement order in 2012. They were 4 and 6 years old at the time that the order was granted. Family finding took place and included exploring LBBB approved adopters, Consortium adopters, advertising in printed publications, searches on the Adoption Register, and considering adopters in assessment who might be an appropriate match. However, no families expressed an interest.

In 2015 the children attended an Adoption Activity Day after intensive preparation to ensure they understood the purpose of the day and that there was no certainty about a match. They thoroughly enjoyed the day and one couple in particular showed a lot of interest in them during the event. The Adoption Team followed this up with the couple's agency but after a couple of weeks, they informed us that they were not pursuing a match.

The children had been placed with their foster carer for some years by this time, who then put herself forward to be assessed as a special guardian and therefore family finding ceased.

Unfortunately, the foster carer experienced some personal issues that led to the breakdown of the placement in early 2016 and the children were moved to a new foster placement.

The Adoption Service discussed the children and how they would benefit from a permanent family and took into account that they did not present with any additional needs despite their experiences. The view was also taken that some potential adopters had changed their views with regards to the children they would consider adopting over the last year, as there were not many very young children available for adoption. Given that these children had no additional needs, the Team decided to have one last attempt at family finding after consulting the children.

Two families expressed an interest once the children's profiles were put onto the Adoption Register and Adoption Link. These were both pursued and one family was chosen as the most appropriate match. These adopters were also supportive of direct contact with their birth family given the ages of the children at the time of placement (8 and 10). They were placed in the summer of 2016 and are awaiting the granting of the adoption. They have settled well and are extremely happy.

- 5.7 **This sibling group's scorecard figures are 1829 days for A1 and 1715 days for A2.** The placement arose as a result of the Adoption Service deciding to make one last attempt at family finding after the placement with their foster carer broke down. The family finding that took place between 2012-14 had not been successful despite attendance at an Adoption Activity Day where interest was shown by a couple of families. They have now been matched with a couple who are supportive of direct contact with their birth family, have many interests in common and are thriving in their placement. The plan for adoption was progressed, having taken account of the children's wishes and feelings for a permanent family whilst wanting to maintain links with their birth family.

The CSSC noted that whilst this was a very positive outcome for the children, the impact of the length of time it took to find a family on the Scorecard would remain until the end of 2019.

Recommendation 5

The CSSC recommends that the Cabinet Member ensures that all children have the plan for adoption formally reviewed at 12 months, 18 months and two years after the granting of the placement order by the (AIG) to ascertain whether or not family finding should continue, or whether there should be an application to revoke the placement order. If family finding is going to go beyond two years the rationale for this should be formally recorded.

- 5.8 As stated previously, the outcomes for children who remain in care are generally poorer than those who are adopted. In relation to this, a further issue to consider is that whilst there has been a change to the Care Planning Regulations 2010, which states that long term foster care should be viewed as an equal option for permanency, the Service has significant experience of foster carers committing to children and being formally matched at Fostering Panel as a long term placement, but when challenges arise in later years, they end the placement. Members noted that there are no additional safeguards to ensure the stability of children in long

term foster care to short term placements, despite the formal matching process having taken place. Adoption provides a much more secure form of permanency than long term fostering, particularly for children who may present with challenges as they grow older.

Performance relating to Children Whom are Not Considered 'Harder to Place'

- 5.9 Given that there was a lack of data to confirm that the borough truly was looking for adoptive placements for more 'harder to place' children than other London boroughs, the CSSC emphasised that it was important for it to establish what the Adoption Service's timeliness performance was for children who were **not** considered 'harder to place', which the report will now discuss.

The current Adoption Scorecard was measuring timeliness for all children adopted between 2014 -17. The Council has adopted 74 children during this period, 18 of whom were considered **not** to be in 'harder to place' categories. Of these 18 children, nine were placed within the DfE threshold. This means that there were nine children where there was delay. **The Committee was concerned that this meant that the Service missed the DfE targets for 50 percent of the cohort of children who were not considered 'harder to place'.**

- 5.10 As 50 % of the not considered 'harder to place' cohort, for whom the Service did not meet targets, was very high proportion, the Committee asked officers to provide a breakdown for each child in this cohort to include:

- How many days after the DfE threshold the child was placed;
- The reasons for delay; and
- Whether there was anything the Service could have done differently, procedurally, to improve timeliness.

This breakdown is provided below.

Breakdown of performance relating to children who were not considered 'harder to place' between 2013 – 2016:

Child Number	How many days past the DfE threshold was the child placed for Adoption?	What were the reasons for delay?	What could the Service have done differently to improve timeliness?
1	A1 58 days A2 177 days	Child adopted abroad by family, but complexities arose due to different legal systems to facilitate adoption. Child was formally in a fostering arrangement with family whilst adoption legal issues were resolved.	No contingency could have been put in place as the child was with family and therefore in a stable placement and all actions were taken to chase the appropriate authorities to facilitate the adoption.

2	A1 23 days A2 144 days	Breakdown during introductions so family finding had to resume, which took longer than expected.	There was no contingency plan for a possible breakdown. The Service could have had other adopters identified as potential families as a contingency plan.
3	A1 690 days A2 390 days	Child was adopted by her foster carers, but the carers had to be fully assessed as there were concerns about their ability to meet her long term needs. During the assessment period she was still technically fostered and not placed for adoption despite the fact that she remained in the same placement. They also had to attend Preparation Groups in advance of the assessment taking place.	The Service should have accepted that the foster carers were highly likely to be successful with a private adoption application which would not require a full assessment and approval at Adoption Panel. The Service could have informed the foster carers of their right to apply privately for an adoption order and outlined the Local Authority's concerns in Annexe A (document required for all adoptions) and allowed the court to determine the appropriateness of the match.
4	A1 293 days A2 99 days	Unacceptable delay (was matched with adopters within 7 months, but the DfE threshold is 4 months).	Regular and robust scrutiny of family finder's performance including identification of potential matches in advance of the Placement Order being granted.
5	A1 690 days A2 390 days	Child had relatives being assessed in Australia but they subsequently withdrew from the process. Family finding resumed and it took longer than expected to find an alternative family.	Contingency plan of alternative potential families.
6	A1 – was within timeframe A2 64 days	One child was due to be matched with an adoptive family but the birth father came forward and asked to be DNA tested as he had not been present during the care proceedings. This was granted by the Court and once it was established that he was the father, he was granted time to put forward relatives for consideration, who were subsequently ruled out.	The timing of the DNA test and the granting of the Placement Order overlapped so the possibility of a challenge was possible. However, the Court was not prepared to delay the Placement Order as the father had a history of non-engagement. The legal advice was that we should ensure there was no legal challenge in the future by robustly ensuring father and his family were not viable, therefore the delay was necessary. A family were ready to be matched as soon as paternal family were ruled out.
7	A1 44 days A2 144 days	Unacceptable delay (there is evidence of 9 families being explored but due to uncertainty about potential health issues child may have developed due to mother's substance misuse, adopters were cautious to proceed).	Regular and robust scrutiny of family finder's performance. More regular updates on child's development from Health to share with potential adopters.

8	A1 15 days	Mother appealed the Placement Order as she had kept a younger child. She was a very young mother and the Court hearing the appeal supported the Local Authority's position that she could not care for both children. During the appeal process the Authority could not place child with adopters. In addition, two adopters did express interest in Feb 2014 but they did not want to pursue the match.	Timescales were impacted by the appeal, and the Court's timetable, which the Authority does not have any control over.
	A2 128 days		
9	A1 476 days	Unacceptable delay due to performance issues within the team.	Regular and robust scrutiny of family finder's performance.
	A2 301 days		

5.11 The CSSC recognised that the Service was working to address some of the reasons for delay. For example, work was ongoing to recruit more in-house adopters who could meet the needs of our children and to fast track assessments of any adopters who might be a match for a particular child whose plan either is or might be adoption. In addition to those adopters who might consider 'harder to place' children, it is also important to continue to have a pool of our own adopters who are better suited to the less challenging placements, particularly now the DfE are no longer refunding interagency fees for any child who has been waiting less than 18 months. The CSSC noted that a preparation group began in April 2017 and seven adoptive families had been identified to attend (two of these were foster carers adopting children already in their care). Members also noted, with regard to scrutiny of family finding work, that a number of actions had already been implemented, such as fortnightly updates at team meetings, scrutiny at the AIG, formal supervision by the team manager and ad hoc checks by the Head of Service.

5.12 However, from the above breakdown, the CSSC identified a number of additional actions that the Adoption Service could implement to ensure that children who are considered not 'harder to place', do not experience unnecessary delay:

- (a) It is essential that all children have a contingency plan in case the match with the identified adopters does not proceed for any reason. The contingency plan should be formally recorded at Looked After Children reviews and within the child's care plan;
- (b) If foster carers wish to adopt a child, they should be supported with a private application rather than undertake a full adoption assessment on them – any issues can be highlighted in Annexe A if necessary; and
- (c) Consideration should also be given to arranging additional Adoption Panels to consider matches if there will be a delay of several weeks in order to maximise performance.

Recommendation 6

The CSSC recommends that the Cabinet Member ensures that recommendations a – c are implemented and that the AIG is made aware of these additional action points.

Commentary on Potential Future Performance

Children due to go onto the Scorecard for 2014-17

- 5.13 These are the children who are currently placed with adopters and will go onto the Scorecard once the adoption orders are granted. Children must be placed with adopters for a minimum of 10 weeks before they can submit their application to court for the adoption order. The CSSC asked the Adoption Service to provide its estimation of how this cohort may affect future performance.

These are 10 children which include eight 'harder to place' children:

- 2 sibling groups of 2 (1 group was aged 8 and 10 at time of placement);
 - 1 eight-year-old child who is visually impaired;
 - 1 young child who has Down's Syndrome; and
 - 1 child who may possibly have developmental delay.
- 5.14 The current DfE target is 426 days for A1 and 121 days for A2. Officers explained that this target would not be achievable for a number of years given the current performance of the Scorecard. Furthermore, once these children are added to the Scorecard the Service expects that its performance will worsen as follows:
- A1 – will increase from 783 to 821 days, and
 - A2 – will increase from 357 to 380 days.

Children due to go onto the Scorecard for 2015-18

- 5.15 The cohort of children for whom there is a possible plan for adoption, whom the Adoption Team have been notified of, appear to be a more mixed cohort ('harder to place and 'easier to place' children), compared to previous cohorts. Officers felt that this must be viewed with caution as the Service has experience during 2016/17 of a number of babies and young children whose needs appeared to be relatively straightforward early on, but who later developed complex health or developmental needs. There were also adopters who were concerned about committing to taking on children with backgrounds involving parental substance misuse or learning disabilities, until they had a clearer view from the Medical Adviser that there was no apparent impact on the children's development.

Not all 'Harder to Place' Children are Equally Hard to Place

- 5.16 The Committee expressed concern that the category 'harder to place' was very wide. This meant that there could be a large variation in the time it takes to find a family for a young sibling group with no additional needs, and the time it takes to find a family for an older child with behavioural difficulties (although both would fall under the category of 'harder to place'). The CSSC feel that the Adoption Service should expect different timeliness performance in each case, rather than simply treat both cases as 'harder to place'. Members therefore felt that the Service should have in place a system whereby managers can more easily scrutinise the Team's family finding performance in light of the particular circumstances of each child.

Recommendation 7

The CSSC recommends that all family finding activity relating to each case is recorded in one place so that it is transparent and accessible. This could take the form of a Family Finding Record which is updated with every activity linked to family finding as a separate chronology attached to each child's file. The Family Finding Records should be reviewed by the AIG during Looked After Child reviews, as well as in staff supervision.

6. What is Working Well and What More Can be Done?

What is working well?

6.1 We stated in the Introduction that the Adoption Service has in place an Adoption Action Plan that sets out the actions required for improvement (see Appendix 1). The Action Plan was reviewed by the DfE in June 2016 and was positively received. The points below summarise the progress made as a result of actions in place for improvement:

- There has been a change in culture within the Service which has taken time to embed and staff are now very much aware of the Scorecard performance and how their actions and delays impact on the timely placement of children. Systems and processes within the Service have improved and there is now a culture of urgency to progress placements whilst remaining aware of the need to ensure that the quality of the placements remains high, with an excellent prospect of success. There is concern that speed of placement should not lead to an increase in placement breakdown, which is particularly important for older children, sibling groups and children with additional needs. Despite the change of culture, the Service is still trying to find adoptive families for a significant number of 'harder to place' children, which inevitably takes longer. Going forward, it will be important to monitor whether targets of all children who are not considered 'harder to place' are achieved and if not, to be clear about the reasons for delay. Historically, there were performance issues within the Adoption Service that impacted on timeliness, but these have now been addressed. The Service has introduced individual summary sheets for every child which provide a pen picture of their needs, family finding activity and any barriers, and their Scorecard performance.
- There has been the introduction of the AIG in 2016, who meet on a bi-monthly basis to track performance of all children who are being considered for adoption, who have Placement Orders, to ensure that actions to find adoptive families are robust. The Adoption Action Plan is also reviewed at this meeting. This Group is chaired by the Director of Operations for Children's Care and Support and is attended by the managers for Care Management, Adoption, Child Protection and Review Service and the Legal Department.
- All children that who the Service is actively family finding for are discussed at fortnightly Adoption Team Meetings to ensure activity is taking place to find families for children outside of the borough and to identify possible in-house families, including those currently undergoing assessment.
- There has been attendance at specific events aimed at finding families for 'harder to place' children, for example, a national event held Walsall in December 2016 and Adoption Activity Days. The latter are 'play days' for children with prospective adopters in attendance. Prospective adopters have an opportunity to meet children in person rather than just see a picture or DVD. The events aimed at 'harder to place' children can encompass all categories that are considered 'harder to place' or can have a focus such as

children with a disability or children who are BME. This gives potential adopters, who are specifically interested in adopting 'harder to place' children, the opportunity to view profiles of children and discuss their needs with social workers to assist with decision making regarding possible matches.

- There has been attendance at all East London Consortium family finding events. Working in this way enables Barking and Dagenham to draw from a wider pool of prospective adopters.
- There has been closer working with the relevant children's social care teams for early notification of children who may be considered for adoption. These notifications are used to explore potential matches within LBB and Consortium approved adopters and to conduct initial searches on the Adoption Register and Adoption Link so that early matching and placement can progress once the placement order is granted.
- All adopters in assessment are approached for consideration of approval for 'fostering to adopt'. This means a child can be placed with prospective adopters while a court hearing is planned or taking place, therefore improving timeliness.
- Lifestory work is an essential part of an adopted child's journey. All children should have a lifestory book which summarises their history with their birth family, significant events, the reasons why they have been adopted and the period of time between being introduced and being placed with their adoptive family. Older children benefit from direct work to understand their lifestory in order to make sense of it and assist them in settling into their life with their new family. There has been a backlog in the production of lifestory books due to limited capacity within the Adoption Team, which is being addressed by dedicating one member of staff to the production of lifestory books and undertaking lifestory work, in conjunction with the children who are of an appropriate age and understanding. In addition, applications have been made to the Adoption Support Fund for an independent social worker to undertake therapeutic lifestory work with identified children who require this intervention as a priority.

What more can be done?

6.2 However, given the issues discussed in Section 5 of the report, the Committee felt that more must be done to promote adoption in the borough and surrounding areas, which may help improve the timeliness of adoption of children in some 'harder to place' categories, for example:

- The use of in-house newsletters and other media to promote adoption for 'harder to place' children and the type of adopters we require for our children;
- A focus on the promotion of adoption in Council buildings and events;
- An internal campaign to include the promotion of adoption within extended family and friends' networks that may be outside of LBB, given that we require many families outside of our locality for safety reasons;

- The Council could identify a dedicated resource from the Communications section to specifically support the recruitment of adopters for BME children;
- Training for social workers on understanding the barriers preventing BME groups from adopting and how they can clear misconceptions around Adoption in these communities; and
- Members could be briefed on borough-specific issues regarding adoption so they can promote it to constituents where appropriate.

Recommendation 8

The CSSC recommends that the Strategic Director for Service Development and Integration oversees the implementation of the Committee's suggestions to improve the recruitment of adopters at 6.2 of this report.

- 6.3 The Adoption Service will continue to access events for 'harder to place' children and have already booked to attend an event in Manchester in March 2017. The profiles of all children subject to placement orders will be actively pursued and profiles of adopters who may be suitable for other children will be collected. Whilst those adopters might not be available in the future, it is important not to miss out on any opportunity to pursue a potential match.
- 6.4 As recommended by the CSSC, the continuation of the AIG is essential for the ongoing monitoring and challenge to all teams linked to adoption and to provide detailed evidence of progress and the issues for individual children.
- 6.5 The CSSC recognises that the challenges within the court arena are much more difficult to influence. The CSSC feels that there must be continued attempts to keep the dialogue open with courts and guardians regarding adoption, particularly in relation to the impact of delay regarding parental challenges to placement orders.
- 6.6 The CSSC had the opportunity to have discussions with an adopted adult and an adoptive mother, both of whom presented a balanced view about adoption, outlining both the challenges and positives of their journeys. Members felt it would be positive to include service users such as these in training for staff. The Adoption Service have made plans to undertake a specific training session with all team managers in Children's Care and Support in the summer regarding permanency, with opportunity for managers to have feedback from these adults. The CSSC also felt that the Adoption Service should include in the session the opportunity to hear from a birth mother who has had children adopted and the impact this has had on her life. This will assist managers in considering all aspects of adoption when assisting social workers with care planning. The Service hopes that these individuals may be prepared to do further work with social workers in a larger group to enhance their practice with regards to the complex issues of permanency going forward.
- 6.7 The CSSC found that post-adoption support works well within the Adoption Service, but there are issues of capacity to manage the range of responsibilities within this part of the Service with only 1.5 staff. This leads to waiting lists for the work with adopted adults as the children in placement are prioritised for intervention and support when required. This includes applications to the Adoption Support Fund where criteria is met.

In light of this,

Recommendation 9

The CSSC recommends that the Cabinet Members asks the Adoption Service to undertake a review of resources to ensure that there is the correct allocation of staff to the various tasks within the team, taking account of the changing landscape of adoption nationally. This may be an interim measure pending the outcome of Regionalisation.

7. Next steps

- 7.1 This report will be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration. If the recommendations are accepted, the Strategic Director for Service Development and Integration will be asked to draw up an action plan describing how the recommendations will be implemented. In six months' time, the CSSC will request a monitoring report explaining the progress of the implementation of the recommendations and whether anything could be said of the early impact they have had on the Service's outcomes.

The CSSC would like to extend its thanks to the following for contributing to this Review:

Guests

- Professor Julie Selwyn PhD, CBE, Bristol University
- Roy Stewart, Chair of the Adoption Panel
- The Adopter and Adoptee who met with the Committee on 21 November 2016

Council officers:

- Joanne Tarbutt: Head of Service, Looked After Children
- Masuma Ahmed: Democratic Services Officer
- Ann Graham: Director of Operations, Children's Care and Support
- Jane Hargreaves: Commissioning Director for Education and Scrutiny Champion for the CSSC
- Mary Manual: Social Worker, Post Adoption team
- Exarchou Eirini: Senior Solicitor, Safeguarding

Appendix 1- Adoption Service Action Plan 2016/17

Task	Action	Lead	Timescale	Progress Update
To set up Adoption Improvement Group to monitor systems, processes, practice and outcomes for children considered for adoption and to ensure that cases are fast tracked for permanency where appropriate.	1. Meetings to take place bi-monthly, tracking all cases considered for parallel planning from entry into care until placed with adoptive family.	AG/JT	May 2016	Completed
	2. Replace NI61 performance monitoring in monthly dataset with Adoption Scorecard performance.	GC	May 2016	Completed
	3. Progress will be reported at monthly Portfolio meetings	AG	Ongoing	
	4. Scorecard Performance to be presented to quarterly Corporate Parenting Group	JT	From September 2016	Ongoing
Embed use of Adoption Tracker across all teams to monitor timescales for performance	1. Update current Tracker to ensure all children currently being considered for adoption are captured, but who may not yet have an ADM decision.	JT/CG	May 2016	Completed
	2. Identify BSO/s who are responsible for updating Tracker.	JT	May 2016	Completed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Document to be used in Adoption Improvement Group to ensure ownership across the Service. 4. Document to be used in Adoption Team Meetings every fortnight 	<p>AG/JT/CG</p> <p>MO</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	
Deliver a range of training to include Permanency Planning, process for parallel planning, timescales and links to performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Commission training on permanency planning. 2. Deliver training on writing good quality CPRs 3 times per year. 3. Re-launch Adoption Referral Meeting process for Team Managers and Social Workers. 4. Deliver training on Later Life Letters and Lifestory Work 5. Adoption Team to present permanency planning session to Team Managers' Practice Improvement Group 	<p>Learning and Development/JT</p> <p>HK</p> <p>MO</p> <p>HK</p> <p>Adoption Team</p>	<p>Sept 2017</p> <p>July, Nov, March</p> <p>June 2016</p> <p>June, Oct, Feb</p> <p>August 17</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
Continue to work with London Regionalisation Group and East London Adoption and Permanency Group re regionalisation planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attend all London wide events 2. Work with ELAPG to ensure East London's views are represented in addition to individual boroughs. 	JT/MO	Ongoing	
To identify additional resources to make applications to court to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All applications to be submitted by end of July for those currently with a Panel/ADM decision that adoption is no longer the plan. 	JT	July 16	Completed

rescind all Placement Orders where adoption is no longer the plan for the child.	2. To ensure that all future applications are submitted within one month of ADM decision that adoption is no longer the plan.	MO/JT	Ongoing	
Senior management steer is required re adoption planning for children who are considered 'difficult to place' (sibling groups, disabled children, children with a high level of needs, older children and BME). The length of family finding will impact on Scorecard performance and adoption may never be achieved.	1. Director of Children's Services to clarify position so that social work teams and ADM are clear about parameters when considering adoption plans for children who are difficult to place.			Completed
To continue to make applications to the Adoption Support Fund to access resources for post adoption support.	1. Therapeutic support to be identified at an early stage to ensure good performance on placement stability is maintained. 2. To make applications to the ASF to support Special Guardianship placements (introduced 2016)	Post Adoption Workers SG Consultant	As required As required	Applications are considered on a case by case basis. Applications are considered on a case by case basis.
To continue to make applications for interagency funding reimbursement to	1. To continue to make use of all interagency placement options for children who are waiting for an adoptive placement to ensure timely placement.	MO/CL	Ongoing	Applications are considered on a case by case basis.

maximise use of interagency placements to ensure timely placement				
To ensure IROs understand their role in adoption performance.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To work with CPRS managers to ensure that IROs raise practice alerts when any drift is identified in permanency planning at any stage. 2. IROs to ensure that Group Manager for Adoption is copied into any alerts for information to ensure that there is oversight on any potential drift. 3. Adoption TM to attend IRO team meeting for discussion on adoption performance and delay. 	<p>JT/NA</p> <p>IROs</p> <p>MO</p>	<p>May 2016</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>18.5.16</p>	<p>Completed and refreshed as new IROs join LBBB</p> <p>Completed</p>
Identify appropriate methods of engagement with Judiciary re mismatch in government agenda, case law and impact on LA performance on adoption.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with Legal to put on agenda for next meeting with Designated Judge. 	AG/JT/CG		<p>Legal are in discussion with Designated Judge regarding a date to meet.</p> <p>Offers attend the regional Family Court meetings and issues are raised here.</p>
To target recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All initial enquiries to be thoroughly vetted to try to identify those who are likely to consider difficult to place children. 	Adoption Team	Ongoing	

who can meet the needs of LBBD children	2. Work with East London Adoption and Permanence Group to deliver regular preparation groups to prevent delay in assessment of prospective adopters.	MO		Barnardo's to be commissioned by ELAPG to deliver preparation groups
Inter-country adoption assessments	1. Continue to offer assessments to inter-country adopters as this generates income and ensures expertise of ICA remains within the Service.	MO/MB		Under review due to capacity issues in team
Staffing	1. Fill 1 vacant post within the team to maximise capacity for family finding, assessments of adopters and post SGO support.	MO/ JT	tbc	
Policies and procedures	1. Continue to ensure TriX procedures are updated.	MO	As necessary when TriX updates are required.	Completed
	2. Highlight essential parts for 'easy reference' for social workers re permanency planning, which includes ADM process.	MO	May 2016	Completed