

**CHILDREN AND LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE
29 March 2022**

Subject Heading:

Update report regarding the 2020-2021 children's complaints report and Adopt London East Partnership 2021 report presented at Children's OSSC November 2021

SLT Lead:

Robert South – Director of Children's Services

Report Author:

Tara Geere, AD of Children's services

Policy context:

The following updates are in relation to the council's responses to complaints against children's services and in relation to the running of the council's adoption services both statutory functions of the local authority

SUMMARY

Following the presentation of the 2020-2021 annual children's complaints report and the 2021 annual adoption update report at the overview and scrutiny panel on the 23 November, members have requested further information to include -

1. Is there any benchmarking information in relation to children's complaints including statistical neighbours and could there be further clarification re the number of different classification of complainant's religion?
2. Who sits on the Havering Adopt London East (ALE) board?
3. Is there any benchmarking with statistical neighbours on adoption performance?
4. What areas of adoption performance can be improved more?

This report responds to the questions raised with follow up information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future children's services reports to include benchmarking against statistical neighbours where available

REPORT DETAIL

1. Is there any benchmarking information in relation to children's complaints including statistical neighbours and could there be further clarification re the number of different classification of complainant's religion?

As requested the following information shows benchmarking data with statistical neighbours in relation to complaints against Havering.in 2020-2021.

The following Information published by the local government ombudsman shows all complaints listed against Havering, unfortunately it does not break down to show just children's complaints. The information shows Havering is performing better than similar authorities

Complaints upheld



67% of complaints we investigated were upheld.



This compares to an average of 72% in similar authorities.

12

upheld decisions

Statistics are based on a total of 18 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

[View upheld decisions](#)

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



In 100% of cases we were satisfied the Council had successfully implemented our recommendations.



This compares to an average of 99% in similar authorities.

Statistics are based on a total of 11 compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021



The table below shows the % of complaints in 2020/21 that were for Education and Children's Services, as a % of the total complaints received benchmarked by our statistical neighbours. Showing smaller percentages of complaints against children's services than neighbours.

Table 1

Authority Name	Education and Children's Services	Total	Education and Children's Services as a % of Total
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council	13	38	34%
Essex County Council	48	134	36%
Kent County Council	79	156	51%
Lancashire County Council	55	124	44%
London Borough of Bexley	14	60	23%
Medway Council	15	50	30%
Northamptonshire County Council	27	61	44%
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council	7	39	18%
Swindon Borough Council	9	43	21%
Thurrock Council	9	30	30%
London Borough of Havering	8	55	15%

In regards to the question from Councillors regarding the numerous classifications of religions in 2020-2021 annual children's complaints report, this is how the complainant had described their religion.

2. Who sits on the Havering Adopt London East (ALE) board?

The ALE board is chaired by Robert South, the Director of Children's Services (DCS) in Havering. There is Assistant Director representation from Tara Geere (Havering); April Bald (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham - LBBD); Emma Cockerill (Newham); Lissa Marie Minnis (Tower Hamlets). With Adoption lead representatives from Tendai Dooley (Havering); Joanne Tarbutt (LBBD); Carlos Galaz (Newham); Lissa Marie Minnis (Tower Hamlets). Havering also have representatives for performance (Lucy Goodfellow), finance (Amar Barot) and HR (Julian Sivill)

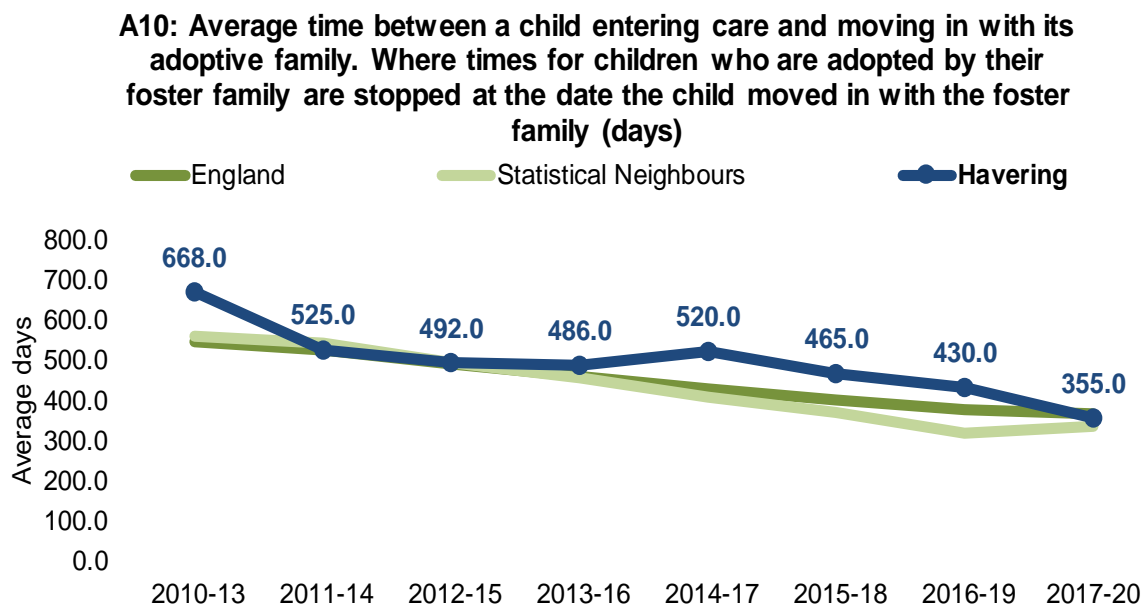
There is an operational sub group chaired by the head of service (HOS) for ALE Sue May (Havering) with adoption Leads; Tendai Dooley (Havering); Joanne Tarbutt (LBBD); Carlos Galaz (Newham); Lissa Marie Minnis (Tower Hamlets) Operational Lead: Eulyn Joseph (Havering); Mercia Jackson (LBBD); Yvonne Michaels (Newham); Leo Major (Tower Hamlets). Joined by the ALE Managers: Belinda Bhatti (Adoption support); Michelle Bakay (Recruitment and Assessment); Anthea Bennet (Family Finding); Nancy Pinthieve (Panel Advisor)

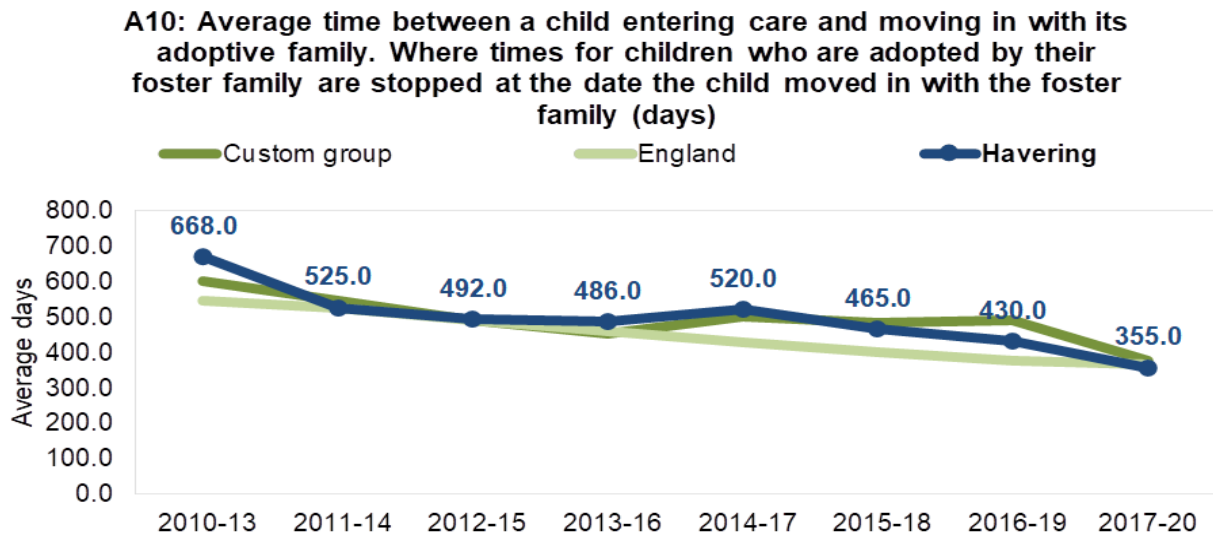
There are also several working groups with varying membership dependent on expertise required to look at current priorities. Currently these are focused on life-story work and Child Permanence reports required as part of adoption work.

3. Is there any benchmarking with statistical neighbours on adoption performance?

The adoptions score care benchmarks against statistical neighbours and national data over a three year rolling period. The last published data for the average time between a child entering care and moving to their adoptive family (Graph 1 below) shows our improving performance.

Graph 1





Graph 2 above highlights the performance of the 4 ALE boroughs (the custom group) showing the average performance for the 4 of us over time, compared to England and to just Havering alone

Havering's performance has improved but remains below the nationally set targets within the adoption scorecard. As noted in the annual adoption report none of the local authorities in Adopt London East has met the targets. Given the low numbers of children leaving care through adoption, one child with any delay can make a large difference to the timescale measurements. On average children in Havering have waited long periods to be adopted.

Children are deemed to be harder to place and are likely to wait longer for an adoptive placement if they are over 5yrs old, are from a Black or minority Ethnic (BAME) heritage, are part of a sibling group or have a disability. On average 66% of children awaiting adoption in England are harder to place. An analysis of the children placed for adoption by Havering in the last three years has shown that the children had at least one harder to place characteristic.

Table 2

ASGLB RAA Dashboard - Adopt London East 2021/22 Q2 - Average days to complete key phases of child's journey in the 12 months to 30 September 2021

Agency	BLA to ADM	# ADMs	ADM to PO	# POs	PO to match	# matches	Match to placement	# placed	Placement to AO	# AOs	
Target timescale (days)*	182		91		121		31		274		0.00 200.00 400.00 600.00 800.00 1000.00 1200.00 1400.00 1600.00
Adopt London East	281	35	168	27	339	36	21	41	320	57	
ENGLAND	260	3562	115	3031	193	2946	24	3059	292	3327	
Barking and Dagenham	439	6	191	5	426	9	24	12	299	19	
Havering	249	6	233	6	93	4	38	4	351	6	
Newham	316	12	110	7	190	8	27	9	316	18	
Tower Hamlets	172	11	157	9	431	15	11	16	341	14	

Table 2 above shows benchmarking against the partners within ALE. There is further work to do to improve the timescales for children. However it can be seen that the average time from becoming looked after to the agency decision maker deciding that adoption is in the best interests of the child has improved and is lower than the England average.

During the pandemic there have been national delays in court proceedings. In Havering there were considerable delays from the agency decision to the court granting a placement order which allows a child to be placed for adoption. This reflects complex and challenging court processes.

Improvements on our timeliness from placement order to matching a child with their prospective adopters was at 93 days, which is better than the target and England averages. This is indicative of pro-active joint working between Havering and Adopt London East.

However, there have been delays between a child being placed with their prospective adopters and the adoption order being granted. Ongoing work with East London Courts has improved this picture considerably in 2021-2022 and this work is now of interest to other London Courts.

4. What areas of adoption performance can be improved more?

From the information above three areas of improvement are required

4.1 The Timeliness of placement of a child for adoption.

From the data above and from the annual report we know that timescales are not meeting the national targets. Adoption is a highly specialised area of work that is not a frequent area of work undertaken by social workers in Havering. Adopt London East now provide mandatory consultation sessions for social workers and first line managers at the earliest point of consideration for adoption.

Where the social worker is new to adoption work or the child has complex needs a schedule of consultation sessions is agreed. Support is also available for completion of the Child Permanence Report and other necessary documents.

4.2 Recruitment of adopters

Currently approximately 50% of our children are placed with adopters recruited by external agencies. Whilst this is comparable with all agencies across London; Adopt London East is working with the other Adopt London Regional Adoption Agencies to recruit more adopters in London and to ensure these adopters are able to meet the needs of our children.

4.3 Adoption pathways in liquid logic

The current Liquidlogic system adoption pathways does not meet requirements of a separate Local Authority and Regional Adoption Agency. Work is ongoing to improve

the pathway and ensure all recording is timely. Work is also ongoing in Adopt London East to develop appropriate Liquidlogic recording systems for the work of the agency.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks: No financial implications noted

Legal implications and risks: - There are no apparent legal implications in making the proposed decision.

Human Resources implications and risks: The recommendations made in this report do not give rise to any identifiable HR risks or implications that would affect either the Council or its workforce

Equalities implications and risks: There are no equalities implications regarding this report

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

None noted

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Previous Complaints report and Adoption report.