

<b>Item No</b> 10	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> February 3 2009	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Southwark Joint Area Review outcomes for Looked After Children	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		Southwark Looked After Children	
<b>From:</b>		Rory Patterson Assistant Director of Children's Specialist Services & Safeguarding	

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That the Committee note the key findings and recommendations of the Southwark Joint Area Review (JAR) inspection. Specifically that the Committee:
  - Note key findings and actions for Looked After Children (LAC) arising from the inspection, and commend the service for the positive outcomes
  - Consider how key findings may impact on work of corporate parenting committee.
  - Monitor and review the key recommendations

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. Southwark JAR reported that the contribution of local service to improving outcomes for LAC and young people is **good (3\*)**. Major strengths included:
  - Inter-agency working to ensure good quality care plans
  - All LAC are allocated to qualified social workers
  - LAC and care leavers live in safe placements and are well supported
  - The effectiveness of support for children and young people's physical and emotional health
  - Improving adoption rates and timescales
  - Support to involve children and young people in leisure activities
  - An integrated, committed, skilled and well-led LAC service
  - Effective corporate parenting
  - Good participation of children in making individual decisions about their lives
  - Good support to care leavers
  - Good services to prevent children and young people becoming looked after.
3. However it also highlighted several important weaknesses:
  - The long-term stability of placements for LAC
  - No written commissioning strategy

- An underdeveloped partnership with the YOT
  - Evaluation of initiatives is not well coordinated.
4. In general, the management of services for children and young people in Southwark is **good**. Capacity to improve further is **good**. Major strengths also included:
- Strong managerial leadership and effective political support
  - Strong ambitions and clear priorities supported by key partners and based on local need
  - Effective partnership arrangements
  - Good and improving performance management arrangements across the partnership
  - Capacity to deliver sustained improvement.
5. However, the report also revealed important weaknesses
- Insufficient attention to ensuring value for money
  - Evaluation of initiatives insufficiently systematic

#### **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

6. Services for looked after children have been placed within one integrated structure since April 2007. The JAR reported that while some evaluations and thematic auditing have taken place, a systematic approach for undertaking evaluations is not well coordinated. It cited a recent external evaluation of the Alternative To Care project which highlighted the need for a more systematic approach to interventions.
7. Recent Ofsted inspections indicate that there is a good fostering and adoption service. Good support is given to enable carers to meet the cultural needs of children and young people they care for. Foster carers are very well supported. Unvalidated data show that there has been a good response to the Annual Performance Assessment recommendation to improve adoption rates. The LAC service has developed more robust processes to ensure that decisions about permanency arrangements are made at an early stage. **However unvalidated data showed that the long-term stability of placements for children who are looked after has declined, although not below the level of performance achieved by statistical neighbours.**
8. There is good placement choice and a range of placements are commissioned so that appropriate matching can take place. There has been an effective development through the commissioning of the residential contract which will offer more flexible placements, including intensive work to rehabilitate children back home where appropriate. However, children's services have not yet developed a written commissioning strategy that covers all placements for looked after children. Since the JAR, performance in this area has improved as a result of actions taken in line with the JAR action plan.
9. The quality of pathway planning is improving through auditing and training for practitioners but there is still some variability.
10. The percentage of children in care who have been given final warnings about their criminal behaviour is below the national average but above that of statistical

neighbours. **Joint work between the Looked After Children Team and the YOT was found not to have been sufficiently developed. Although, work is in hand to ensure this relationship is strengthened.**

11. Action plans have been drawn up and are being part-implemented. The report and action plans that cover all the outcomes from the JAR will be presented to the Southwark Executive on 27 January 2009.

### **Policy implications**

12. The recommendations and findings of the recent JAR will influence and help steer policy and service reforms around LAC services in Southwark and align with the national reforms for Children's Trusts, Care Matters, and Aiming Higher for Disabled Children.
13. The JAR's recommendations about LAC reflect local priorities as set out in the current Children and Young People's Plan and will inform future policy development and the work of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

### **Community Impact Statement**

14. Delivering the recommendations of the JAR will result in improved outcomes for LAC, one of the most vulnerable groups in the community
15. Recommendations and findings in some cases are specific to supporting improvements in equality and diversity of practice. Although, this was an area of practice commended by the JAR for this client group.
16. The recommendations and findings of the JAR will have a particular impact on children and young people, those with disabilities and key cohorts most affected by issues under investigation such as those of particular ethnicity or gender. Service development and commissioning of provision both generally and in relation to JAR recommendations is underpinned by needs assessment including considerations of equality and diversity. This applies equally to service delivery for LAC.

### **Resource implications**

17. Resource implications arising from JAR will generally be managed within the existing budget framework.
18. Any substantial financial or other resource changes arising from the JAR will be built in to future Children's Services business plans and budget proposals.

### **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

#### **Strategic Director for Legal and Democratic Services**

19. There are no legal implications arising from this report

#### **Finance Director**

20. Comments are included in the body of the report.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Joint Area Review Action Plan	Strategy and Partnerships Team	Nick Roslund 020 7525 3864

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Southwark Joint Area Review

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Rory Patterson	
<b>Report Author</b>	Nick Roslund	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	January 23 2009	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Borough Solicitor	Yes	Yes
Finance Director	Yes	Yes
List other officers here		
<b>Executive Member</b>	Yes	Yes
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