

Report for: ACTION/INFORMATION
Item Number: 10

Contains Confidential or Exempt Information	YES/NO YES (Part) No
Title	Adoption Figures Briefing
Responsible Officer(s)	Judith Finlay, Director, Children and Families Services
Author(s)	Carolyn Fair, Operations Manager, Children's Placements Services
Portfolio(s)	Cllr Binda Rai, Children and Young People.
For Consideration By	Corporate Parent Committee
Date to be Considered	4 th December 2014
Implementation Date if Not Called In	
Affected Wards	None
Keywords/Index	

Purpose of Report:
This report serves to brief the committee on the interim Adoption figures for 2014-2015.

1. Recommendations

Members are invited to note this report and identify any additional information they would like to receive.

2. Reason for Decision and Options Considered

This report updates members on Ealing's interim adoption and permanence figures for 2014/2015

3. Key Implications

Ealing's Adoption service is responsible for ensuring that children whose permanence plan is adoption are matched with adopters who best meet the needs of those children. The team is also responsible for the assessment of prospective adopters and on-going support to those adopters post placement. The child's social worker will present a care plan for adoption to the agency decision maker who will then make a decision regarding the permanence plan for a child. Once agreement is given to a plan of adoption, the adoption team, in partnership with the child's social worker will begin the process of active family finding. When suitable adopters are found, this match is presented to the Adoption and Permanence panel for a recommendation. The panel also makes recommendations regarding the approval of prospective adopters. A child can only be placed with their prospective adopters once the courts have made that child subject to a Placement Order, an order that allows the local authority to place the child for adoption. Once a child is placed with their prospective adopters, the adopters are able to make an application to the courts to adopt the child – although adopters can make the application as soon as the child is placed, the courts will not hear it for at least 10 weeks. It is the government's expectation that adoptive placements are identified for children within 6 months of the date that the agency decision maker agrees that child's plan of adoption.

As at the 24th November 2014, Ealing had 363 looked after children.

Current position 2014 – 2015

Adopters

Between the 1st April 2014 and 31st October 2014, Ealing Adoption Panel has approved 13 couples as adopters. Of those 13 approvals, none were for inter country adoption. 1 couple were approved within 0-3 months of application, 7 were approved within 3-6 months of their application, 3 were approved within 6 – 12 months of their application and 2 took just over 1 year.

There are currently 18 domestic adoption assessments underway. 10 of these are in Stage One and 6 are in Stage 2. There are 2 fast track adoption assessments underway.

The adoption team are in the process of undertaking 17 initial home visits to people enquiring about adoption.

There are 16 approved adopters awaiting placements, of which 1 has been selected for a child from another authority and 1 is being visited for a sibling group from another authority. 14 adoptive families are therefore still awaiting a placement and are NOT currently linked to any children. One of these families was approved for a specific child who was returned to his birth mother.

Children

Between the 1st April 2014 and 31st October 2014, 9 adoption orders have been granted. At this point last year, 16 adoption orders had been granted.

- Of these 9, 7 children were placed within 12 months of the agreement to their plan of adoption.
- There was 1 sibling group of 2.
- There were 6 boys and 3 girls.
- The eldest were aged 6 years, and the youngest was aged 13 months at the point of the adoption order.
- 1 child is White Polish.
- 8 children are from an ethnic minority background.
- 4 children were adopted by Ealing adopters
- 5 children were adopted by external adopters

There are currently 10 children in their adoptive placements. Of these ;

- The eldest is 7 years,
- The youngest is aged 1 year
- There are 2 sibling groups of 2.
- There are 4 boys and 6 girls.
- 6 children were placed within 12 months of the agreement to their plan of adoption.
- 4 children are placed with Ealing approved adopters
- 6 children are placed with externally approved adopters

There are 11 children with placement orders awaiting adoption placements, or with adoption plans, or on referral for active family finding. Of these 11 children;

- There are 3 sibling groups of 2.
- 4 have been referred to IAAM for specialist family finding.
- 2 children have disabilities (1 significant).
- 1 child has a background of significant mental health problems for both birth parents.
- The eldest child is aged 5 years.
- The youngest child is 5 months old.

Special Guardianship Orders

Between 1st April 2014 and 31st October 2014, 16 Special Guardianship Orders have been granted.

Ealing's Performance

Ealing performs well in the area of adoption, although needs to continue to strive to ensure that timescales are met, both for approving adopters and placing children with adopters within 6 months.

In comparison to last year, our numbers have dropped, particularly with regards to the number of children being adopted. The numbers of adopters being approved is forecast to be approximately 30 new approvals by 31st March 2015 as opposed to 36 in 2013/2014. Whilst it is a small drop on last year's figures, the approval numbers are still considered high

It is however, in the number of adoption orders and placement orders where there has been a noted drop in the figures – a trend being experienced in local authorities across London.

One of the reported reasons is a change in the way that courts are dealing with care proceedings following two appeal decisions. In November 2013, the Court of Appeal decision in the case of Re B- S was released. This case followed on from the decision of the Supreme Court case of Re B where it was reasoned that adoption is a last resort measure and should only be used where 'nothing else will do'. The judicial reasoning of Re B-S requires there to be a careful balancing of the pros and cons of all available options in cases, but particularly where care orders or placement orders are sought. Sir James Munby (President of the Family Division) stated in the case that "the evidence must address all the options which are realistically possible and must contain an analysis of the arguments for and against each option.'

For court proceedings in general, this has required an additional section to be added into social work evidence which considers each realistic option for the child with a list of pros and cons for each attached and the new, nationally developed, Social Work Evidence Template incorporates this as a stand-alone section. However, in terms of outcomes, there has been a significant change in the order at the end of proceedings.

In 2012/2013 there were 119 children involved in issued cases and decisions have been reached in all proceedings. In total, 14 placement orders were granted, this being 12% of all decisions reached. None of these decisions were made after November 2013.

In 2013/2014 there were 115 children involved in issued cases and decisions have been made in the case of 90 of these children. A total of 5 placement orders have been granted in these cases, that is 5% of the decisions reached. This represents a significant fall in placement orders granted.

Although the number of placement orders granted has fallen, the number of children in proceedings has not significantly changed. Examination of the final outcomes of proceedings has found that whilst care order numbers have remained stable, there has been an increase in orders which result in the child remaining at home or with relatives. There has been a small percentage increase in the number of supervision orders granted up to 32% from 30%. In some of these cases a care or placement order was sought but a supervision order was granted at the final hearing and the child has moved from care back to their family.

However, the largest increase has been in Residence Orders/Child Arrangement Orders. In 2012/2013 these accounted for 6% of decisions in cases, whereas in 2013/2014 these accounted for 16% of decisions. The majority of these have had a supervision order granted in addition to support the child and family.

Fewer children are therefore having a plan of adoption. Of the children Ealing are currently family finding for, the majority have additional needs and are therefore requiring prolonged family finding. The issues outlined above have also meant that adopters are having to reconsider the type of child they would be willing to adopt as there are fewer babies with a plan for adoption. There is currently work being done with the courts and local authorities in order to ensure that changes to social work evidence brought about by the appeal decisions are being implemented properly.

Ealing continue to use a range of family finding mechanisms in order to ensure that children are placed with adopters without delay. Ealing have also made 5 referrals to IAMS, a Social Impact Bond that is committed to placing those children who are considered hard to place.

Additionally, Ealing are using Profiling Events to family find for children which has proved very successful, and took part in a London wide adoption activity day in May 2014 and November 2014. One of Ealing's disabled children featured as part of an ITV news item during Adoption Week in November 2014.

In addition, Ealing have signed up to Adoption Link, an online family finding service currently used by 794 prospective adopters, and 435 social workers, from 163 different local authorities and voluntary agencies across the country. The service allows adopters to take the lead in searching for matches and is proving successful in achieving matches for children.

Ealing has also been invited to take part in the pilot of the new National Adoption Register. The pilot was due to begin September 2014 but has yet to start.

4. Financial

a) Financial impact on the budget (mandatory)

No financial implications.

5. Legal

S 23 (1) Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to maintain a 'looked after' child in other respects as well as providing accommodation that meets all their needs.

6. Value For Money

Financial aspects are monitored within existing budgets and existing value for money assessments and reviews.

7. Sustainability Impact Appraisal

None

8. Risk Management

None

9. Community Safety

None

10. Links to the 5 Priorities for the Borough

The work of the Children’s Placements Service links to the Corporate Strategy. Targets to improve the number of adopters and improve the speed of placing children in permanent homes are set within the wider objective of creating a great place for every child and young person to grow up.

11. Equalities, Human Rights and Community Cohesion

Equality Impact is consistently reviewed and evaluated in terms of service delivery.

12. Staffing/Workforce and Accommodation implications:

To be determined

13. Property and Assets

No property implications

14. Any other implications:

To be determined

15. Consultation

N/A

16. Timetable for Implementation

17. Appendices

18. Background Information

Consultation (Mandatory)

Name of consultee	Post held	Date sent to consultee	Date response received	Comments appear in paragraph:
Internal				
Judith Finlay	Director			
				e.g. 5. Legal

				e.g. 4. Financial
External				

Report History

Decision type:	Urgency item?
For information	No
Report no.:	Report author and contact for queries: Carolyn Fair, Operations Manager Childrens Placements, x8815
	First and surname, job title