



Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2017 – 2018

Introduction

The London Borough of Brent believes that every child has the right to a stable, loving and permanent family to care for them, to promote their physical, intellectual and emotional development, and to enable them to achieve their full potential. When children cannot be cared for by their own family Brent enable them to move to alternative families who will care for them throughout childhood and beyond, providing love, care and warmth, and who are able to respond to their individual needs.

This Statement of Purpose reflects the overall aims, objectives and values of Brent's adoption service. It is available to all staff, service users and anyone seeking a copy.

This Statement of Purpose is produced in accordance with:

- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 (S18);
- Care Planning Regulations 2010;
- Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011;
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (amended 2011);
- Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012;
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013;
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013;
- Local Authority Adoption Regulations 2005;
- Adoption and Children Act 2002; and
- Care Standards Act 2000.

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually.

Brent Council has set local targets that reflect national priorities for adoption set by the Government as well as objectives in providing alternative permanent families for children where adoption is not appropriate. These include permanent placements within the child's extended family or with a member of the child's community with whom the child may have a special relationship.

Value Statement

Brent's adoption service aims to comply with the requirements of the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 and reflects the values that underpin those standards in its principles for service delivery. In particular:

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children, birth parents/guardians and families, and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.

Strategic Aims

Our adoption function is positioned within the Looked After Children and Permanency Service. The vision for the placements element of this service as set out in our service plan is that:

- The best adopters are recruited for our children.
- All placements receive high quality support, effectively targeted according to need.
- Children are found permanent families without delay – whether within their extended family network or outside.
- A responsive, flexible and effective post-permanency support offer is available to families.
- Staff within the service are encouraged to become more professionally autonomous and confident.

The Statement of Purpose is underpinned by the Brent Borough Plan (2020); The Children and Young People Departmental Plan (2017-18); the Brent Sufficiency Strategy (2015-17) and the Looked After Children and Permanency Service Plan (2017-8).

Aims and Objectives;

- To ensure that all children living in Brent have the opportunity to grow up in a permanent, safe, loving home and where this cannot be provided by their birth family or wider network, adoption will be considered.
- To recruit, prepare, assess and support a sufficient pool of prospective adopters to meet the needs of children needing adoptive families.
- To work in partnership with prospective adopters, children and their families, and with colleagues, other professionals and agencies to deliver the best outcomes for children.
- To manage Brent's Adoption Panel efficiently and ensure it is effective.
- To provide information and services to enable adopted people to address adoption related matters throughout their life.
- To actively involve service users in the ongoing review and development of the service.
- To reflect the values and principles of the Statement of Purpose in Policies and Procedural Guidance.

Principles for children

- To take a child centred approach to adoption and permanency ensuring the child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre.
- To actively seek and take into account the child's wishes and feelings in age-appropriate ways.
- To consider adoption as a positive option for all looked after children who are unable to return to live permanently with their birth family.
- To offer consultancy to colleagues in Social Care on adoption issues, planning for children and alternative permanency options, e.g. Special Guardianship.
- To avoid and minimise delay as far as possible. Timescales for decisions and action will take account of the child's age and needs.
- To prioritise recruiting and assessing families who are most likely to meet the needs of local children who need permanent families.
- To ensure that we focus on children that are often more challenging to find permanent placements for.
- To ensure adoption and other permanency allowances are paid where a child's needs and circumstances require it in order to secure an alternative home.
- To recognise and positively value and promote a child's cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic background and not discriminate against any aspect of their identity. Usually it is in the child's best interests to be placed with a family which shares their background, but we will not deny a child the chance of a permanent home, including adoption, if it proves impossible to find a family with similar characteristics within a reasonable time.
- To ensure brothers and sisters, who need to be found alternative permanent homes, are placed together. If this is inappropriate in terms of meeting individual children's needs or not possible within a realistic timescale we will carefully consider possibilities for maintaining contact between siblings.
- To ensure that each child and family is prepared for adoption, that a suitable period of introductions occurs and that the settling in period is fully supported.

Principles for the birth family

- To facilitate and promote “Family Network Meetings” which involve the family in the planning for a child.
- To promote and facilitate post adoption contact between children and their birth parents, siblings and other birth family members, where it is assessed as being in the child’s best interests.
- To offer independent counselling to birth parents and birth siblings during the adoption proceedings.
- To actively work in partnership with birth families taking account of their views and wishes in decision-making.

Principles for prospective permanent carers

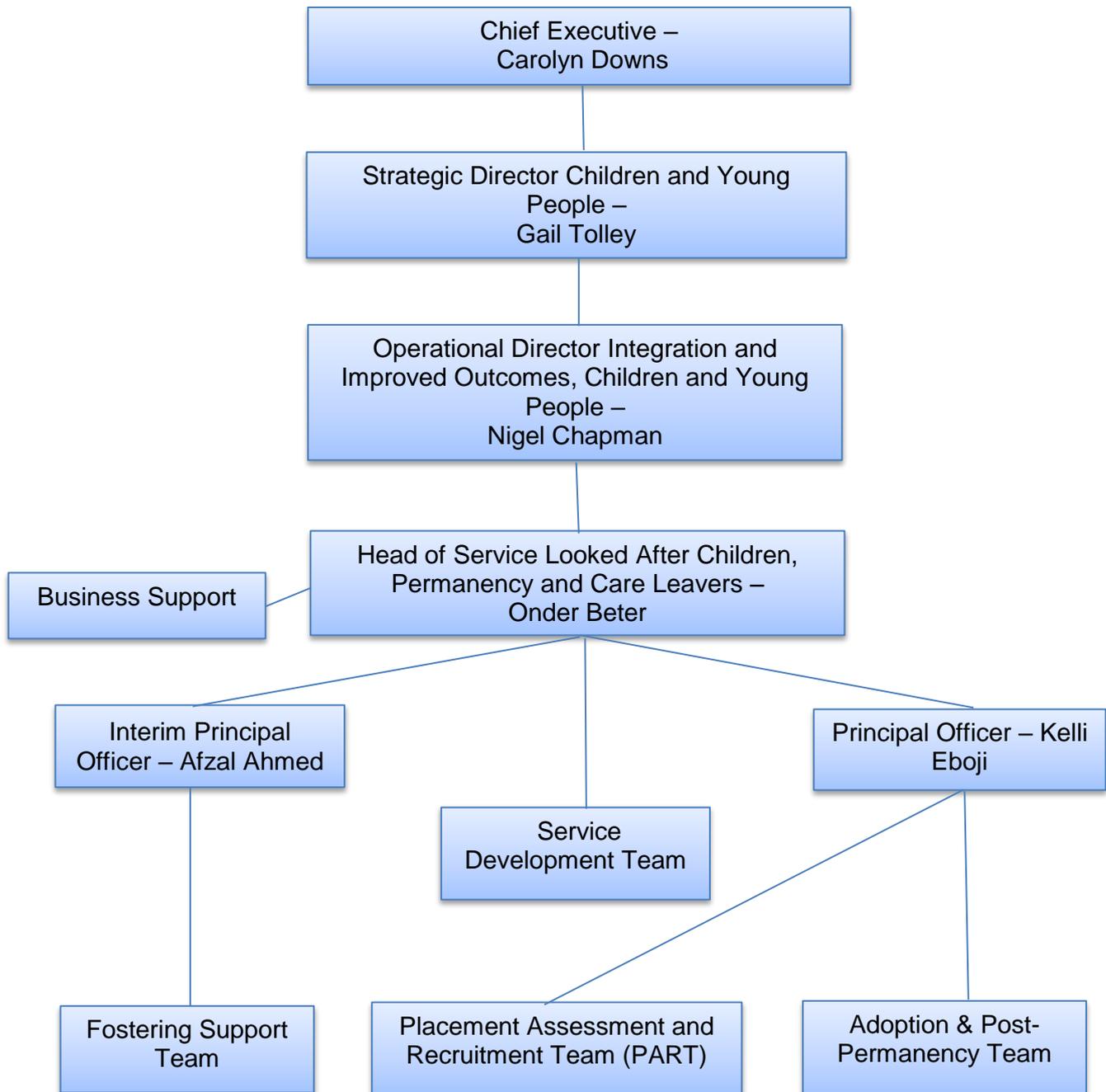
- To ensure applications from people wishing to be assessed as prospective adopters are welcomed regardless of marital status, race, disability, religion, gender or sexual orientation.
- To communicate openly with applicants about our priorities, procedures and assessments.
- To treat prospective adopters with respect and without discrimination throughout the adoption / permanency process and to ensure assessments are undertaken sensitively and confidentially.
- To ensure prospective carers are assessed according to fair, clear and open criteria with clearly defined time scales for assessments.
- To ensure permanent carers can offer a safe, stable and loving home throughout a child’s minority and beyond and demonstrate an understanding of a child’s needs.
- Brent will aim to prioritise applicants who are able to meet the needs of the Brent children who require permanent homes.
- To provide an information, assessment and support service, including appropriate training in preparation groups, to Inter-country Adopters resident in the London Borough of Brent via the registered voluntary adoption agency, *Intercountry Adoption Centre* (IAC), based in Hertfordshire London. Tel: **020 8447 4753** Website: www.icacentre.org.uk

Principles for Adoption Support

- To ensure that a high quality adoption support service is available to adoptive parents and children. Brent Council has an Adoption and Post-Permanency Team, which provides support services to adopted families and birth families (as well as families with a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement / Residence Order in place). Social Workers will continue to support Brent adoptive families for six months following the making of an adoption order.
- To facilitate post adoption contact where this has been agreed. This may be letter box contact, when mail is re-directed in accordance with agreements made at the time of adoption, or face to face contact with birth families at agreed times.
- To provide a social work service for adoptive families requesting advice on parenting and behaviour, to include home visits when necessary. Where appropriate, work with children will also be provided. More specialist support can be sought via the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) if required.
- To provide an independent telephone helpline for both parents and children available from the Post Adoption Centre. (Brent Council is a subscriber).
- To provide newsletters, training events, up to date information on adoption issues and arrange group events for families.
- To provide birth record counselling, information and advice for adopted adults and their birth families who want to know more about their family history.
- To offer adopted people assistance in tracing their birth families, if that is what they wish, and a post adoption Social Worker will act as an intermediary once the adopted person has found their birth family member.
- To provide support for adoptive parents where adult children are contacting birth families.
- To attempt to contact adopted people on behalf of their birth families where that is requested. Adopted adults have their adoptive identity safeguarded and maintain the right to decide whether to be involved in contact or communication with birth family members.
- Where the birth record counsellor is unable to trace the adopted person, Brent will refer the case to an independent person who is then paid for by the seeking family member to trace the adopted. For each case Brent Council will set up a non-disclosure agreement with the independent tracer.

THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

The Adoption Service is part of Brent's Looked After Children and Permanency Service within the Children and Families Social Care Division. The structure of the service and how it relates to the organisation is shown below.



Staffing and Qualifications

Nigel Chapman, Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People, is the Agency Decision Maker for all matters relating to adoption and is the Registered Manager of the Adoption.

Placement Assessment and Recruitment Team (PART) is led by a Team Manager and this team comprises:

- 2 x Deputy Team Manager
- 12 x Social Workers
- 1 x Social Work Assistant
- 1 x Recruitment Co-ordinator
- 1X Marketing and Recruitment Officer

Adoption & Post-Permanency Team is managed by a Team Manager. This team comprises:

- 1 x Deputy Team Manager
- 6 x Social Workers
- 1 x National Adoption Society Administrator
- 1 x Social Work Assistant

Róisín Hegarty is Brent's Agency Advisor for adoption and fostering and the Team Manager of the Service Development Team. This team comprises:

- 1 x Fostering Reviewing Officer
- 1 x Fostering Development Coordinator

The managers within the service are all qualified Social Workers, registered by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), with extensive experience in children and families social work.

All assessing and supervising social work staff within the teams are similarly professionally qualified and experienced and registered with the HCPC.

Any social work assistants are supervised by qualified Social Workers.

The Adoption Service works in collaboration with the Children's Social Work Teams to ultimately ensure the welfare of children placed. They aim to work together with other professionals, within and outside the council, to achieve the best outcomes for looked after children in Brent. They work within a child centred, multi-disciplinary and anti-discriminatory framework.

The adoption service Marketing and Recruitment Strategy is managed by the Marketing Officer who, supported by the Placement Assessment and Recruitment Team (PART) and Adoption and Post Permanency Team (APPT), undertakes all publicity and marketing to recruit prospective adopters. Information Sessions are delivered on a monthly basis by the PART team members.

The London Borough of Brent is part of the West London Adoption Consortium. This is made up of eight west London boroughs and two voluntary agencies.

The consortium considers matches for children with families waiting for them amongst the eight west London boroughs where appropriate. The consortium is project managed by Justin Simon – Development Coordinator who is situated within the West London Alliance. Joint recruitment and training activities are offered to all members.

The Placement Assessment and Recruitment Team (PART)

All external enquiries relating to adoption are received by a dedicated Recruitment Co-ordinator who passes the calls to the PART Duty Social Worker if they reach referral stage or require social work intervention and support. The PART Team are then responsible for the assessment and preparation of all prospective domestic adopters and support the approved adopters through the linking process until they are matched with a child at Adoption Panel.

The Adoption & Post-Permanence Team

Referrals of children to the Adoption Service are made by the child's Social Worker and go via an Initial Permanency Planning Meeting (IPPM), which is convened and chaired by the Principal Officer for Looked After Children and Permanency.

The Adoption & Post-Permanency Team is then responsible for facilitating effective and timely permanency planning and family finding (linking and matching) for looked after children for whom the plan is likely to be adoption. Permanency Planning Meetings are held on a six weekly basis in order to monitor and progress this.

On the making of a Placement Order, the child's case will transfer from the Children's Social Work Team to the Adoption and Post Permanency Team, as per the departmental transfer procedure. All relinquished babies are managed by this team alone from first point of contact to six months after the Adoption Order being granted.

The Adoption & Post-Permanence Team provides a comprehensive support service for adoptive families, relatives of adopted people and for children who are adopted. This includes establishing any post adoption contact between adopted children and their birth families, managing any financial arrangements and reviews and providing an access to records service.

Service Development Team

This team provides a robust quality assurance of all aspects of the adoption service with the aim of improving standards of practice and, ultimately, outcomes for looked after children in Brent.

The Team Manager, Róisín Hegarty, is the Agency Advisor for adoption and fostering in Brent and maintains an overview of the quality of the agency's reports, to both the panel and to the decision-maker, liaising with team managers and the Agency Decision Maker to quality assure the child's adoption plan and permanence report, the prospective adopter's report and the adoption placement report. It is her role to advise the Adoption & Permanence Panel to ensure it is fully compliant with all current legislation and statutory guidance and to assist the agency with the appointment (including re-appointment), termination and annual appraisal of members of the adoption panel and that all panel members are provided with annual training with the adoption social work teams and kept up to date with current research in the field.

The Fostering Development Co-ordinator role, is currently being recruited to and manages the post-approval training and development of Brent's adopters, Special Guardians and those caring for children under a Child Arrangement (Residence) Order and Adoption & Permanence Panel members, using the views of fostered and adopted children and their carers to inform the training programme.

The Play Therapist post is recently vacant. The role offers Play Therapy to Brent's looked after children, as well as consultations to their families, adopters, Special Guardians and those caring for children under a Child Arrangement (Residence) Order, with the aim of supporting the carers to maintain stability for the child/ren in their care and allow the child/ren to make sense of the difficulties in their life.

Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA)

Gill Kilbane, Team Manager, is the agency's appointed Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA). The responsibilities in this role are to:

- give advice and information to people affected by adoption - a single point of contact to provide information, signpost appropriate services and to advise on how those services may be accessed;
- give advice, information and assistance to other staff in the local authority on assessments of need for adoption support services, the availability of services locally and effective planning for service delivery – in particular, supporting and facilitating intra and inter-agency joint working where needed;
- give advice on good practice in adoption where needed;
- consult with, and give advice, information and assistance to other local authorities as appropriate, for example, liaising between authorities where a family is moving between areas to try to ensure a smooth transition in the provision of support services.

The adoption agency has access to specialist advisors, for example, the play therapist in the Service Development Team, a medical advisor, a legal advisor and the Virtual School. All specialists are employed directly by Brent Council or

through commissioned services and their DBS and Qualifications are clarified and monitored as part of Brent's recruitment and compliance policy.

Inter-country Adoption

Brent's Adoption Service has commissioned the registered voluntary adoption agency, *Intercountry Adoption Centre* (IAC), based in Hertfordshire London, in order to provide assessments of Brent-resident inter-country adopters and some post-approval support. Brent will provide them with any additional support as required by law. IAC also provides Preparation Training for inter-country adopters.

Contact details: Tel: **020 8447 4753** Website: www.icacentre.org.uk

The Adoption & Permanence Panel

Brent has one Adoption and Permanence Panel constituted in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (amended 2011) and Adoption National minimum Standards 2011.

The Adoption and Permanence Panel plays a central role in assisting the Agency Decision Maker to reach the best possible decision in relation to:

- whether certain children should be placed for adoption;
- the suitability of prospective adopters and concurrent carers;
- whether a child should be placed with a specific prospective adopter; and
- whether a child should be matched for long term fostering with a specific carer.

The panel can also advise on:

- contact arrangements;
- whether an application for a placement order should be made (in the case of relinquished babies and children, voluntarily accommodated children or where birth parents are consenting to adoption);
- the number of children the prospective adopter(s) may be suitable to adopt, as well as the age range, sex, likely needs and background; and
- the provision of adoption support.

The Panel meets once per month to make recommendations to the Operational Director and Agency Decision Maker in respect of all matters concerning adoption.

The Adoption & Permanence Panel will receive all necessary information on prospective adopters within 6 weeks of the completion of the assessment report. Panel recommendations will be conveyed orally to all those involved immediately after the meeting. The Agency Decision Maker will make a decision within 7 working days of the Adoption Panel final minutes. Decisions will be

conveyed orally to all those involved within 2 working days and confirmed in writing within 5 working days.

Where the Agency Decision Maker has decided a child should be placed for adoption, the social worker / family finder is required to present a progress report regarding family finding back to panel within 6 months.

When a child's match has been approved for adoption, progress reports will be presented back to the Adoption Panel at 6 monthly intervals until an adoption order is made.

All approved adopters who are not matched within 12 months of approval will be reviewed.

Approved adopters who have not had a child placed within 2 years will be required to revisit their approval range and a request for a change of approval will be presented back to the panel.

The Agency Advisor will update panel on the general progress of cases it has considered.

The Service for Looked After Children

In line with the National Minimum Standards on Adoption, a child's need for a permanent home will be considered no later than at the child's four month Statutory Child Care Review. If the decision is made that adoption should be the plan for the child, a referral will be made to the IPPM administrator within 48 hours of the child's review.

All referrals for permanency are booked into the next available IPPM, which are held fortnightly, and the case is discussed. Various permanency options are discussed and the case is then taken up by the appropriate team and allocated.

Once a case is allocated, a Permanency Planning Meeting (PPM) will be booked. These are held at six- weekly intervals, or sooner if required.

The adoption social worker / family finder is responsible for setting up and participating in the permanency planning, matching and selection, introduction and progress meetings.

The Agency Decision Maker will make his decision as to whether the child should be placed for adoption within two months of a LAC review where adoption has been identified as the permanence plan, as per Adoption National Minimum Standard 17.6 and Statutory Guidance 2:2.

The child's electronic file on Mosaic will continue to be updated once the plan for the child is adoption, however it is restricted to specific workers once a match has been recommended at Adoption Panel. There will also be a paper file created to store specific documents in their original format which are/will be

significant to the adopted person, such as reports, cards, and letters handwritten and signed by birth parents. Once an adoption order is made all these files will be stored, either electronically (Mosaic) or placed in the Records Archive for 100 years. All paper documents will also be scanned to the electronic file as a back-up.

The Adoption & Permanency Panel will make a recommendation on a proposed placement within:

- Six months of the adoption plan being agreed,
- Four to six months of a Court's decision in Care proceedings, OR
- Three months for voluntarily relinquished children aged less than six months.

Children for whom adoption is the plan or who have been placed for adoption will have their care plan and placement reviewed in line with statutory requirements by an Independent Reviewing Officer.

The Service to Prospective Adopters

The procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters are set out in Brent's Policy and Procedures, available on the Brent Intranet and internet Service:

http://www.proceduresonline.com/brent/chservices/chapters/contents.html#fostering_adopt

Recruitment Strategy

The recruitment of prospective adopters is outlined in the Fostering and Adoption Marketing and Recruitment Strategy which analyses past trends, anticipated needs and previous recruitment activities in order to plan the most effective way to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children waiting locally.

Regular discussions take place at team meetings as to the needs of current children, potential matching criteria and recruitment indicators that identify what type of applicants would be suitable for children waiting.

The Support Service

An assessment of the need for adoption support is completed by the child's social worker for all children for whom adoption is the plan and is presented with the proposed match to the Adoption & Permanency Panel.

The Support Plan is reviewed at the child's initial statutory adoption review and at every subsequent review until the Adoption Order is made or if there is a significant change in circumstances.

The review of adoption support plans once the Adoption Order has been made is negotiated and agreed with the adoptive parents.

Brent's Adoption Allowance Scheme provides a financial allowance to facilitate the adoption of children whose needs may involve additional costs. Adoption allowances are considered as part of all support plans, are means tested and a financial review will be carried out each year.

A full assessment of the child's need for post adoption contact is undertaken at all stages. Decisions about contact will always be based on the best interests of the child, in consultation with and with the agreement of the adoptive family. This is normally a voluntary agreement.

The birth family and adoptive family may exchange letters and photographs by mutual agreement, via a service called "Letterbox". The Adoption & Post-Permanency Team act as the post box, reviewing and then forwarding correspondence to the families.

If direct contact is to be maintained between the child and his or her birth parents or family, if assessed as necessary, the Adoption & Post-Permanency Team help facilitate this by providing support and / or supervision.

The Adoption & Post-Permanency Team provide independent support, advice and counselling to birth relatives at their request at any time pre or post adoption.

Returning for Adoption Support

Adoptive families, parents and children, can return for support regardless of whether they live in Brent, live outside Brent or have moved after the adoption order is made.

Brent is responsible for the assessment and provision of support services identified as needed for a period of three years following the making of the adoption order.

Where the three-year period following the making of the adoption order has expired, the local authority where the adoptive family lives will have the responsibility for assessing and providing adoption support services.

In the case of contact arrangements agreed before the adoption order, Brent will continue to be responsible for managing and supporting the arrangements irrespective of where the adoptive family lives, as well as for any changes to those arrangements over time.

Brent will maintain responsibility for the continued payment of financial support as agreed before the adoption order was made until adopters are no longer eligible.

Intermediary Services

An intermediary service is provided to assist adopted adults and their birth relatives obtain the information they need to trace a relative and establish contact with them.

An adopted person aged 18 or over, who was adopted prior to 30 December 2005, has the right to request an intermediary service to trace and facilitate contact with a birth relative. An adult birth relative of an adopted person has the corresponding right to request an intermediary service, where they wish to trace and establish contact with an adopted adult, however the local authority has the discretion to provide the service or not dependent upon the circumstances.

Some adopted adults have no wish for contact with former relatives but do wish to receive information about their family history and early life. An adoption agency has the discretion under the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 (the 1983 Regulations) to disclose the information it considers appropriate to an adopted person. This enables adoption agencies to provide adopted adults with the information they need about their family history and origins.

Some adopted people undertake their own research to establish the identity and whereabouts of the person with whom they wish to have contact. They may then apply to an intermediary agency, in order to request that it make the initial approach to that person.

In other cases, the intermediary agency may undertake the research and tracing on behalf of the adopted person, obtaining the information it needs from the adoption agency, the Registrar General, the courts or other public records. The extent of the work undertaken by the intermediary agency will therefore depend upon the range of information that the adopted person already holds.

Access to Records

A comprehensive service is available to adopted adults requesting access to their records via the Adoption and Post-Permanency Team.

National Adoption Society (NAS)

The National Adoption Society operated from 1916 until December 1986. This Society was one of the largest independent Adoption Agencies based in London. In the late 1930's a branch of the National Adoption Society was opened in the West Country and this became known as the Western National Adoption Society. The WNAS closed down in 1976 and the Agency's files and records were amalgamated with those of the National Adoption Society.

When the National Adoption Society closed down in 1986 they had been operating within the London Borough of Brent, therefore Brent had an obligation to accept responsibility and keep the Society's adoption records for 100 years. There are approximately 17,000 files.

Applications from birth relatives of adopted adults placed through the NAS

Brent will prepare identifying information on a Non-Disclosure Basis for an adoption agency who is offering the Intermediary Service to the Birth Relative. Brent will offer advice about which agencies may be able to help the applicant. If they reside outside of the country Brent will endeavour to offer advice about which adoption agencies will be able to help them in their country of residence. Brent will then provide the same identifying information on a non-disclosure basis to the suitably qualified worker in the agency to facilitate them providing the Intermediary Service to the birth relative.

Applications for an Intermediary Service from NAS Adopted Adults not resident in Brent.

Individuals will be referred to their local authority or a suitable adoption support agency in their local area unless they choose to travel to Brent for the service. If they live outside of the country Brent will endeavour to offer them advice about which adoption agencies will be able to help them in their country of residence.

OTHER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The Adoption Service procedures can be found at:

http://www.proceduresonline.com/brent/chservices/chapters/contents.html#fostering_adopt

Brent's corporate policies and procedures are available publically and within the internal intranet system for staff members.

Systems for Monitoring and Controlling the Activities of the Adoption Service and Ensuring Quality of Performance

A report is written for the Corporate Parenting Committee on a six-monthly basis by the Head of Service, Looked After Children and Permanency Service, providing the executive part of the council with data in relation to the agency's activity. Details include children waiting for a permanent placement, placed for adoption, enquiries and applications from potential adopters, matching and placement dates, panel activity, placement breakdowns, any delays and timescales achieved. The Corporate Parenting Committee provide scrutiny and challenge to the service in order to ensure that our children receive the best service.

The Adoption Agency Advisor has a quality assurance role enabling any issues of poor or good practice to be reported or shared through the line management system. The Agency Advisor supports the Chair of the Adoption & Permanence Panel to provide a six-monthly report to the agency with detailed feedback on the work of the panel including quality and compliance issues relating to children's assessments (CPR), prospective adopters assessments (PAR), and placement matches.

An annual summary and review of the service is produced each year for the agency and elected members to consider strategic development needs, recognise patterns and trends and use the information to inform the Development and Business Plans.

Management information is correlated, and there are fortnightly reports and tracking meetings, on performance relating to:

- The numbers of children placed for adoption;
- Numbers of children matched / not matched;
- Numbers of children adopted;
- Ethnicity;
- Timescales for children;
- Numbers of enquiries relating to adoption;
- Information evenings;
- Interviews;
- Applications for Stage One & Stage Two;
- Successful Stage One & Stage Two applications; and
- Panel attendance

The Team Manager will read and Quality Assure all PARs prior to prospective adopters' scrutiny.

A database is maintained of adoption applicants, ethnicity, responses, outcomes and timescales.

Management information in relation to children needing adoption placements will be used to inform the recruitment strategy and contracting with other providers.

A file audit system enables managers to regularly check on the quality of recording and file management as well as performance in relation to procedures.

Feedback from prospective adopters on service quality and effectiveness is obtained via feedback sheets after each day of the preparation group training, which helps to shape the design of future training.

Written feedback is obtained from prospective adopters following the completion of the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) as an integral part of the assessment process. The panel experience is similarly evaluated.

Feedback is obtained from Adopters following the successful application of the Adoption Order in order to evaluate their experience of the whole process and inform service development.

Feedback is actively sought from children throughout the adoption process to ensure their wishes and feelings are taken into account when planning for them. Their feedback will be used to continue developing the service to ensure better outcomes following their experience.

Feedback is actively sought from birth families to ensure their wishes and feelings are taken into account when planning for their children and to continue developing the service to ensure better outcomes following their experience.

Feedback will be actively sought after all support groups / meetings involving any and all stakeholders in the adoption process to ensure Brent develops a best practice approach to service delivery.

As part of the West London Adoption Consortium and London wide groups, Brent actively considers and shares good practice and policy development.

Regular budget monitoring information itemises amounts paid for a variety of services and totals paid in adoption allowances. Monthly expenditure and budget allocation information is updated monthly in the Finance Section.

Annual financial review forms are completed by all families receiving an adoption allowance to ascertain whether they still qualify for this.

The Adoption Service is inspected on a 3-yearly basis by (since 2007) Ofsted.

Ensuring accountability of staff

There are clear lines of accountability and management of the service. Each member of staff is given supervision by their line manager on a four weekly basis, with a review of tasks and monitoring of targets.

There are annual appraisals for all staff, setting and reviewing targets, which are in line with departmental and service targets and objectives. These reviews aim to ensure that staff members are well trained and competent in delivering a quality adoption service.

Ongoing internal and external training on adoption issues is available for staff and adopters. All internal training is evaluated.

There is an annual joint training day for adoption staff and panel members, ensuring that Panel members are kept up to date with current adoption issues.

The adoption service ensures that there are comprehensive and up to date records on all children placed, prospective and approved adopters with whom

Brent has worked. This information is accessible in line with data protection regulation.

There are clear written policies and procedures for staff within the adoption service including the adoption panel. These are available on the Brent Council website and on request to service users.

Written information is given to birth parents about adoption and contact with their birth children; all children receive a "Children's Guide" leaflet appropriate to their age and understanding, which explains adoption to them and adopters are given written information both before and after approval.

All staff, members of the central list and adopters have current, enhanced DBS checks, which are satisfactory.

Allegations against adopters / staff are investigated under departmental procedures.

Complaints

Adopters, children and families can use Brent's complaints procedure where they have a dissatisfaction or concern with the service provided.

Adopters may complain on behalf of a child as well as on their own account. The Customer Care and Complaints Section maintain records of complaints and their outcomes and praise.

Details of Brent's Complaints Procedure and how to access it are given to prospective adopters as part of the information pack given at point of enquiry.

Brent's website clearly outlines the guidance for adults who wish to complain www.brent.gov.uk/complaints.nsf/Corporate%20Complaints/LBB-1

Guidance for young people who wish to complain is given on Brent's website www.brent.gov.uk/complaints.nsf/Corporate%20Complaints/LBB-23

The information booklet *Children's Guide to Adoption* provides details for children of the national telephone help line, "Talk Adoption", the Brent complaints procedure, Children's Rights services and of their right to make representations and complaints.

Consultation with young people has revealed that most do not want a specific children's complaint leaflet or form to use. The service therefore encourages young people to speak to a member of staff, or their social worker/key worker if they have one, in the first instance. Complaints do not have to be made in writing so details of the complaint can be taken by phone or face to face as required.

Applicants to adopt who are turned down by the Adoption and Permanence Panel and / or the Agency Decision Maker once in, or having completed Stage Two of the assessment process, are able to ask for their case to be reviewed

by the Independent Review Mechanism, details of which are provided to prospective adopters.

The Registration Authority

Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) is an independent, non-governmental public body responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services under the provision of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The address for Ofsted is:

OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231

E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk