Adopt London East Annual Report October 2019 to March 2020

Background information

The Department for Education (DfE) paper, Regionalising Adoption proposed the move to Regional Adoption Agencies [RAA] in order to:

- Speed up matching.
- Improve adopter recruitment and adoption support.
- Reduce costs.
- Improve the life chances of vulnerable children.

All Local Authorities must join a Regional Adoption Agency by April 2020. Feedback from Regional Adoption Agencies in operation for a year or more is positive. Adopters report on improved services and staff on improved job satisfaction. Ofsted reports on Local Authorities with adoption services delivered regionally have been universally positive.

The government continues to drive forward with the structural reform programme regarding regionalising adoption and all but a handful of authorities are either in a live Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) or in an RAA which will go live by October 2020. The government have noted the significant progress in cutting the time children wait to be placed with their adoptive parents and this is a positive outcome for children. However, both the number of registrations of interest and approved adopters nationally, regionally and locally within East London have fallen in recent years. An increase in expressions of interest has been sustained since the service went live last October and we anticipate this will increase the number of adopters approved in 2020/21

The adoption functions of Tower Hamlets, Newham and Barking and Dagenham were delegated on the 1st October 2019 to the London Borough of Havering within terms drawn up in a detailed partnership agreement. Adopt London East (ALE) formally commenced operational activity on this date.

Adopt London East works in close collaboration with the 'Adopt London' adoption agencies who provide services for 23 Local Authorities in total. In this way we are able to develop a London wide profile, develop economies of scale and share best practice.

Outcomes

Adopt London East is committed to improving outcomes for children for whom the plan is adoption through:

- Increase in the percentage of children adopted from care
- Improved timescales for placing children with adoptive families
- Fewer adoption placement disruptions
- More children placed in an early permanence placement

- Reduction in the number of children for whom the permanence plan has changed from adoption
- Improved timescales for adopter assessments
- Higher conversion rate from enquiry to approval
- Fewer prospective adopter approvals rescinded
- More timely matching of approved adopters

Scope of service

Adopt London East has responsibility for all adoption led services:

- Recruitment and assessment of adopters.
- Family finding and matching
- Adoption support.

Responsibility for the child remains with the Local Authority. The Local Authority will therefore remain responsible for the child's progress through the court system and for final decisions in respect of care and adoption planning.

Adopt London East has a responsibility for support to Local Authority social workers including dissemination of information on regulation and best practice

Design Principles

The Board agreed the following design principles

- Local delivery - Responsive to the needs of the community
- Close relationships with children's social workers
- Economies of scale
- Cross local authority working
- Innovation and service improvement
- Evolving service design – one size may not fit all
- Provide value for money
- Service informed through the voice of adoptive families

Adopter Voice

Adopters in East London contribute to service development through an Adopter Advisory Board, chaired by an adopter and supported by Adoption UK. Key themes from the work to date include the importance of:

- A supportive social worker at all stages of the process
- Continuity of service delivery both pre and post adoption
- Early intervention and support from a known person
- Peer networks and safe places for adopters and adopted children to meet
- Support with family contact
- Schools informed about attachment and use their pupil premium well.

- Responsive and understanding health services
- All services working together well. A 'one stop shop' for service delivery

Service development post go-live

Governance

All service functions and relationships are detailed within the partnership agreement. The agreement includes:

- Governance
- Finances and Budget setting
- Data sharing agreement
- Dispute resolution
- Termination of agreement

The ALE Partnership board has met on 2 occasions since go-live. A planned meeting in early April was cancelled in the immediate aftermath of the Covid 19 lockdown. A Covid specific meeting of Service leads was held in order to ensure best use of delegated funds.

The Executive Board comprises of ADCS or their representatives with delegation of authority. These members have responsibility for all partnership decisions. A wider board membership considers operational developments and includes representatives from partner agencies as well as the chair of our adopter advisory board.

Service delivery

The central Head Office is in Havering but staff also have a local base in each Local Authority. In this way we aim to ensure that the existing close working and supportive relationships with children's social work staff and partner agencies remain absolutely central to our practice. All adoption records are being transferred to the new Havering Liquidlogic system. We also have agreements in place that locally based adoption staff will continue to be able to access LA systems. The practicalities of access have proven challenging but work is underway to resolve this.

Although services are delivered locally, we will also be able to work together to develop a more responsive service. This will help us to recruit more adopters, to meet our children's identified needs and to provide better support through a core offer delivered by the adoption support workers in partnership with local agencies.

Panel functions are currently retained in each Local Authority. One central ALE panel will be developed in phase 2 of go-live, we expect to be able to operate in-house panels by the end of May 2020. This panel will meet in a number of locations and will have a large central list but one chair. The panel will meet approximately every 2 weeks in order to support timeliness. The panel will make recommendations in respect of both adopter approval and child matches. Decisions in respect of child matches will continue to be made by the Agency Decision Maker in the LA with responsibility for the child.

Staffing

All staff who primarily worked in adoption within the four constituent Local Authorities TUPE transferred to Havering on 1st October 2019. The interim HOS remained in position. She has subsequently been offered and accepted a permanent contract. Only one team manager transferred. The three other team manager positions were filled by through promotion of skilled and experienced adoption social workers from within the service. This left a number of vacancies within the service. Currently one social worker position in adoption support is unfilled and a total of five agency workers cover vacant posts. Three have accepted permanent positions and the remaining two have expressed an interest in doing so.

Work has been undertaken with the senior leadership team, the management team and with all staff to establish the vision and values of Adopt London East.

Ongoing development work continues with all staff regarding the importance of relationships as we build the Adopt London East profile within all Local Authorities, working in a culture of high support and high challenge.

Working across East London with some staff working from local bases has assisted us to maintain positive links and close working relationships with social workers in Local Authority children's services. There has been a need for staff to come together for meetings to develop practice and to ensure that there is good communication between local authorities and the different parts of the service to provide a joined up approach.

Staff still meet in teams and as a service at least on day per week. This has supported service development and has resulted in a strong staff identity as Adopt London East workers.

Business and Service support

Adopt London East has three Business Support Officers (BSO's) who provide a dedicated service. The BSO's are line managed within Havering Business support teams.

ICT and systems development

All staff have use of a Havering supplied laptop and mobile phone. Laptops have Skype connectivity and mobile headsets.

Social work staff also need access to constituent Local Authority ICT systems in order to access information for the purposes of family finding and adoption support. This has proven to be challenging. Interim arrangements are in place in all LA's and more permanent solutions are in development.

The migration of casework data onto Liquid Logic (LL) was hampered by challenges in system development. Development work was complicated by an incomplete transfer from the development team to the permanent LL support team. Recruitment and Assessment files are completed and uploaded. Family finding files are in progress of uploading. Adoption support files will be uploaded as soon as the final development work in LL is completed. All files not on LL are stored in a secure drive. The process of uploading and checking files has been challenging for all and has placed additional demands on the team.

Service accessibility

Adopters, prospective adopters, birth families and professionals may access the service through the Adopt London website, by email or by telephone. The duty telephone is staffed by Business Support Officers (BSO's) between 9 and 5 each weekday. The BSO's have been trained in telephone response. Each team operates a duty response system and calls forwarded from BSO's are answered quickly. A nationwide RAA mystery shopping exercise commented positively on the response.

Adoption Panel

Adoption panels initially remained in Local Authority due to challenges in recruitment processes. This also allowed other aspects of the service to bed in prior to go-live of panels. Adopt London East panels will be operational from 27th May. All panel members will also attend webinar training prior to panel. This will include an overview of Adopt London East, updates on regulation and best practice and a welcome from the panel chairs.

Two panels will operate with a central list of panel members. Two highly experienced panel chairs have been recruited together with a central list of panel members. Panel member expertise includes adoption experienced social workers, adopters, care leavers and professionals from a range of backgrounds. Two panels will operate per month. Initial panels will be held virtually using Skype technology. Panel papers will be sent securely through egress.

Medical advisors will provide advice to panel on their own children either in writing or directly to panel in person or via Skype.

Legal advice will be provided by the Havering legal team.

Partnership work

The Head of Service and Adoption team manager meet on a quarterly basis with the Virtual School Post LAC group. Adopt London East funded a highly successful Cornerstone led virtual reality session for virtual schools and designated teaches on attachment disorder in children.

The Head of Service attended a CCG led meeting of Designated Doctors, LAC nursing leads and clinical commissioners aimed at improving medical advice for panel. This has resulted in a clearer service offer though challenges remain. The ALE region is not coterminous with the CCG regions and therefore must liaise with both NELFT and WELL in order to achieve improvements

We have commissioned Cornerstone, an adopter led organisation to provide a specialist virtual reality tool to assist in one to one support and training for our adopters.

We have also commissioned PAC-UK to provide a helpline and one to one counselling. This service is also available to birth families.

All Intercountry adoption assessments are undertaken by 'Inter Country Adoption'. This commissioned service provides specific expertise and value for money in provision of a highly complex area of adoption work

Partnership work with Adoption UK aims at assisting ALE to develop an adopter advisory board. Progress is slow but a board chair has been appointed and a number of adopters have engaged in consultation processes. We also work closely with We are Family, an adopter led support group providing support to families across London and New Family Social who support LGBTQ adopters

Adopt London HOS meet with the Voluntary sector stakeholder group on a quarterly basis. We also purchase bespoke therapeutic provision through use of the Adoption Support Fund. This work is commissioned from a range of registered adoption support providers.

Performance information

Comparator information

Publicly available comparator information is currently only available up to 2017/18. Regionalisation has changed the landscape of adoption since then and these figures are not relevant to the current climate.

In order to provide some comparison, the Adopt London RAA's worked together to provide some top line statistical information on adopter approvals and child matches.

Adopt London comparator data

Current National comparator data is not available. The Adopt London RAA's have worked closely together to develop some top-line data to assist in pan London service analysis.

Please note: the Adopt London RAA's vary in size

- ALS provides a service for 9 Local Authorities
- ALN provides a service for 6 Local Authorities
- ALW provides a service for 4 Local Authorities
- ALE provides a service for 4 Local Authorities

Other factors affect demand for adoption services and supply of adopters across the four regions.

number of children matched
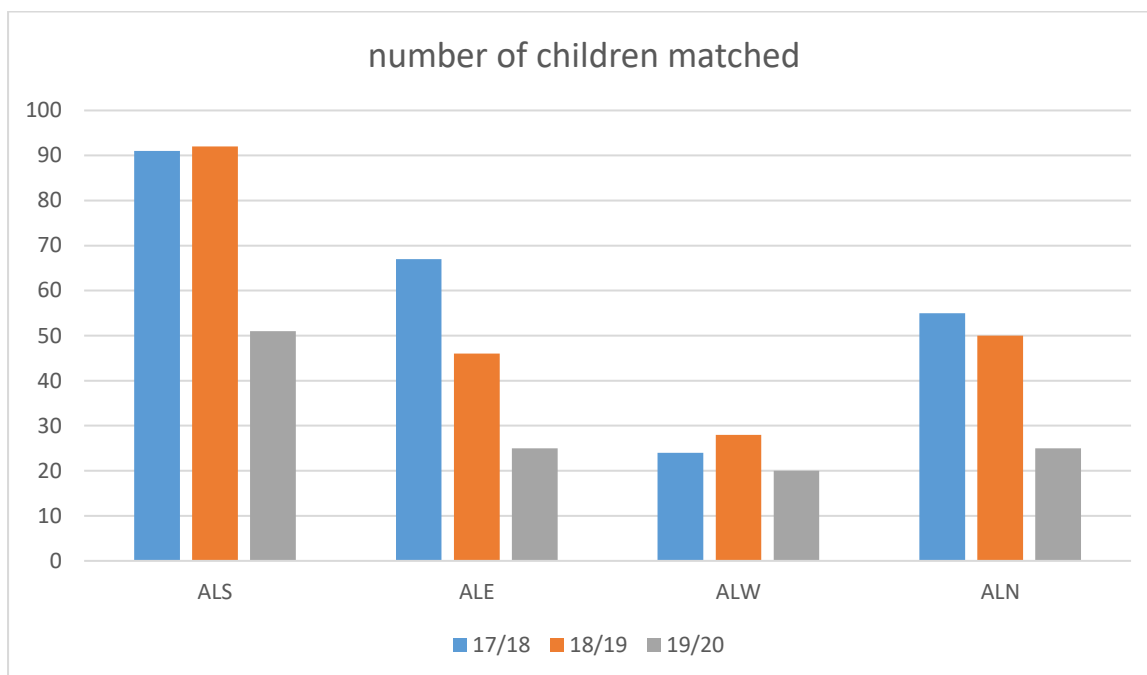
The number of children matched has been chosen as an indicator of child focussed activity as this is the first indicator of likely adoption orders and provides an earlier overview of trend information in adoption activity.

As can be seen, the trend in adoption matches from year to year varies. Two of the RAA's saw a slight increase between 2017/18 and 2018/19 and two saw a decline. The decline was most significant in ALE. All Adopt London RAA's saw a sharp decline in matches in 2019/20.

The decline between 18/19 and 19/20 was the smallest in ALW (28%) albeit from a lower initial baseline. All other RAA's saw a decline of between 50% (ALN) and 44% (ALS) with ALE declining at 46%.

There are a number of factors involved in the decline in matches in 2019/20:

- All regions noted a downturn in activity in Q1 and 2 prior to go-live due in some cases to vacancies created by social workers who did not wish to transition leaving adoption services.
- Transition of large amounts of case information was time consuming
- New working arrangements take time to embed.
- A background rate of declining numbers of adoption orders
- Evaluation of all RAA's post go-live shows a consistent downturn in activity over the first 12 months with an upturn thereafter.

Although not in the scope of this report, matches in ALE show a marked improvement in Q1 of 2020/21
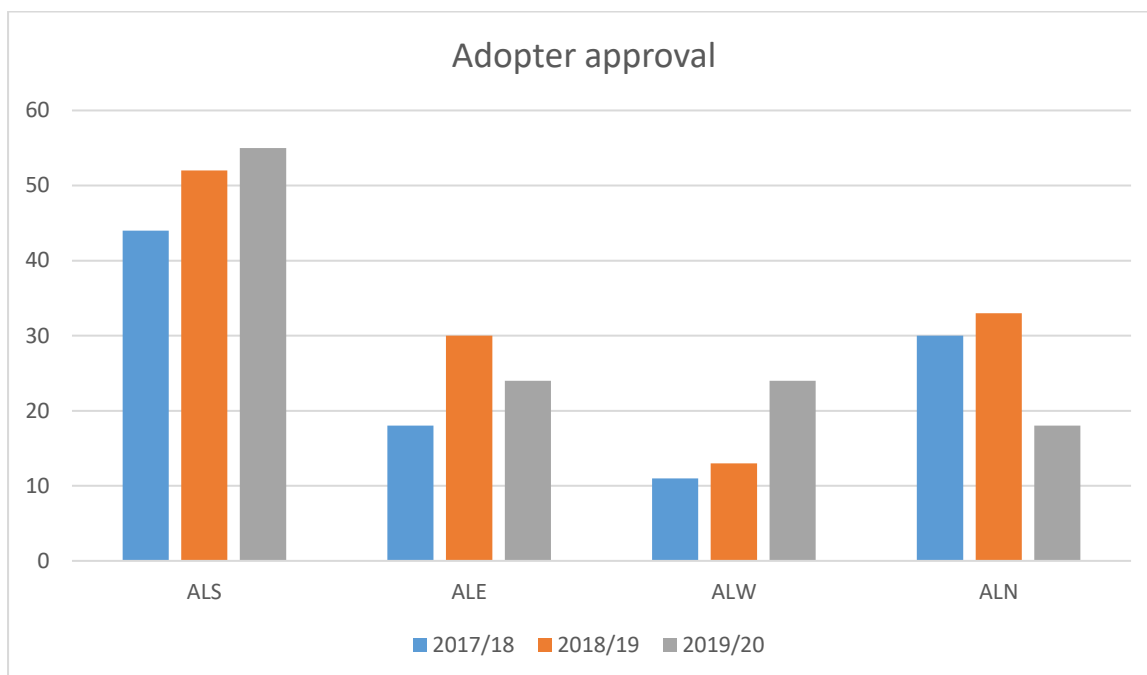
Adopter approval trends vary across all RAA's. In all RAA's approval numbers increased from 2017/18 to 2018/19. ALS and ALW show a consistently improving figure in ALN, adopter approvals fell markedly in 2019/20 and in the Local Authorities who combined to form ALE approval numbers fell from 2018/19 figures but improved on 2017/18.

There are a number of factors involved in the decline in adopter approvals in 2019/20

- Activity in prospective adopter engagement declined in the 6 months prior to go-live. This led to fewer prospective adopters in the system with marked decline in early enquiries and stage 1 assessments
- There were 50% vacancies in the recruitment and assessment team on go-live
- 24 approved adopters were transferred awaiting a placement. This has led to successes in placing more children in-house but building relationships and matching adopters is time consuming. Some approved adopters may need to be counselled out
- Previously preparation groups were outsourced. This affected both the quality of the assessment and relationship with the adopters. The team developed an in-house preparation group and work book.
- Evaluation of RAA's nationally shows a pattern of initial decline in number of adopter approvals in year one with improvements thereafter

Although not within the scope of this report: the number of prospective adopters in assessment has continued to rise in Q1 of 2020/21

Analysis of Adopt London East: the approach

The performance information and analysis will consider three outcomes in detail:

- Outstanding adopters meet the needs of our children
- Timely matching of children with outstanding adopters

- Adoptive families are happy and achieve the best outcomes

Each outcome area includes an analysis of practice and an outline of the service plan

Outstanding adopters meet the needs of our children

Six adoptive families were approved in Q3 and 4 of 2019/20.

The downturn in approvals in Q 1 and 2 was most evident in enquiries and early stages of approval. The adopter approval process takes 6 months and it is therefore not surprising that this curve has been slow to turn.

Recruitment and assessment staff had to get to know adopters waiting for placement and provide an initial focus on placement of children with adopters waiting. Some had been waiting for over 2 years.

Staff also had to develop new preparation groups and adopter workbooks.

Challenges were exacerbated by staffing issues. Two managers were recruited from within the recruitment team and we have struggled to recruit to these posts. Agency staff have not proven to provide an effective resource.

A strong performance management process has been developed and we are confident the curve will begin to turn.

The chart below shows a steady increase in the average number of children matched to in-house adopters per month. This includes both ALE children and children from other Local Authorities. At the end of Q2; 24 adopters were awaiting placement. This has reduced to 19.

We are actively working with all adopters waiting.

Adopter approval and matches
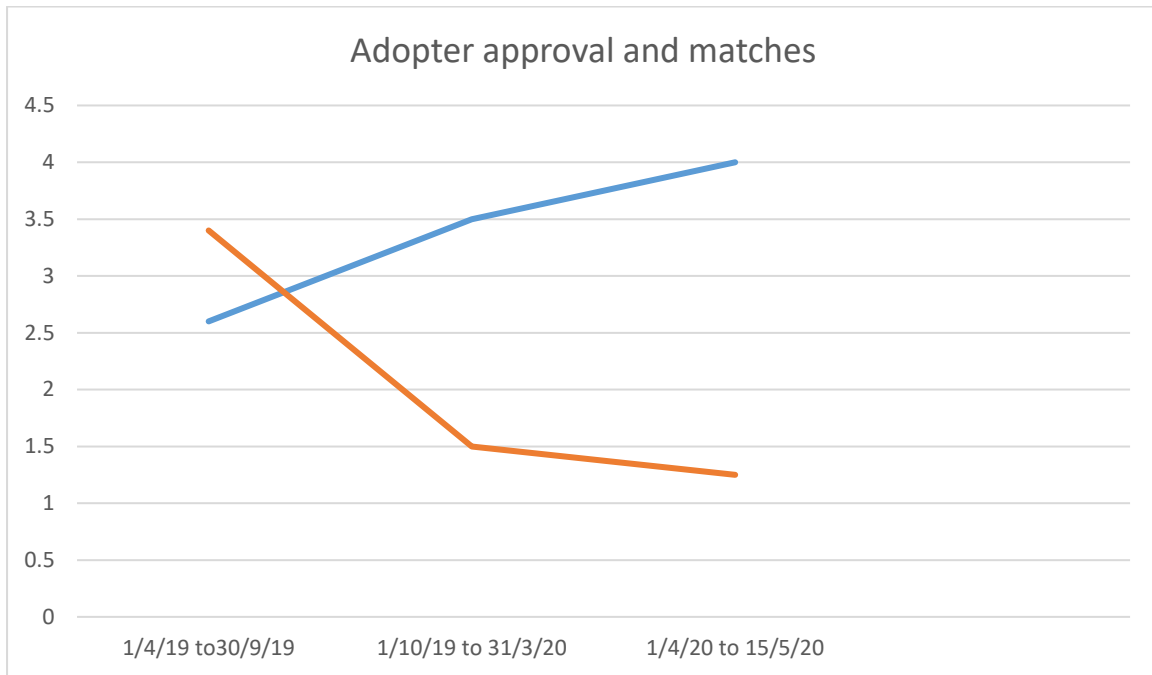
Adopter Approval Matches to approved adopters

Enquiries

Enquiries initially peaked in October following the launch then steadily climbed to January and February. The apparent small dip in February may be explained by the shorter month. All RAA's noted an initial dip in enquiries in the run up to lockdown and in the first few weeks of lockdown. Although not directly in the scope of this report, enquiries have begun to recover in April and May

Enquiries by month
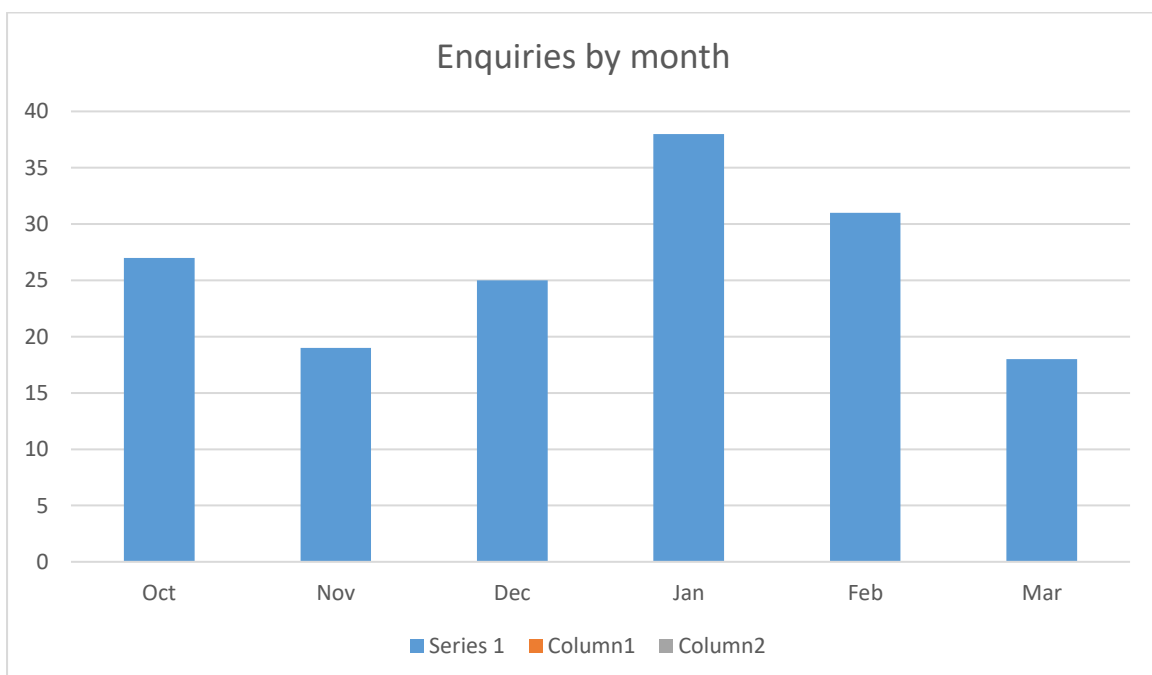
Workload analysis

The workload analysis evidenced improved throughput of adopters in assessment and increasing volume of work

| Stage	Jan 20	March 20	Comment
Enquiry	40	21	Timeliness improving
Stage 1	14	17	Slight increase in throughput
Stage 2	5	9	Continued increase
Approved and awaiting placement	24	19	Reduction in numbers through active family finding
Child placed pre - order	19	18	
Adopter awaiting match	24	19	Reduction in waiting times – further review will be undertaken

Prospective adopter characteristics

The following charts consider characteristics of all applicants to identify which community groups we are reaching
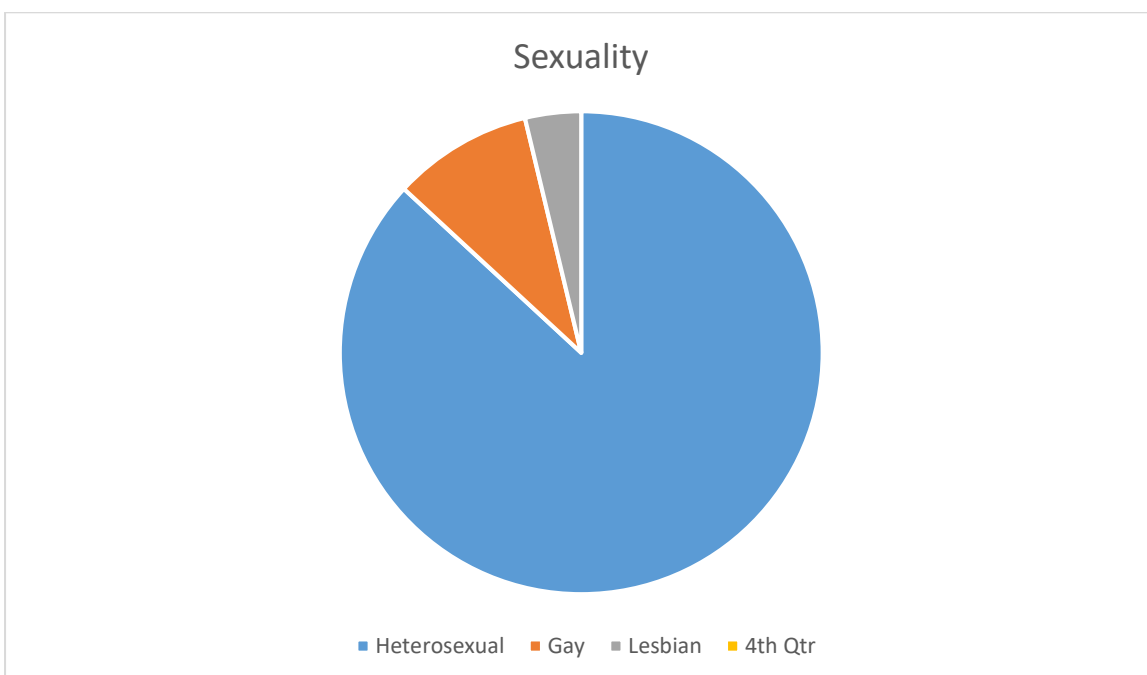
Ethnicity

The vast majority of applicants are White British. A targeted community based campaign to recruit Black African and Caribbean adopters was due to be launched in March but has been delayed until September following the Covid lockdown.

Although a only small number of adopters from Asian communities come forward there is no national shortage of adopters from these groups

Ethnicity

Legend: ■ White British ■ Asian ■ Black African/Carribean ■ White Other
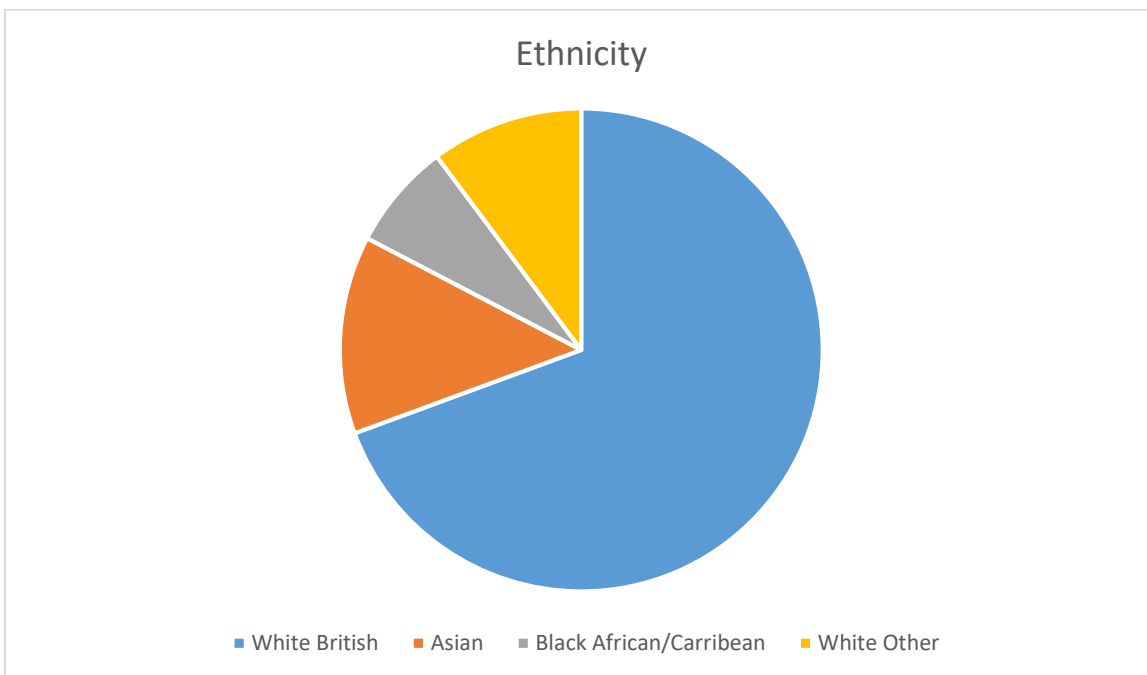
Sexuality

The vast majority of prospective adopters are heterosexual. Slightly more gay men than Lesbian women have applied to adopt. This may indicate an untapped resource. A specialist recruitment event attracted more gay and lesbian couples and further partnership work with New Family Social will be undertaken

Sexuality

Legend: ■ Heterosexual ■ Gay ■ Lesbian ■ 4th Qtr

Service plan

Development area	Action	Comment	Progress
Staffing	Recruitment of agency workers Recruitment of permanent workers Recruitment of Independent SW's to undertake additional assessments	Challenge of recruitment to 2 vacant posts	Agency workers recruited – high turnover In advert 3 ISW's recruited
Information evening	Develop positive presentation Recruit adopters to speak	Positive feedback from adopters 1 key speaker others to be recruited	Completed Transferred to web based
Prospective adopter Preparation	Develop preparation group	Developed and delivered by Jan 2020 Positive feedback	Completed now being reviewed for web based delivery
Statutory checks	Develop system and tightly monitor returns	Developed Robust monitoring required Further work with CCG re influence on GP's required	Completed
Assessments	Develop QA process for assessments	All assessments QA'd Mid-point progress review to be implemented	Completed – to review
Performance management	Develop timescales and monitoring tool		Completed Compliance monitored

Timely matching of children with outstanding adopters

Local Authorities were given permission to delay Q4 ASGLB reports figures folloiwng the Covid lockdown. This has meant that timeliness figures cannot currently be accurately reported.

Progress in placement of children can be reported.

A substantial drop in placement numbers was evident in 2019/20 Q2 (figures have been rounded up to full year equivalent for comparison on the chart below) This was primarily due to a number of adoption staff chosing to leave the service prior to regionalisation.

Adoption staff in ALE had to work hard to collate case file information, work within regional systems and develop new relationships. Progress was herefore slow in the first few months after go-live. Despite this the final year end figure is higher than predicted from Q2 reports.

Despite the impact of Covid, the curve continues to move upwards

The Q2 figure in the chart below reflects the annual position should placements have continued at the same rate.

Children placed
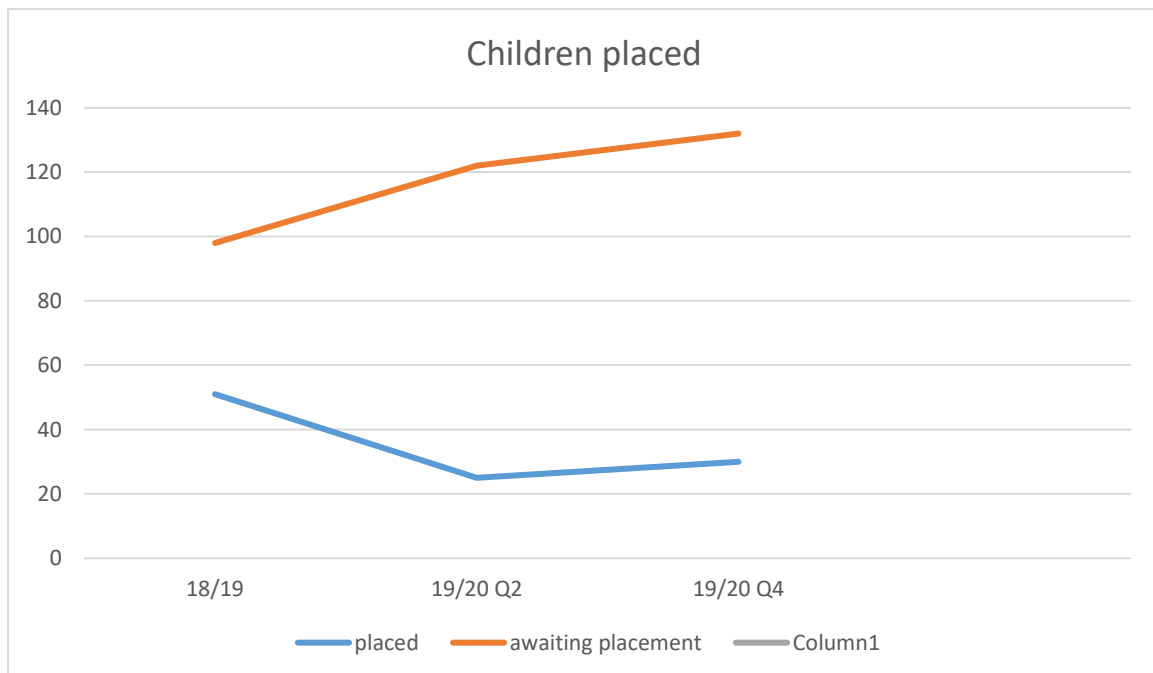
Adopt London East is currently working with 164 children at all stages in the family finding process. Demand is highest in Tower Hamlets with LBBD and Newham also having substantial demand on services

	Newham	LBBD	Havering	Tower Hamlets
Unborn baby	2			7
Early monitor	10	1		2
Parallel planning	1	17	2	21
ADM	1	1		
Family finding	6	8	4	19
Progress to match	4	4		6
Matched placed	14	21	6	1
Adoption no longer the plan	1		2	4
Total	**39**	**52**	**14**	**60**

Demand is highest in Tower Hamlets with LBBD and Newham also having substantial demand on services
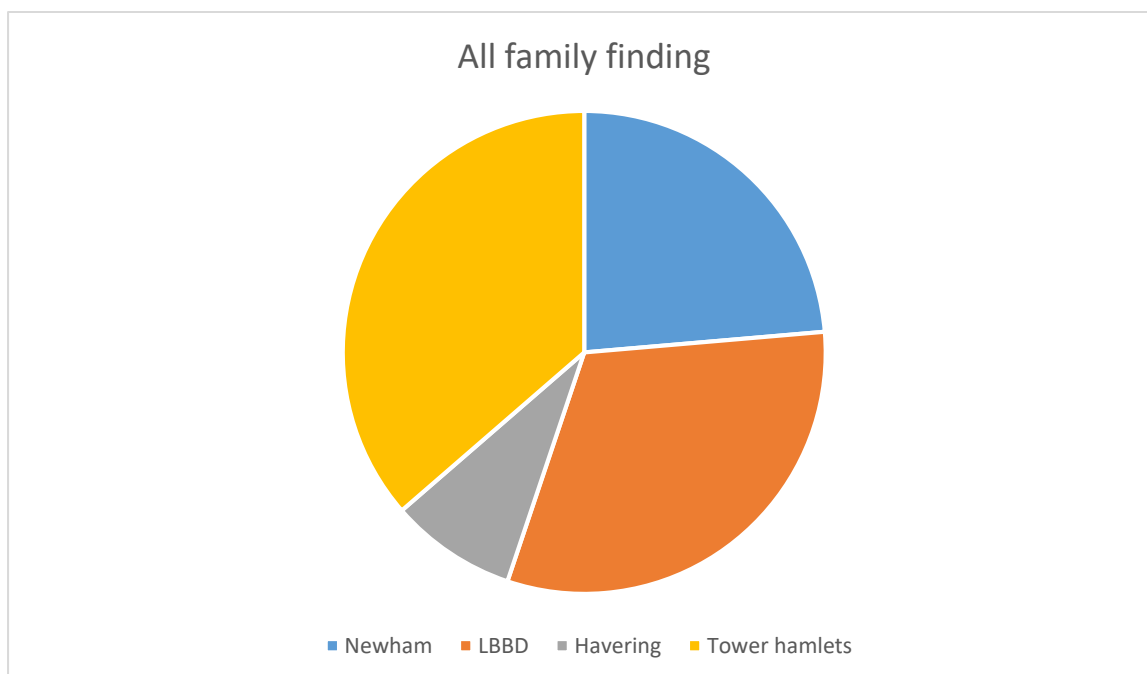
When the active phases of family finding are considered, demand is considerably higher in Tower Hamlets than elsewhere in the region

family finding

Newham | LBBD | Havering | Tower Hamlets
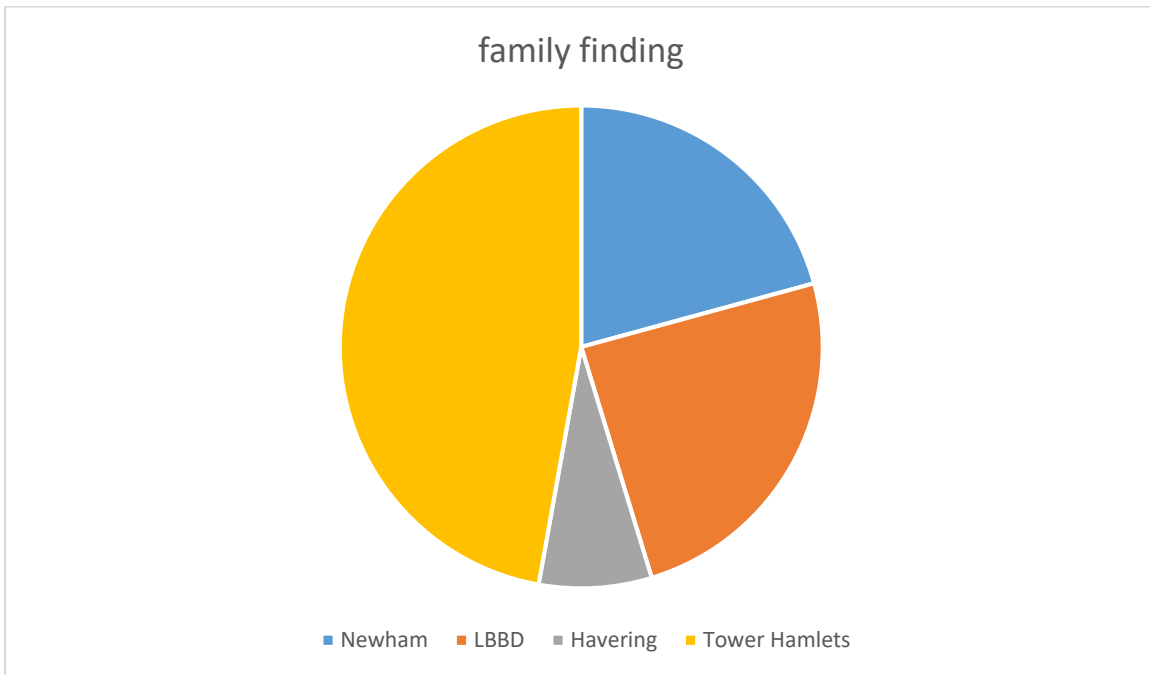
**Age of children in active family finding**

The age of children in active family finding was considered at this more accurately reflects the age of children moving towards placement. The majority of children are aged between 1 and 4 with a substantial number of children up to age 9. Improvements in early assessment and early permanence should bring the age range down.
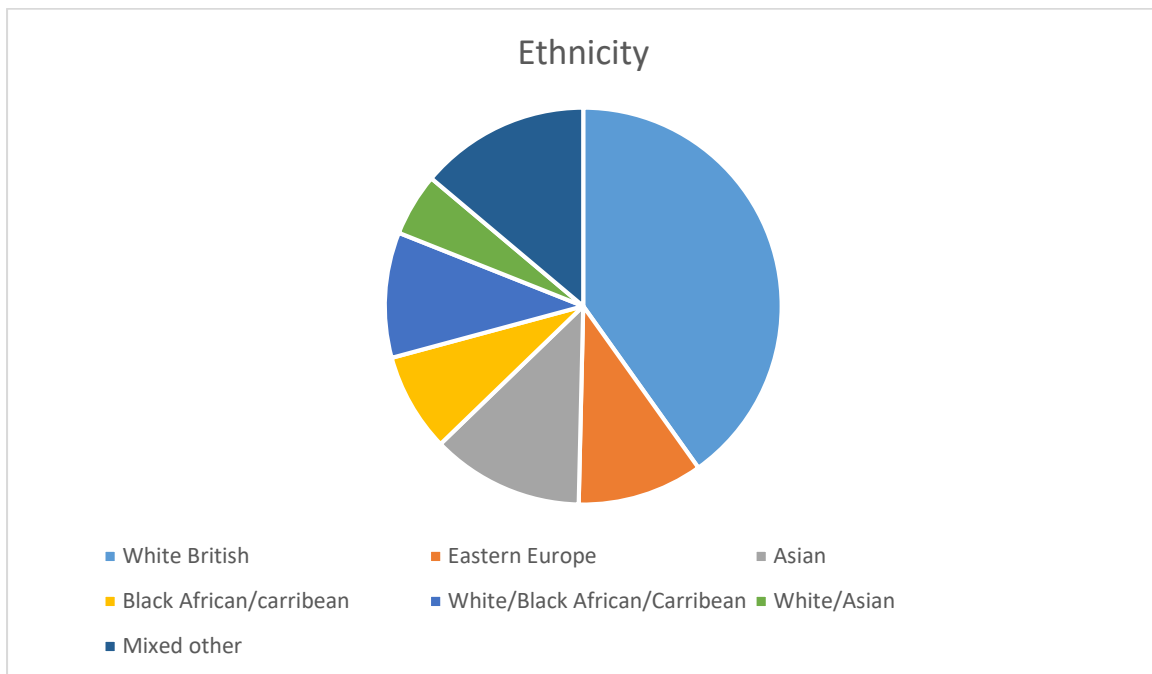
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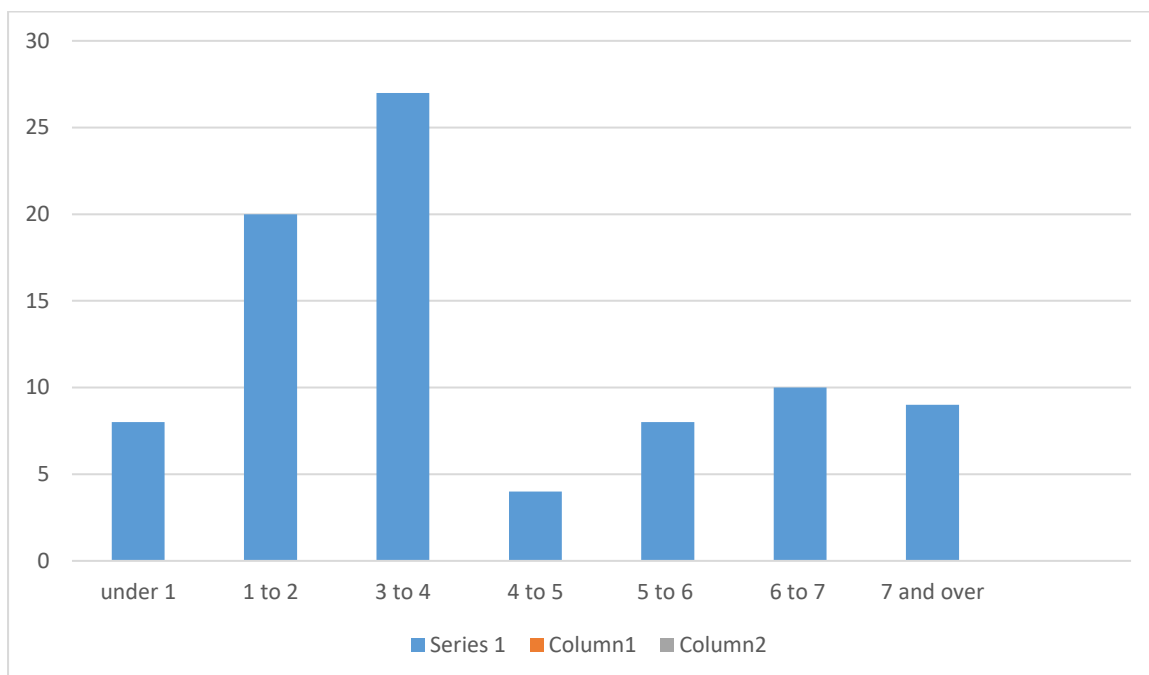
Sibling group

30 children require solo placements; 34 require a placement with a sibling (in 17 family groups) and 6 require a place with 2 siblings (in 2 family groups of three)
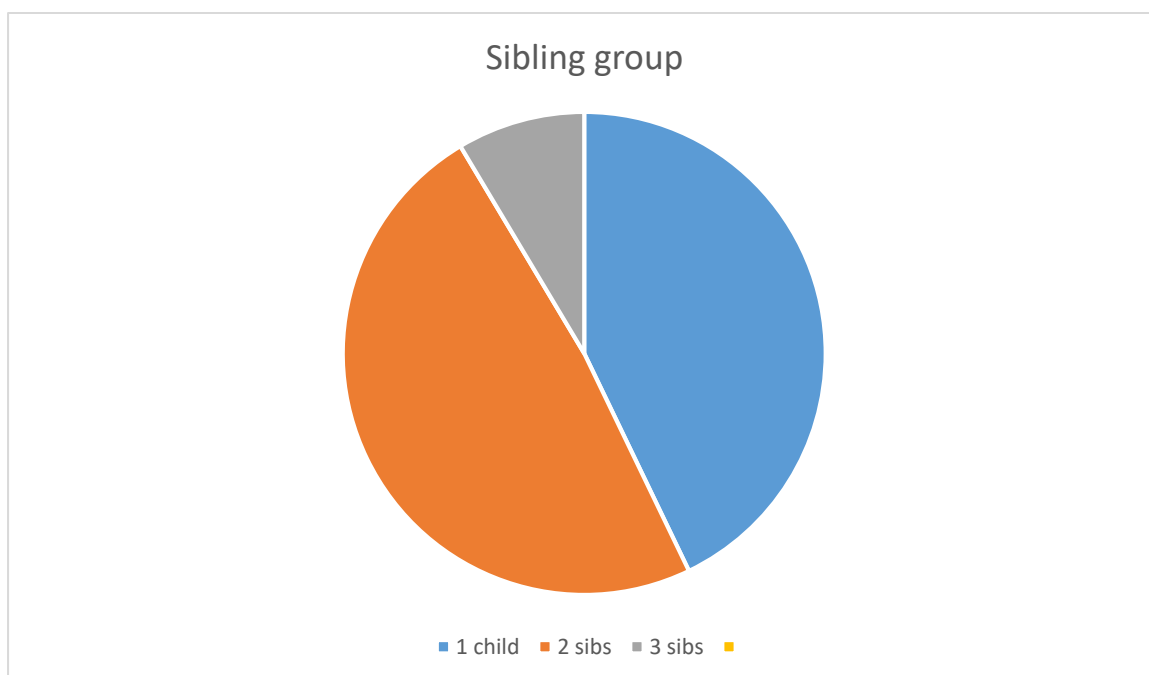
Ethnicity

Detailed information on each childs family heritage. For the purposes of analysis I have conflated several groups. The largest single group remains White British children with smaller percentages from Black African/Carribean and Asian populations. An increasing percentage is made up of Eastern European groups. Our diverse population is reflected in a large number of childre with parents with differing ethnicity.

Ethnicity

- White British
- Eastern Europe
- Asian
- Black African/carribean
- White/Black African/Carribean
- White/Asian
- Mixed other

Service Plan

Development area	Action	Comment	Progress
Staffing	Full staffing. Back fill for long term sick leave Staffing insufficient to meet demand	One staff member off sick to end March	Full staff in place On-going review of workload
LA relationships	Locally based staff Agree strategic and		Staff in place

	operational leads in all LA's Develop positive working relationships		
Access to LA records	Identify solutions to access LA records on read only basis to ensure information flow is seamless	This has proven difficult Further work ongoing	Access in place in 2 LA's and partial access in one other
Protocols	Protocols developed and shared with LA services	High staff turnover – to review and re-issue	Completed – under continuous review
Relinquished babies and Early permanence	AP to take lead role in development and delivery		
Tracker	Develop effective tracker ASGLB compliant	System glitches	Completed – to separate into 4 trackers due to local need and system glitches

Adoptive families are supported to achieve happiness and the best outcomes
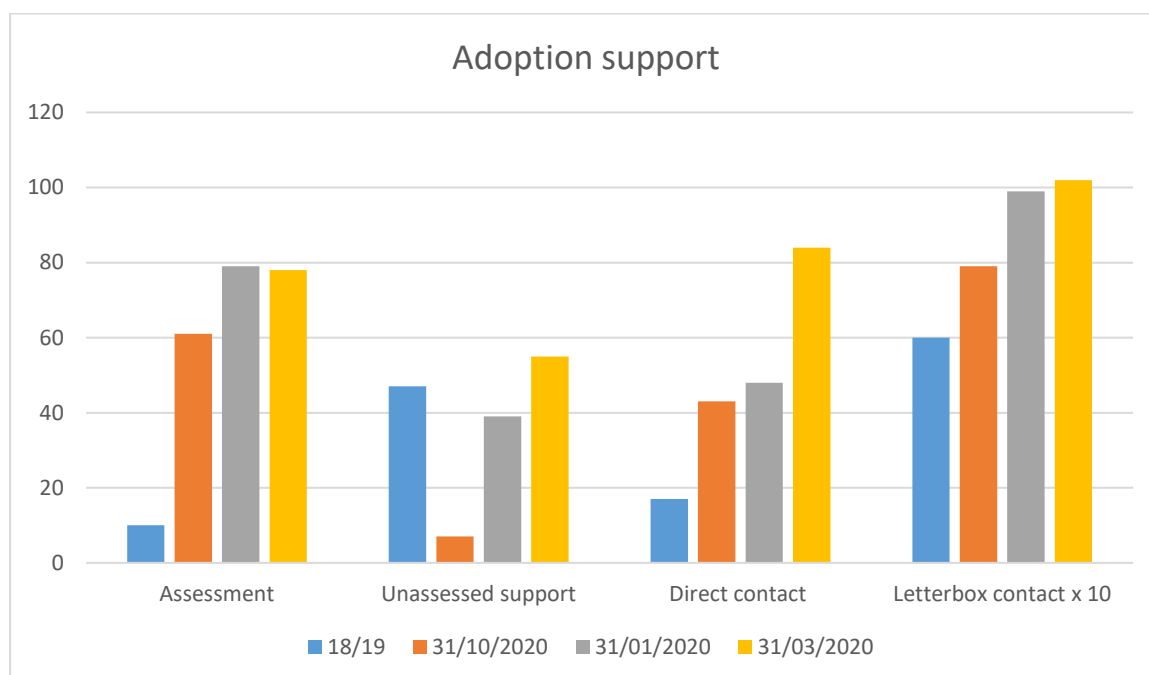
Adoption support

All 2018/19 figures were based on self reporting by each Local Authority. Adoption support was typically provided by one worker, services were responsive but often not subject to formal assessment. Numbers of adopters requiring adoption assessment were higher than initially reported and increased in the first three months following go-live.

Numbers in assessment have stablilised but the majority of cases in unassessed support require assessment and are receiving interim support whilst awaiting allocation for assessment.

Numbers in direct contact were higher than reported prior to go live and have continued to increase. This is partially due to increasing numbers of adoptions including direct support and primarily due to some cases not being passed over to ALE on go-live.

Numbers in letterbox contact are 40% higher than previously estimated and continue to increase slowly.

	Tower Hamlets		Havering		Newham		LBBD	
	Jan 20	Mar 20	Jan 20	Mar 20	Jan 20	Mar 20	Jan 20	Mar 20
Assessment	23	32	18	20	19	19	7	7
Unassessed support	0	11	17	19	0	8	5	15
Direct contact	15	22	0	1	21	28	22	33
Total	38	66	35	40	40	55	34	55

The total number of adoption support cases has increased by 32% in three months. Numbers of families in assessed work has increased by 14% however a number are being provided with interim support awaiting allocation.

Numbers of adoption support cases vary greatly between Local Authorities. The service will work towards consistency of offer and it is likely that this will show larger increases in those Local Authorities with a smaller local offer.

Not all Adopters living in a Local Authority area will have been approved by the Local Authority or have children placed from the Local Authority in which they live but most will have been eligible for services from the Local Authority in which they reside.
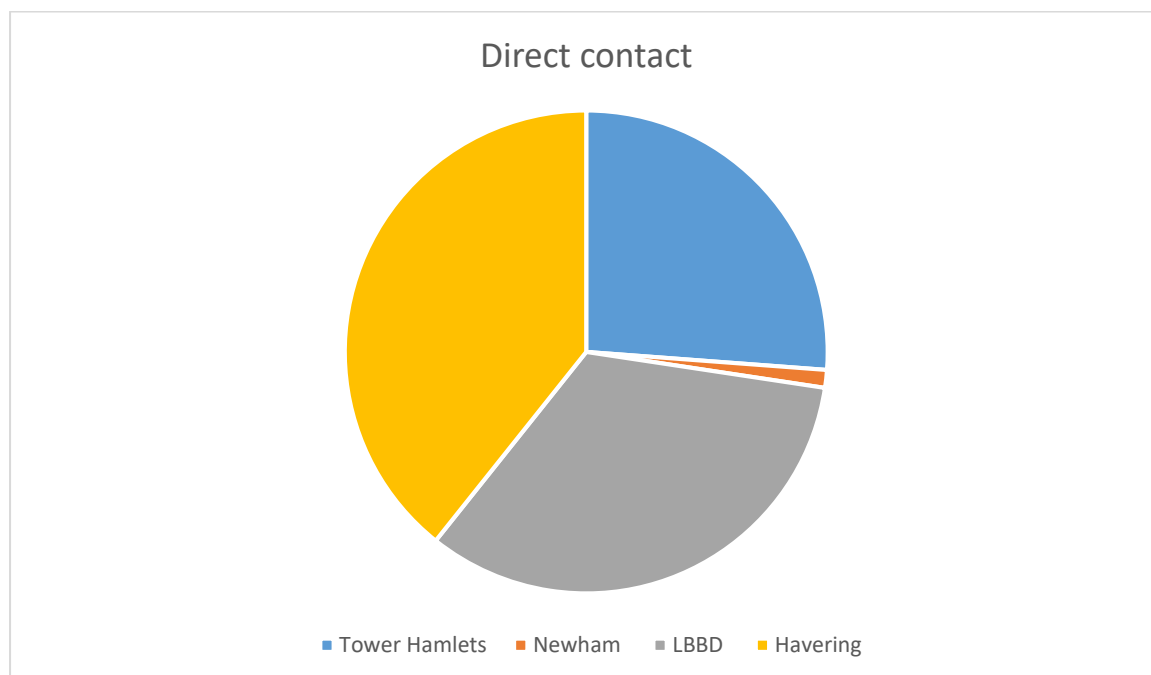
Number of cases in assessment

LBBD have a history of placing children in-house and of provision of direct therapeutic support. Many complex cases did not transfer at the point of go-live and continued to receive services from LBBD. Cases will close or transfer at an appropriate point and referrals from LBBD will increase as a result.

Tower Hamlets has the most adopters in assessment with Havering and Newham having roughly similar numbers. A larger number of adopters in Havering are awaiting assessment and numbers will increase in this area

■ Tower Hamlets ■ Newham ■ LBBD ■ Havering
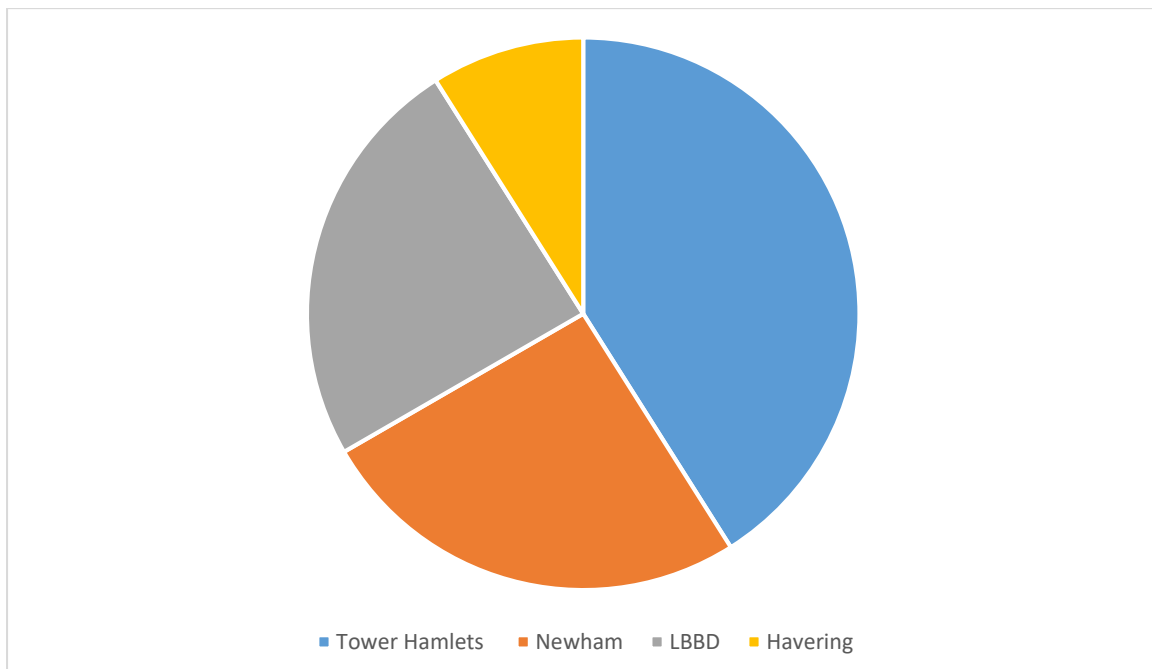
Number of cases with direct contact

Supported direct contact is relatively high in all Local Authorities except Havering. It is likely that promotion of direct contact will increase this area of work in Havering

Direct contact

Legend: ■ Tower Hamlets ■ Newham ■ LBBD ■ Havering

Service plan

Development area	Action	Comment	Progress
Staffing	Recruit to vacant post	Advanced practitioner appointed to panel advisor post Usuccesful in appointing agency worker	Advert out
ASF	Register agency	Required for applications	Complete
Adopter led support	Liaise with existing peer support networks Work with Adoption UK on adopter advisory board	All networks visited – most in havering Formal consultation with adopters with representation on baord	Complete Chair appointed, small membership, first report and consultation
Develop core offer	80% direct work to be assessed Improve early offer to all adopters	Develop structure for planned interventions Some commissioned services offer direct access	Some delay in assessments due to staffing challenges

		Improved working with peer support networks	
Develop core adopted adult/birth family offer	Develop protocol for clarity of role Develop effective commissioned offer	This aspect of work has been delayed due to pressure on the adoption support offer Birth family support undertaken wherever possible	
Improve partnership offer	Develop effective working relationships with key partners Undertake joint delivery/programmes where apropriate	Challenge with health services due to differing CCG's	Termly joint meetings with virtual schools Training for LAC leads with Cornerstone
Review commisioned services	Review and develop effective commissioning strategy	Pan London approach wherever possible commencing with Adopted adult and birth family services	Y1 services re-commmissioned as previous year. Review ongoing

Adopter consultation

Adoption UK were commissioned in order to work with us to develop engagement with our adopters.

The model used was to recruit an advisory board chair and a number of advisory board members who would constitute our advisory board and develop adopter activities as part of an engagement programme.

There is not a strong history of adopter engagement in service development in East London and progress has been slow. We are now also working with We Are Family (WAF) a London wide peer support group to further develop our partnership and engagement strategy.

Two adopter events were held immediately before service go-live to engage with our adopters and seek their views on service provision.

These events were supported by Matt Simpson, the chair of our developing adopter advisory board. Matt produced a report summarised below:

Outside of education, post-adoption support was clearly the most pressing subject for the group of existing adopters. The general consensus was that access to far greater support was required and that adopters felt they were largely left to cope with many challenges of bringing up adopted children largely alone. This applied both to those who've adopted relatively recently but also to those 5+ years in.

One adopter said: "The most vital thing that all adopters want & need is a friendly, nice, kind warm voice at the end of the line. Someone supportive and non-judgmental who will talk them through whatever issues they are having. This is sadly lacking."

The conversation around support predominately focused on attachment, and the needs of adopters who are parenting children with attachment challenges. That support could relate to better training in the pre-adoption phase, access to counselling or other related support post-adoption and better access to a range of information and guidance. There was the view that the post-adoption support plans needed to be much more detailed.

A couple of adopters also spoke of valuing more support and practical guidance around contact: particularly in cases where contact is more complex (e.g. a number of birth siblings). Again, a feeling that adopters were largely left to their own devices in scenarios that are often complex.

There were also some voices of concern around life stories: examples of where adopters had been left for long periods without receiving the documents from the authorities, and even when they did materialise they were not fit for purpose. My personal experience here was exactly that: long delays and then ultimately a life story that had been mostly copy-and-pasted from the CPR and was entirely unsuitable for children.

Lack of formalised peer-to-peer support was also raised as an issue. In a number of cases, adopters had built their own support groups – e.g. coffee mornings for adopters – and expressed how important they were in terms of emotional and practical support. But that wasn't universal and there were adopters who didn't yet have the benefit of such groups. Better information and communication about where these and other organic peer-to-peer groups already exist would be of value, as would any opportunities to broaden the reach and number of peer-to-peer support groups with support from the RAA.

Prospective adopters pointed to the value of engaging with existing adopters so, again, any opportunities to broaden the scope of peer support during the approval and matching process would be valued.'

Matt also produced a series of recommendations for improvement work. All recommendations have informed our work in partnership

1 Facilitation and support of peer-to-peer support groups

It's clear that the peer-to-peer support groups (e.g. coffee mornings) that spring up organically are of great value to adopters. But not everyone is aware of or has access to such groups. The RAA could address this through a mapping exercise of existing groups and – with permission from the organisers – could then pro-actively promote these to adopters (e.g. through a dedicated page on the RAA website, links in newsletters, communication at training and events.)

Moreover, the groups themselves could be more pro-actively supported by the RAA – e.g. by delivering information about new services, developments in policy etc directly to the group organisers to disseminate through their networks. Could there also be an opportunity for groups to apply for small amounts of funding to put on their own events? Perhaps someone within the RAA could be assigned responsibility for the facilitation and support of peer-to-peer support groups so there is a "go-to" person for group organisers?

2 Life story quality, delivery and guidance

As detailed above there appeared to be frustration around the quality of life stories and the (lack of) speed at which they're delivered to adopters. Should there be an agreed deadline for these post-placement and the targets measured? In terms of the quality, while of course all life stories are different there should be enough similarities in the appropriate format / style / structure to have a consistent template that social workers can adapt as appropriate. I suspect this does already exist, but feedback from adopters suggest it isn't being applied consistently (recognising of course that often the life stories for East London adopters will be coming from other RAAs.)

Similarly, there are enough common themes (e.g. drug dependency, domestic violence, alcoholism, neglect) to create better guidelines for both social workers and adopters as to how to relate these in age-appropriate language. Could, for example, "best-in-class" life stories from adopters be anonymised and shared with new adopters?

3 Pro-active communication

There are some quick wins here. Adopters would value a simple email acknowledgement that documents or information has been received. They would value more pro-active communication, especially in the approval process, rather than feeling they have to chase for information. Could there be a process whereby social workers are encouraged to send an update every, say, fortnight to reassure prospective adopters things are moving forward? (And something similar for adopters in their first six months of placement?) Can there also be further focus on ensuring that all correspondence is logged and filed?

4 Consolidation of information and advice

As detailed above, there's no doubt there is more support, information and advice out there than perhaps most adopters realise. Awareness is an issue. Another quick win – particularly with the formation of the RAA – would be to consolidate all of this information into a central web portal accessible to adopters and heavily and repeatedly promoted. This should be become the first port of call for adopters in the region whenever they're searching for information. It can contain links to training, advice, counselling, social networks, resources, support services, events, peer-to-peer groups and – in particular – information regarding the education of adopted children. Could one person in the RAA be made responsible for ensuring this is always kept up to date?

5 Named key social worker

It is of course desirable that adopters keep the same social worker throughout the whole process. Could there be an additional focus on trying to ensure this? We acknowledge that that isn't always possible, but where it isn't could a process be implemented where whenever a social worker moves role or leaves the RAA, the adopters who fall under their remit are pro-actively contacted with the details of the social worker who'll take over responsibility for them? That should even apply when a social worker goes on holiday as that may coincide with a critical time during which an adopter requires support.

6 Attachment training

Could there be an even greater focus on attachment in the training for prospective adopters? In particular, could an experienced adopter lead a module specifically relating to their experiences of attachment issues and how they've dealt with them?

7 Post-adoption training

While we appreciate that this requires additional resource, there was a strong feeling that while the training in the approval process is valuable, the time when you perhaps most need guidance is in the early months after placement. Could a programme be put in place for post-adoption training for adopters in their first six months of placement?

Complaints and compliments

In the 6 months following operational go-live, the service has had one complaint regarding a late payment of an invoice for provision of a training course. The training course was delivered prior to go-live and the invoice initially sent to the lead LA in the ELPAC consortia in error. This was resolved at stage 2 through payment of this invoice and an apology.

The service has received numerous informal compliments and has logged numerous compliments from adopters, birth families and professionals.

Compliments include:

Adopters: thank you for all your support and help in creating our family

Parent: it was a relief to be able to discuss everything and not worry about judgement

Adult: I enjoyed meeting you today and was very happy with your sensitivity

Social Worker: I thank you for your support and continued good practice

LA Legal: Thank you v helpful, I have not received a service as good as this in 5 years.

Adopt London East Partnership Board Financial Outturn 2019/20

This provides the outturn expenditure and income for the financial year 2019/20.

Actual expenditure incurred in 2019/20 amounted to £897k of which the LBH contribution of £190,240 has been used to set budgets for the items of expenditure to be incurred for the ALE items below (excluding recharges). After offsetting DfE income carried-forward for 18/19 and partner contributions totalling £671k, this has resulting in an overspend position on the ALE budget of £8.4k for 2019/20.

Expenditure

Category of Expenditure	Budget 2019/20	Actual Expenditure 2019/20	Variance 2019/20
ALE Costs funded via LA contributions	652,950	0	-652,950
Staffing Costs	129,540	370,187	+240,647
Agency Staffing	0	159,499	+159,499
Interim HOS	0	103,125	+103,125
Other Staff Costs	22,090	22,958	+868
Travel/Transport	0	3,955	+3,955
Office Expenses	4,770	7,363	+2,593
Premises Related Costs	0	5,818	+5,818
Commissioned Services	26,060	190,200	+164,140
Communication/Publicity/Market Engagement	7,780	3,949	-3,831
Internal Recharges	27,157	29,861	+2,704

Total Expenditure	870,347	896,915	+26,568

Income

Category of Income	Budget 2019/20	Actual Income 2019/20	Variance 2019/20
DFE Income carried-forward from 18/19	0	-18,125	-18,125
LA Contributions:			
LB Barking &Dagenham		-235,597	
LB Newham	-652,950	-243,795	-1
LB Tower Hamlets		-173,557	
Total Income	**-652,950**	**-671,074**	**-18,126**

* Note LB Havering contribution £190,240 has been included as a budget in kind contribution in the expenditure figures

Net Expenditure 2019/20

	Budget 2019/20	Actual Income 2019/20	Variance 2019/20
Net Expenditure	217,397	225,841	+8,442