

Corporate Parenting Committee

Monday 6 November 2017
2.00 pm
Ground Floor Meeting Room GO2A, 160 Tooley Street, London
SE1 2QH

Supplemental Agenda No. 1

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Date: 2 November 2017

Item No. 11.	Classification: Open	Date: 6 November 2017	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children 2018-2022	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director of Commissioning Director of Children and Families	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Corporate parenting committee is asked to comment on the strategy and note the action plan.
2. Corporate parenting committee is asked to note the proposed governance arrangements in paragraph 8.

SUMMARY

3. The purpose of the report is to share the Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children 2018-2022.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Issues and Analysis

4. The attached strategy sets out seven strategic priorities which include:
 1. Reduce the need for children to come into care
 2. More looked after children will live in a location that is right for them
 3. Enable more stable and long term placements
 4. Support looked after children to have good physical and mental health, achieve educationally and develop positive connections within their communities
 5. Support young people in their teenage years to ensure smooth transition into adulthood and ability to gain independence
 6. Work with other local authorities to facilitate the market; and
 7. Better outcomes and therefore better value for money.
5. The strategy has been informed by key stakeholders across health, social care, commissioning, education, and housing as well as hearing the voices of looked after children and care leavers. A series of individual stakeholder meetings took place during June-August 2017 as well as a looked after children and care leaver focus group. A well-attended (professionals) workshop was held on 21 September 2017 and the children and young people (CYP) commissioning development group discussed the strategy in October.
6. Delivery of the strategy by implementing the action plan. There would be quarterly monitoring by the sufficiency strategy steering group co-chaired by the director of commissioning and director of children and families. This will report into children and adults board (CAB) at least quarterly. There would also be a monthly sufficiency strategy working group (not meeting in the month that a steering group meeting takes place) that ensures that the actions are being implemented and will be co-chaired by the head of partnership commissioning for children and young people and the head of permanence. The terms of reference (ToR) for both groups will be signed off by the directors for commissioning and children & families and these

ToR will be supported by a sufficiency strategy delivery dashboard (currently in development) to support monitoring progress.

7. There will be annual reporting of progress against the strategy to the corporate parenting committee. For the first year of the strategy, there will be an update to the committee after the first six months of the strategy, July 2018.
8. **Governance timetable:**

Forums	By when?
Children and Adults Board (CAB)	18 October
Cllr Mills Lead Member Briefing	19 October
Final draft strategy is received by the Corporate Parenting Committee	6 November

Financial, Risk and Equality implications

9. There are a number of actions that are known to have cost implications. These are set out below in paragraphs 10-12.
10. £30,000 investment has been agreed to support the South London Commissioning Collaboration / Dynamic Purchasing System. This will enable Southwark to contribute towards the mobilisation of procurement across 7 South London boroughs and yield collective influence over the current provider-led market.
11. Nationally and locally, there is a shortage of good quality in-house and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) foster carers. There is a risk that Southwark may not be able to meet the needs of all our looked after children unless we support foster carers to manage behaviour which challenges amongst our adolescent cohort who have additional needs including special education needs and disabilities (SEND), and looked after children who require therapeutic interventions; and
12. There could be a cost implication depending on the proposed decisions taken following an options appraisal and these decisions will be presented individually through the relevant governance process.
13. Equalities information is set out in the section of the strategy entitled 'Profile of LAC and Care Leavers in Southwark.'

Community impact statement

14. Compared to their contemporaries who are not in care, Southwark's population of looked after children often experience poorer outcomes, therefore through development of this strategy we will improve outcomes and reduce inequalities.

Resource implications

15. Pathways will be reviewed to ensure resources are in the right place to increase early action and prevention of children and young people going into care.

REASONS FOR URGENCY

16. Corporate parenting committee are not due to meet until February 2018 and in order to progress this strategy and ensure that further input is received from the committee, the report needs to be considered at this meeting. The strategy addresses the adequate supply of high quality accommodation and support; and meet the needs of, and improve the outcomes for looked after children, young people, and children on the edge of care and as such needs to be progressed without delay.

REASONS FOR LATENESS

17. The sufficiency strategy has been subject to extensive consultation and discussions and it has not been possible to circulate this report five clear days in advance of the meeting to ensure that all submissions and representations have been incorporated before consideration by the corporate parenting committee.
18. Following a consultation event with looked after children and care leavers which was supported by Speakerbox and following advice from CAB, a set of *I statements* have been developed that will feed into the Sufficiency performance reporting dashboard. It is intended that the I Statements will be built into our contracting with providers who are responsible for delivering placements, health and care services for our looked after children and care leaver population in order to align outcomes and encourage improved pathways and partnership working.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children 2018-2022

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Alasdair Smith, Director of Children and Families	
Report Author	Sophie Gray, Senior Joint Commissioning Officer	
Version	Final	
Dated	31 October 2017	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	31 October 2017	

Southwark Council (version 311017)

**Children Looked After and Care Leavers
Placement Sufficiency Strategy
2018-2022**

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Foreword

Children and young people who are looked after by local authorities are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society. In September 2017, Southwark Council were responsible for protecting and ensuring the safety, stability and wellbeing of 495 children and young people in our care, placed within the borough and beyond.

In March 2017, Southwark received an overall Ofsted rating of 'Good' for our children's services and we want to continue building on our successes to ensure that we are consistently performing well across every service we provide for our children and families in Southwark.

We want all our children and young people to have the best start in life, to experience safety and stability, to be happy and healthy and enjoy life. We will give them the care and support they need to be resilient and well prepared for adulthood and independence. We will provide them with high quality care, support and guidance to ensure they get the opportunities they deserve.

We have identified our strategic priorities for sufficiency which will rely on all health, education and care services working together to impact positively on improving outcomes for our population of children looked after. This population are amongst our most vulnerable, who deserve our best efforts to improve their life chances.



Councillor Victoria Mills

Cabinet Member for Children and Schools

Chair of Corporate Parenting Committee

Our vision for looked after children

“We want all our children and young people to be safe, happy and healthy and to enjoy life. We will give them the care and support they need to be resilient and well prepared for adulthood and independence.

We will provide them with high quality care, support and guidance to ensure they get the opportunities they deserve.”

Our values and principles for looked after children

The following values underpin the planning, commissioning and delivery of services to support children and young people.

- Be the champions our young people deserve
- Deliver high quality care, support and accommodation services
- Do our best to enable families to stay together
- Keep children and young people safe at all times
- Keep children and young people’s needs and wishes central to our work
- Keep all children and young people in care and care leavers well informed about their rights and where to go for help
- Empower children and young people to take control of their own lives and realise their full potential
- Deliver proactive support that secures the best long term outcomes for all children and young people
- Ensure the views of children, young people and their families inform service improvement

In 2012, the Council developed its Care Leavers Charter. The principles are:

- To respect and honour your identity
- To believe in you
- To listen to you
- To inform you
- To support you
- To find you a home
- To be your lifelong champion

Voice of the Child and Young Person

As part of developing this strategy, we met with a focus group of children and young people in care and care leavers to inform the outcomes they would like from the implementation of the strategic priorities.

The focus group was made up of eight young people. Two were care leavers and the rest were still in care. Two were aged 15 and six were 16+, where the eldest was 21. There were 5 young women and 3 young men, with a mix of ethnic backgrounds. Two had learning disabilities or difficulties. For those in a placement, their length of stay ranged up to 12 years.

Based on their answers to the questions and the stories that they told about their personal experiences, good and bad, we have developed I statements that will be used to monitor whether the actions related to this strategy are making a difference for the young people that are intended to benefit from it. The I statements are the outcomes that we would want for any young person but are particularly important to children and young people who are in, or have left, care.

- 1. I want to feel safe in the place that I live and sleep**
- 2. I want to feel good about myself and be healthy**
- 3. I want to know what my options are**
- 4. I want to be supported to stay in, or be connected, to my (extended) family**
- 5. I want to understand the decisions that are being made about my life and be asked how I can contribute to those decisions**
- 6. I want the things that are important to me to be taken into account when making decisions about my life**
- 7. I want to feel settled and comfortable in the place that I live**
- 8. I want my preferences to be taken into account when choosing who I should live with**
- 9. I want those involved in making decisions about where I live to keep regular contact with me and be responsive to my views**
- 10. I want to learn how to be ready to live the life that I choose when I become a care leaver**

Sufficiency Duty

The council has a duty under the Children Act 1989 (section 22c) to provide sufficient placements in the locality, as far as reasonably practical, to meet the accommodation needs of our children looked after and of our care leavers. The Children Act 1989 requires that the priority consideration for placing a child, is that the placement is the most appropriate available to meet the child's needs, including any physical disability, enabling of siblings to live together if appropriate, and least disruptive to the child's education.

The Southwark Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy 2016-2019 contains specific strategic priorities and actions directly related to the sufficiency duty, a significant number of which have been delivered. This Sufficiency Strategy and its action plan will build on those successes, as well as consider in more depth what is needed to better support our children in care and care leavers.

This strategy reflects the ambitions set out in the Southwark Five Year Forward View (FYFV) for health and social care 2016-21 which focuses on population and placed based commissioning, whole-system value and how care is delivered. The strategy also aligns with the Joint Strategic Framework for CYP which sets out the CCG and Council's shared priorities for CYP (including early years and 0-5 school readiness, emotional wellbeing and mental health, admission avoidance and crisis planning, vulnerable groups and risky behaviours), as well as Southwark Council's Children and Young People's Plan (including outcomes associated with early help, choice and control, safety and stability).

This strategy fully embraces the government guidance, *Putting Children First* (2016) that places emphasis on placements that are safe and stable, so that the child experiences continuity of care, and prepares the child for independence by helping them to build strong relationships, achieve in education and work, lead healthy lives, and actively participate in the decisions about their lives.

We will ensure that all children and young people who require accommodation are provided with a safe, stable placement that has been matched to their needs and enables them to form meaningful relationships with trusted adults for as long as they need them.

We will continue to strive to increase the range and scope of in-house fostering, and adoption services to ensure we have families available to offer placement choice to children and young people best placed to meet their needs.

We will ensure that the use of family based care both internally and externally remains a preferred option to secure appropriate family based accommodation for children and young people and promote stability and permanency in these as appropriate for the child.

We will also expand our involvement and access to external provision where this is best placed to meet the needs of children who cannot be accommodated within our provision. This will involve working with other boroughs across the South-East region.

Engagement & Methodology

In order to fully understand the needs of our looked after children, and to develop new ways of working to improve outcomes, a needs analysis has been undertaken as well as benchmarking performance against statistical neighbours. Evidence of best practice has been reviewed based on models that demonstrate good outcomes elsewhere. Commissioners have held individual meetings with children and young people in care and care leavers, providers of Southwark services and colleagues from other boroughs to identify areas for improvement and agree areas for action.

We have incorporated outputs from reviews including:

- Gaining Independence Report 2016: transforming support and housing for Southwark Looked After Children/care leavers and young people at risk of homelessness aged over 16 years¹
- Ofsted Report on Southwark Council's Children's Services (2017)
- Southwark Looked After Children: Health Annual Report 2016-2017
- The Strategy Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2015)
- LAC and Care Leaver Forum (October 2017)

We have considered national guidance, reports and research including:

- Putting Children First (2016)
- Residential Care in England (2016),
- Keep on Caring: Supporting children from Care to Independence (2016)
- Children Act 1989,
- Children Leaving Care Act 2000
- Children & Young Person's Act 2008
- Children & Families Act 2014
- Children & Social Work Act 2017
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

¹ Gaining Independence Report: Transforming Support and Housing for Southwark Looked After Children/Care Leavers and Young People at risk of Homelessness aged over 16 Years (2016)

The Way Forward

This strategy is a route map for ensuring that there is sufficiency of placements for Southwark's looked after children. Therefore, in order to reach the destinations of the strategy, the council must commit resources to delivering and monitoring the action plan that has been developed.

What will success look like?

- Effective Early Help and Edge of Care Services
- Reduced need for children to enter care through lower numbers of looked after children
- Good use of Family Group Decision Making processes to enable families to develop their plans to safely reduce the need for children to enter care or lifelong links
- Permanence for children entering care at earliest opportunity
- More placements matched to needs of the child
- Siblings kept together whenever in their best interests
- Increased short term and long-term placement stability
- Increase the number of in-house Southwark foster carers
- Reduce the number of independent sector fostering placements
- Reduce the number of children placed in residential care
- Reduce the placement number and costs of semi-independent placements
- A greater range of fostering placement types within our fostering service matched to the needs of our children
- CAMHS and CCG working together with social care to deliver timely assessments, treatment, and funding of therapeutic help for children and young people
- Robust quality assurance of independent providers with clear outcomes measures for the child
- Innovative and creative solutions

How will we achieve this?

The delivery of the strategy will be directed by the Sufficiency Strategy Delivery Group, which will be co-chaired by the Director of Commissioning and Director of Children and Families.

We will monitor and update a 12 month action plan as a living document able to grow and develop to the changing needs of our young people and the market. This will be monitored by the Children & Adults Board as well as opportunity for scrutiny given through the council's Corporate Parenting Committee.

Profile of our Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Around 306,000 people live in Southwark of whom around 64,000 are young people.² The population is expected to grow and lead to greater need for health and social care services. Southwark's level of deprivation has improved in recent years but still remains the 12th most deprived London Borough (41st nationally).

Southwark's numbers of looked after children have remained stable between 475 and 500 over the 12 months up to September 2017. Southwark has higher rates of looked after children than national and London levels (78 in 10,000 children, compared to 62 and 50, respectively in March 2017).

Our current looked after population represents 0.7% of our Southwark children and young people aged 0-18 years³ which is comparable to our neighbouring borough of Lambeth. The number of children and young people in Southwark is projected to increase by 6% over the next five years. Forecasts also suggest our cohort of looked after children aged 13 years and over will grow and that without any intervention, the proportion of older looked after children requiring residential care placements will steadily increase putting additional pressure on already scarce resources.

In common with many London boroughs and the national profile, there are more males (58%) than females in our care, and 52% of children are aged over 10 years old. About 60% of the borough's population are from black and minority ethnic groups, and just over 50% of children looked after identify as Black or Black British.

The majority of our children looked after are subject to a legal order, with only 34% accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act with parental consent or the consent of the child if 16 years and over.

It is not unusual for children coming into care to be older adolescents (26% were aged 16 years and over), an increasing trend locally and nationally. In September 2017 Southwark had 390 care leavers. This is projected to increase to over 600 taking into account the increase in statutory duties through the Children & Social Work Act 2017 extending entitlement to care leaver services to those aged 21 to 25 who are not in employment, education or training.

² Southwark Demographic Factsheet (2015)

³ Office for National Statistics (2016)

Key areas

Reducing the need for children to come into care

We believe that children and young people are best cared for within their families wherever this can be safely achieved and that investing in providing services that are able to promote change within families is frequently more effective and efficient than removing children and placing them in alternative care. This strategy recognises the importance of services that support families to stay together, wherever it is safe to do so, therefore minimising the need for fostering or residential care. This approach is consistent with our values and principles. We are currently delivering and continuing to develop and enhance early help and preventative services with that aim.

In March 2017 Ofsted praised the extensive range of services for younger children with emerging additional needs, and the strong early help services for older children that prevented the need for statutory social work involvement. Ofsted also praised social work intervention in identifying and protecting children promptly. This preventative approach is set out in the Families Matter (Early Help) Strategy 2015-2020 and is a key priority of the Strategic Plan for Children in Care and Care Leavers 2016-2019. Southwark expects to build on this success through this strategy from 2018 to 2022.

We seek to support the resilience of families with a range of family support services and clinical interventions, complementing the core social work offer and additionally providing targeted support to families at risk of escalating into statutory services and those stepping down from Children's Social Care. The specialist Family Focus Team works with children to reduce the need for children and young people to come into care, and together with the Keeping Families Together Team has been very effective.

Southwark understands that an effective Sufficiency Strategy is dependant on ensuring that only those children who really need to be in care become looked after, for the shortest possible period that meets their needs. As far as possible children and young people will continue to be supported to live with their families.

Location of placements

In September 2017, 26% of looked after children were placed more than 20 miles from Southwark. This has increased 4% over the last 18 months due to increasing difficulties finding suitable placements for children with more complex needs and challenging behaviour. We have particularly seen this with residential placements for adolescents. Increasing awareness of risks due to exploitation have been a significant feature of this.

Ofsted (2017) recommended Southwark work to ensure the needs of those placed out of borough are not disadvantaged by slower access to important services. For the purposes of this strategy the measure of children living 20 miles plus from Southwark is a better guide to concerns about placement outcomes, as young people living near to Southwark are able to access our in-house or commissioned services for CAMHS, education or health.

Southwark recognises that whilst it is sometimes appropriate to place a looked after child away from the borough for safety reasons, there are implications for the management of health and educational outcomes that we must consider. **We will increase the opportunities for placing more children and young people in, or near to, Southwark.**

Stability of placements

In September 2017, 14% of looked after children in care over the previous 12 months had experienced 3 placement moves in that year. The national average is 10%. This is a measure of short term stability.

In September 2017, 58% who had been in care for over 2.5 years had been in the same placement for 2 years. The national average is 68%. This is a measure of long term stability.

Ofsted (2017) reported that ‘senior managers are aware that too many children in care, especially older children, have too many placement breakdowns that are, in many cases, the result of poorly planned and matched placements’ and that too many children experience numerous changes of placement that are not in accordance with their care plans. While the majority of children are matched appropriately according to their needs, there are also some children who are placed with carers or in residential units that do not meet their needs or adequately safeguard them.

There is a suitable range of placement options for children under 10 years of age, however, there is not a sufficient range of high-quality placement options available for adolescents, particularly those who present challenging behaviours to their carers⁴. This lack of sufficiency leads to a significant number of placements that repeatedly break down for these young people.

We will improve placement stability through a better supply of high quality placements, alongside improvements to practice in relation to assessment, care planning and placement.

Matching of placements

Matching a child with a foster carer or adopter is one of the ‘turning points’ in a child’s life⁵. Relationships with people who care for them are the ‘golden thread’ running throughout a child or young person’s life. Whatever the route to permanence, professionals must work to match the developmental needs of the child with the caregiving required to meet them. Placement sufficiency can only be improved if alongside this, practice in relation to assessment, care planning and placement are of the highest quality, and matching of a child or young person’s assessed needs, with the best placement for them, is central to this.

Ofsted (2017) reported that the majority of children are matched appropriately according to their needs, but some children are placed with carers or in residential units that do not meet their needs or adequately safeguard them.

We will improve placement sufficiency through better matching of such placements to need, and the development of the provision of support to placements to meet need.

⁴ Ofsted Report on Southwark Council’s Children’s Services (2017)

⁵ <http://fosteringandadoption.rip.org.uk/topics/matching/>

Living with Family and Friends

If children and young people are not able to live with their parents, the council has a duty to consider whether they can live safely with family or friends. There is a need to work with families to enable them to develop these alternatives themselves. This is a key part of our social work approach that will be supported through the development of Family Group Conferencing (FGCs) so that there is an offer for families at an earlier stage when difficulties arise. Evidence to support this approach is found in Southwark's involvement with the DFEs' Innovation Programme using FGCs for children on the edge of care⁶.

We are committed, as far as is in the best interests of children, to enable their needs to be met outside the care system. **We will continue to strengthen our approach to supporting Special Guardians who take on the care of children and young people who were formerly looked after.**

Sometimes, children will be placed in the care of family members or friends and those carers will be assessed as foster carers. Over the last 3 years we have strengthened our capacity to support such carers that has seen an increase in such placements and reduced pressure on our own Fostering Service. Research recognises that children and young people placed with family and friends are often more stable and achieve better outcomes than regular foster care⁷. The council has been successful in securing funding from the Children's Social Care Innovation Program to pilot a Lifelong Links Programme starting early 2018. This is based on extensive evidence of such an approach in the US⁸

We will work with 50 children in care, over the next 3 years, and support them to make life long links with extended family members that may include being cared for by those family members.

We will continue to build the success in developing the option of family and friends placements for children and young people.

⁶ Munro et al (2017) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Report 54. Daybreak Family Group Conferencing: Children on the Edge of Care (DFE)

⁷ Elaine Farmer and Sue Moyers (2008) Kinship Care: Fostering effective Family and Friends Placements (Jessica Kingsley)

⁸ <https://www.frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-group-conferences/lifelong-links#what-is-the-evidence-of-the-impact-of-lifelong-links>

Adoption

Ofsted (2017) reported that ‘in Southwark, early consideration of permanence for children is an embedded approach throughout the social work teams and adoption is considered for all children’. They went on to say that ‘children and adopters receive high-quality support from a stable, experienced and well-trained workforce, resulting in children benefiting from a permanent home’ and that ‘adoption is identified promptly as a potential permanency arrangement and that children develop good, trusting relationships with their social workers’.

The percentage of all children who ceased to be looked after because they were adopted in Southwark was 8% in 2016/17. This is lower than the previous year (12%) but reflects that changing national picture in adoption with lower numbers of children being adopted.

Southwark is very proud that Ofsted (2017) has judged our adoption service to be “outstanding” with “excellent” preparation of adopters. The government requires local authorities to work with each other to form Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) by 2020.

We will maintain and develop the sufficiency of adoption placements through taking leadership within the development of the Regional Adoption Agency in whatever form that takes for London.

Fostering Service

There is currently a national shortage of foster carers. This makes placing children and young people in such family settings more difficult. March 2017 saw the highest number of children in care nationally in over 30 years, a 5% rise on the previous year. Underlying this was a rise in older children in care and those with more complex needs. So, the demand for foster placements nationally is rising and recruitment is not at a pace to meet this demand.;

This mirrors the local picture not only in the recruitment of foster carers to Southwark’s Fostering Service, but in more complex children needing to be placed and the challenges in finding suitable foster care for these young people, often resulting in some children and young people being placed in residential care.

The very large majority of our children are placed in foster homes (89%). *Putting Children First* emphasises the importance of foster care for helping to improve children’s lives and enabling them to achieve, noting that fostering can achieve stability and continuity of care for challenging children when carers have access to good therapeutic resources, training, and respite care.

Southwark has one of London’s largest fostering services. The recruitment and assessment of foster carers was brought back in-house in 2015 to increase the quality and expectations of the kind of care that children and young people should experience. It proved challenging to develop momentum in this area and during 2016/17 only 8 new carers were recruited, insufficient to maintain current numbers or to grow placements for young people with complex needs. Progress has been made in this area and over 2017/18 an estimated 15 new fostering households will be approved. This strategy recognises the need to continue to develop the capacity and recruitment of foster carers, and their capacity to meet the needs of the children they care for.

Approximately 35.5% of all Southwark foster placements are made with independent fostering agencies (IFAs) They have a valuable contribution to make to the choice, range, consistency, and quality of fostering placements available to our children looked after. However, the competitive recruitment of foster carers similarly impacts IFAs, placements are in short supply, particularly for challenging young people, and placement disruptions are as likely with IFA placements as with our own fostering service. Placements with IFAs are far more costly than in-house placements (national cost difference of £300 per child, per week). Last year there was a 17% increase in IFAs, and Southwark's spend on such placements of £5.9 million is likely to increase to £6.7 million for 2017/18.

The substantial level of profitability in this sector has raised considerable concerns, as reported to the government by Sir Martin Narey (2016).

Ofsted (2017) reported that 'most children wait too long to achieve permanence when they are in long-term foster placements. This means that children may be prevented from building strong, enduring relationships with their carers until firm agreements are reached.' Ofsted also recognised that more needed to be done to maximise the prospects of sibling being placed together.

We recognise that the sufficiency of foster placements, and the outcomes that flow from this, are supported by a strengthened approach to permanence planning in fostering, building on the success through adoption.

We will grow our own fostering service in each year of this strategy both to decrease reliance on the independent sector, and to create the range and types of fostering placements required for complex needs older children, respite, crisis intervention, siblings, and parent and child.

Staying Put

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced the duty for care leavers to remain with their former foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement, if both the young person and the carer wanted to do so. Southwark has well established Staying Put arrangements, and last year 35 care leavers decided to remain with their former foster carers.

We will build on this success and continue to ensure care leavers remain with their former foster carers when this is right for them under Staying Put.

Residential Children's Homes

In September 2017 there were 50 children placed with in residential homes including those in the secure estate. The review undertaken for the Department of Education by Sir Martin Narey, *Residential Care in England* (2016), recognises that when carefully matched to the assessed needs of the child, residential homes can be the right placement for some children. However, in line with the legislation and guidance, fostering is the right choice for most children who cannot return home, enter special guardianship, or be placed for adoption. Local authorities must treat fostering as the first option "not least because it is much less expensive than residential care" Sir Martin Narey (2016)." The view that there are some young people who cannot live in a family placement is questionable, as the No Wrong Door (NWD) project in North Yorkshire has demonstrated, and Sir Martin agrees that the evidence of NWD suggests that there is merit in viewing residential care not as the end of the child's journey but as a bridge to fostering.

Placing a child in a residential home requires very careful consideration of the child's needs and of the improved outcomes being sought. Children placed outside the locality may experience increased vulnerability. Ofsted (2017) judged that Southwark has placed some children in residential homes that do not meet all their needs. As an immediate response to this concern the formal scrutiny by senior managers of every residential placement was strengthened through a more robust panel process with a clear remit to ensure: the child is safe; their outcomes are improving; the placement remains appropriate; and that the child has a plan to transition to foster care or to an alternative if this is in their best interests.

Nationally, about 53% of children in residential homes have a Statement of Educational Needs (SEN) or Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) and a further 28% have identified developmental disabilities and/or special educational needs without a plan. This compares to 20% and 30% of all children looked after (*Residential Care in England 2016*). Southwark's figures are not dissimilar, and this creates the opportunities for closer working together between the CCG and children's social care, to develop joined-up packages of assessment, therapeutic treatment, and funding of residential care placements, and more importantly, better assessment and treatment pathways enabling more children looked after to experience family life, either through the care of their families or in foster placements. By increasing the number of fostering placements for children with complex needs, and timely transitions,

We will reduce the number of children placed in children's homes from 2018 to 2022 and we began this work during 2017.

Very few residential children's homes are owned by local authorities or the voluntary sector and the majority of children live in privately owned provision. The council does not own any provision. Less than 6% of the 1,795 homes are located in London, whilst the North West has 24%, meaning that Southwark children are very likely to be placed considerably beyond a 20 mile radius from the borough. Cost analysis and comparisons per placement between local authority owned children's homes and the independent sector is complex, and Residential Care in England 2016 suggests that unlike the considerable profits made by the independent fostering sector, there may be little difference between the two. Placing the child in the right placement takes priority over placing a child closer to the borough, but the lack of choice for Southwark in placing children in residential care outside London creates

the challenge and the opportunity to consider if Southwark should own and operate its own children's homes in the London area, or engage in a partnership with a provider to create this resource.

We will collaborate with other local authorities so that the council, as a commissioning organisation, improves its leverage in the residential care market so that we can get work with good providers that deliver excellent outcomes at a fair price.

Care leavers

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced the duty for local authorities to publish their local offer to care leavers, to include the provision of accommodation. In line with the Children Act 1989 and Care Leaving Act 2000, Southwark, maintains children in placement until 18 years of age, and assists with the provision of accommodation from age 18 to 21, or 25 if in education, for care leavers. Southwark has recently reviewed the local offer to care leavers, (see: Scrutiny sub-committee for education and children's services review of the local offer for care leavers, April 2017, and report of the Southwark Young People 16+ Support & Housing Project, May 2017; also, response of the Cabinet to the review, September 2017).

The needs and vulnerabilities of care leavers means that many are not able to transition to independent accommodation at age 18, and require support to develop their independence skills and the abilities needed to manage tenancies of their own. As stated in the Southwark Young People 16+ Support & Housing project, "the move to independent living is a formative time in many young people's lives. It is a time when many young people finish their education, take up employment and begin to pay rent and other bills in what may be their first home away from their families and foster carers."

In September 2017 there were 112 care leavers living in Semi-Independent Accommodation (SIA). This is accommodation provided by the independent sector at cost to the council (after housing benefit/universal credit housing element contribution). The cost of this kind of accommodation can be expensive, the average spend for the care leavers in SIA is £22k per annum. This is also a market where demand outstrips supply, and with the projected increase in the number of care leavers over the next 4 years, there is both a challenge and an opportunity for Southwark to innovate ways of providing more of this type of accommodation.

The Southwark Young People 16+ Support & Housing Project sets out a detailed plan in relation to improving sufficiency in this area.

We will ensure the continued development of this including close working with Housing and exploring the possibilities for council owned and managed semi-independent accommodation.

Sufficiency and the enablers for better outcomes

The impact of abuse, neglect, parental dysfunction, or absent parenting, leads to emotional, behavioural and health concerns for over 50% of the children in our care. Partnership

working with health and education partners is vital to meeting the needs of children looked after. Placement stability is essential to meeting the child's evolving needs. Children's development educationally, socially, physically, and mentally, is highly dependent on the consistency of care. Placement stability is directly influenced by how the emotional and mental health needs of children and young people are met within that placement. Health and therapeutic support for those young people as well as their carers is essential to enable the council to have sufficient placements for its children and young people in care.

We will work with the CCG, CAMHS, and independent therapeutic providers to improve the effectiveness of therapeutic placement support for both children and young people and those that care for them.

For the same reasons of abuse, neglect, parental dysfunction and absent parenting, children looked after may do poorly at school, and the gap in educational achievement between them and their peers is marked. Ofsted (2017) judged that most children looked after by Southwark attend a good school regularly, receive good support from the Virtual School, and make good progress. However, the gap between our children and their peers remains wide.

We will further embed the Virtual School in the assessment, planning, and review of children looked after and their placements as well as co-working directly with all educational providers where our looked after children are.

Ofsted (2017) judged that many of our care leavers are living in safe, suitable housing and achieving good outcomes in their education, employment, and training. The projected increase in numbers of care leavers creates both challenges and opportunities in 2018-2022 that Southwark is addressing in partnership with Catch22 through a successful investment through the Department of Education's Social Care Innovation Fund. The quality of accommodation and support young people receive around this, is critical to enable the council to have sufficient accommodation for its care leavers.

We will renew our approach to working with care leavers to improve outcomes and meet the challenges that increased demand places on the sufficiency and suitability of accommodation. This work has already begun.

Action Plan – placement sufficiency priorities for next 12 months

Key area	Action Focus	Milestones/ target	Linked Indicators	Lead officer	I Statement
Adoption	Pro-actively with plans to form Regional Adoption Agency	RAA decisions made Mar 2018		Director of Children & Families	1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 10
	Develop Fostering for Adoption for older children			Head of Permanence & Resources	1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 10
Fostering	Continued targeted recruitment of specialist foster carers for complex needs/challenging behaviour older children and adolescents	By March 2018	Increased percentage of placements with in-house foster carers	Head of Permanence & Resources	7, 8, 9, 10
	Development of more specialised practical and clinical support for foster carers through CAMHs and Children's Social Care's embedded Clinical Service	Review by December 2017 Implementation by April 2018	Improved stability of all placements	Head of Partnership Commissioning for Children and Young People Head of Clinical Service	2, 4, 6, 10
	Development of parent and child, respite care, emergency care, and time-limited care placement opportunities	By September 2018	A comprehensive and seamless range of services that improves foster placement stability	Head of Partnership Commissioning for Children and Young People	3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10
	Joint work to deliver changes to foster carer accommodation to increase capacity to care for children with complex needs and sibling groups	By April 2018	Placement stability Permanence	Director of Commissioning with Director of Children, Families, Director of Asset Management and Director of Resident Services	1, 9, 10

Key area	Action Focus	Milestones/ target	Linked Indicators	Lead officer	I Statement
	Comprehensive benchmarking review in 2017-18 of its financial and support package for foster carers, its training, and 'wrap-around' health, CAMHS and education support to inform how we improve the attractiveness of fostering children from Southwark to potential carers who are from or near Southwark	Review by March 2018 Refresh the recruitment campaign by July 2018 Increase number of carers by December 2018	Increase number of carers signed up to in-house fostering service	Head of Permanence and Head of Finance	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10
	Recommissioning of IFA placements through sub regional approach with other SE London authorities	Specification by March 2018 Contract award by December 2018	Matching of needs first time Demonstrably cost effective placements Improved placement stability	Head of Partnership Commissioning for Children and Young People	1, 7, 8, 9
Access to Resources business management of placements	Access to Resources Team (ART) working to an effective business model in securing independent sector placements, managing in-house placements, and achieving value for money on cost	Review by December 2017 Improvement by April 2018	Placement stability Matched Placements Permanence	Director of Children & Families Head of Permanence	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
	ART gatekeeping of the quality and appropriateness of referrals for resources, and that these provide good detail of children's	Review by December 2017	Matched placements Improved value for money	Head of Permanence	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Key area	Action Focus	Milestones/ target	Linked Indicators	Lead officer	I Statement
	personalities and needs to support effective matching	Improvement by April 2018			
	ART embedded in the scrutiny and gatekeeping of costs through the High Cost Placement Panel	November 2017	Resource gatekeeping Placement suitability	Head of Permanence	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
	ART and Commissioning quality assurance and monitoring of independent residential care and SIA placements through reporting, scrutiny and site visits	Work plan for monitoring by December 2017	100% of placements monitored by Sept 2018	Quality and Performance Manager with Head of Access to Resources Team	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
Reduce placement moves and increase stability	Strengthened care planning and management oversight of placement moves through ART gatekeeping of transfer requests and referral to AD/Director	December 2017	Placement stability	Head of Permanence	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
	Timely and effective clinical support linked to outcomes including greater partnership working with the CCG ensuring the quality, provision, and funding of therapeutic services to children looked after Enhance the Looked After Children service that is provided by GSTT to ensure high quality health assessments and follow up	Review by March 2018 Inform commissioning intention letters for 2019/20 by July 2018 Phased implementation from March 17	100% health checks for LAC Dental checks (90%) Substance misuse intervention (60%) Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Score (95%)	Head of Partnership Commissioning for Children and Young People CCG, Guy's and St Thomas's NHS Foundation Trust and Children and Young People's Health Partnership (CYPHP)	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10

Key area	Action Focus	Milestones/ target	Linked Indicators	Lead officer	I Statement
	Foster carers fully supported in their care of children by Health, CAMHS, Children's Social Care including embedded Clinical Service, and the Virtual School, working as a team	Health: Review by March 2018 Inform commissioning intention letters for 2019/20 by July 2018 Education: TBC	100% health checks for in-house foster carers Improved foster placement stability	Head of Partnership Commissioning for Children and Young People with Lead Officer, Secondary & Further Education & Employment	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10
Residential care	Reduced number of residential care placements to 41 through timely transitions where appropriate, scrutinised and monitored by the High Cost Placements Panel	March 2018	Placement suitability	Director of Children & Families Head of CLA	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
	Exploration of the potential for Southwark to access/manage its own residential children's homes through partnership with a provider or through direct ownership	Options appraisal by July 2018	Increased overall number of places available to Southwark children	Head of Partnership Commissioning for Children and Young People	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
	Recommissioning of residential placements through sub regional approach with other SE London authorities	Specification by March 2018 Contract award by December 2018	Matching of needs first time Demonstrably cost effective placements Improved placement	Head of Partnership Commissioning for Children and Young People	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Key area	Action Focus	Milestones/ target	Linked Indicators	Lead officer	I Statement
			stability		
Care leavers	Commissioning, Housing, Social Care Partnership – adopt/adapt the Barnardo’s care leavers accommodation and support framework (as recommended by the Southwark Young People 16+ Support & Housing Project) as this provides a TQM model for joined up working and progressive actions to achieve sufficiency	June 2018	Increased number of young people moving through supported living into fully independent living	Assistant Director for Commissioning, Children and Adults	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
	Increased independence skills of care leavers to move into their own tenancies with innovative support services (Catch 22 Innovation Fund Project, and the proposed Young People 16+ Support and Resettlement Service)	Benchmark percentage of young people that maintain independent and ‘debt-free’ living for more than one year by December 2017	Increase the percentage of young people that maintain independent and ‘debt-free’ living for more than one year	Representative from Ops and Assistant Director for Commissioning, Children and Adults	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10
	Exploration of the potential for Southwark to access/manage its own semi-independent accommodation for care leavers 18+ through direct ownership and management of accommodation or through partnership with a provider	Options appraisal by September 2018	Increased overall number of places available to Southwark care leavers	Assistant Director for Commissioning, Children and Adults	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
	Achieved cost reductions in current semi-independent	September 2018	Reduce the average unit cost for semi-	Assistant Director for Commissioning,	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Key area	Action Focus	Milestones/ target	Linked Indicators	Lead officer	I Statement
	accommodation through ART monitoring and scrutiny of the High Cost Placements Panel		independent living	Children and Adults	

Item No. 12.	Classification: Open	Date: 6 November 2017	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Adoption Service Annual Report 2016-17	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director, Children & Families	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the corporate parenting committee accepts the Annual Report of Southwark Adoption Service 2016-17.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The purpose of the Annual Report document is to report on the activity of the Adoption Service fulfilling obligations in the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) to report to the executive side of the local authority.
3. The report covers: performance and developments in Southwark's delivery of adoption services; how the Council is compliant with key national minimum standards; and the service offered to those seeking to adopt and those affected by adoption through the provision of adoption support. It will also identify any significant trends within adoption and how Southwark can continue to meet the changing demands within the Adoption Service.
4. The report details the work of Southwark Council Adoption Service from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.
5. This report is presented late due to delays in finalising data within the report.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

6. Southwark Children's Services were inspected in March 2017 and rated good overall with an outstanding sub-judgement for adoption performance.
7. The number of adoptions reduced by approximately a third to 20. This was still amongst the highest numbers in London and reflects a national trend.
8. Children are being adopted quicker (over a year quicker than 5 years ago). This is supported by a sector leading Early Permanence Scheme and well embedded early tracking approach.
9. The number of adopter assessments undertaken reduced by half to 10 reflecting a focus on the needs of Southwark children and a national downturn.

Community impact statement

10. Southwark is committed to ensuring children with an adoption plan, from all parts of the community, are enabled to live with families able to meet most of their needs as soon as possible.

REASONS FOR URGENCY

11. Corporate parenting committee are not due to meet until February 2018 and it is necessary for the committee to consider the report at this meeting so that they are given a chance to provide feedback and consider any of the relevant issues arising, at the earliest opportunity.

REASONS FOR LATENESS

12. It is not been possible to circulate this report five clear days in advance of the meeting due to delays in finalising data within the report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None.		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Annual Report – Southwark Adoption Service

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Alasdair Smith, Director, Children & Families	
Report Author	Helen Woolgar, Head of Service, Permanence, Children's and Adults' Service	
Version	Final	
Dated	2 November 2017	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
	Officer Title	Comments sought
	Director of Law and Democracy	No
	Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No
	Cabinet Member	No
	Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	2 November 2017

2016/17

Annual Report

Southwark Adoption Service



KEY MESSAGES

Southwark Children's Services were inspected in March 2017 and rated good overall with an outstanding sub-judgement for adoption performance.

The number of adoptions reduced by approximately a third to 20. This was still amongst the highest numbers in London and reflects a national trend.

Children are being adopted quicker (over a year quicker than 5 years ago). This is supported by a sector leading Early Permanence Scheme and well embedded early tracking approach.

The number of adopter assessments undertaken reduced by half to 10 reflecting a focus on the needs of Southwark children and a national downturn.

PURPOSE OF ANNUAL REPORT

The purpose of the document is to report on the activity of the adoption service, fulfilling obligations in the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) to report to the executive side of the local authority. It will cover: performance and developments in Southwark's delivery of adoption services; how the Council is compliant with key national minimum standards and the service offered to those seeking to adopt and those affected by adoption through the provision of adoption support. It will also identify any significant trends within adoption and how Southwark can continue to meet changing demands within the adoption service. This report details the work of Southwark Council Adoption Service from 1st April 2016 to end of March 2017.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Adoption is one of the most important and significant decisions that can be made for a child. As part of its wider agenda to create a fairer future for the most vulnerable children and families, Southwark Council wants every child to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. For those young children who cannot remain or return safely to their birth families, adoption offers them the best opportunity to experience a warm and loving family environment throughout life. Southwark Adoption Service is part of the Permanence & Resources Service within the council and there is a strong focus on working closely with all the Children's social work teams, in particular the Safeguarding Service to ensure permanence is thought about as early as possible for children and for most children the best possible permanence option is remaining with their birth parents or extended family but for those for whom this cannot be safely achieved then considering adoption as early as possible increases the chances of finding a matched adoptive family in the child's timescales.

Southwark have invested in having a high-quality Adoption Service and this has led to on-going improvements in the quality and pace of the adopter assessments undertaken and with the pace at which children are matched with prospective adoptive families. The service invested in having a team dedicated team tracking child as early as possible to ensure that where appropriate the parallel plan of adoption is considered as early as possible enabling consideration of early permanence. This team working closely and successfully with colleagues in Safeguarding and Assessment and Intervention have enabled several children to be placed in Early Permanence placements rather than experiencing moves from a foster carer then to adoption.

Southwark continues to develop its practice and systems in order to deliver the extensive change agenda outlined in *Putting Children First: delivering our vision for excellent children's social care* (July 2016). This sets out the programme of reforms to children's social care over the next four years. 2016 is a period of unprecedented change with key adoption reforms being implemented. *Adoption – A vision for Change* (March 2016) reiterates the government pledge to tackle delay for children in the adoption process. This is followed by a critical development that requires all councils to combine their adoption functions by 2018 and was highlighted in the Queen's Speech in June 2016. The London Regional Adoption Agency project team are due to publish a proposed draft business plan for the regionalisation of adoption in London by the end of October 2017 which will be shared with the Directors of Children's Services across London. Given the scale of London it is highly unlikely that any regional model in London will be implemented by 2018.

The Family Justice Review, which introduced the 26-week timescale for care proceedings, has had a significant impact on the Adoption Service over the last few years. Local Authorities are now required to develop permanence plans for children and place them in alternative family arrangements more quickly. Southwark Adoption Service is rising to this challenge through having developed highly effective early tracking through Permanence Consultations. As well as this, the impact of the Court of Appeal cases re B (June 2013) and re BS (September 2013), triggering a more robust approach to decision making, has been visible in the significant reduction of children available for adoption through placement orders being made in the year.

PERFORMANCE

Activity Overview - children	2016-17	2015-16	2013-14	2013-14	2012-13
Children with a Placement Order made (plan for adoption agreed by Court)	17	13	21	40	42
Children matched with adopters	14	21	32	29	28
Children with an Adoption Order granted	20	32	39	33	20

Numbers of children adopted have decreased to 20 in 2016-17. This was anticipated as in 2015-16 only 13 Placement Orders were granted compared to 21 in the previous year. This was the equal highest number in London alongside 4 other boroughs with the same amount.

The reduction in the numbers of Placement Orders being granted, and thus Adoption Orders made, is in line with national trends. For 2016/17 the 20 adopted represents 8% of children leaving care which is a 4% decrease compared to in 2015/16. The reduction in the number of Placement Orders also appears linked to a greater percentage of children coming into Local Authority Care in Southwark being aged 10 or over and therefore while there are no fixed age boundaries on when adoption is the right plan it is less likely to be the agreed plan for children aged 10 and over. Despite this reduction, 2016/17 figures indicate Southwark had the 2nd highest number of children adopted within South London Permanence Consortium and the level remains high compared to other London Boroughs.

In the last decade from 2006 the range of adoptions per year in Southwark ranges between 17 and 39 children per year. The main reason is the number of proceedings in the previous year and the number of children waiting. The decrease in adoptions is also impacted as children now move to their adoptive families in a much more timely way, so there are less children waiting for long periods. Support plans are now drawn up in detail prior to children being matched at Panel and this is meaning adopters are putting in their applications to adopt consistently within 6 months of a child being placed with them so adoptions are happening more quickly and children are not remaining placed for adoption without being legally adopted for long periods as discussions on ensuring the right support is in place for children is happening in advance of them being placed for adoption.

Of the 20 Children adopted in 2016/17 8 (40%) of these children were aged 4 or above at the time they were adopted and 4 out of 20 (20%) were aged 7 or above. The aged range for children being adopted was from aged 9 months to aged eight. Three of the children who were adopted had been placed from hospital with their carers under the Early Permanence Scheme. In Southwark 70% of the 20 Children Adopted were from a BME background and this compares to 74 % of Looked After Children in Southwark as at 31st March 2017 being from a BME background.

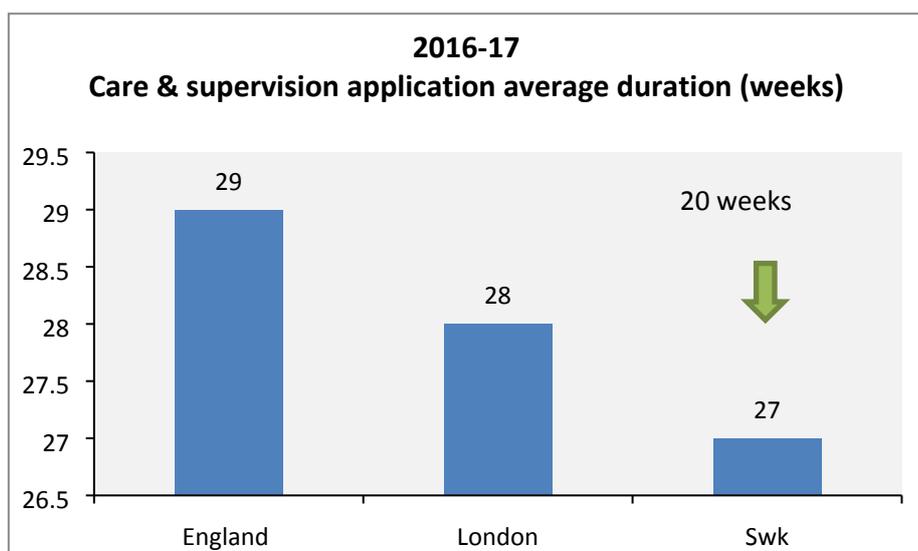
Numbers of placement orders made increased from 13 in 2015-16 to 17 in 2016-17 this is a small increase and it is anticipated that the number of Adoption Orders made in 2017-18 will be at a similar level of around 20 children.

Adoption timeliness for children

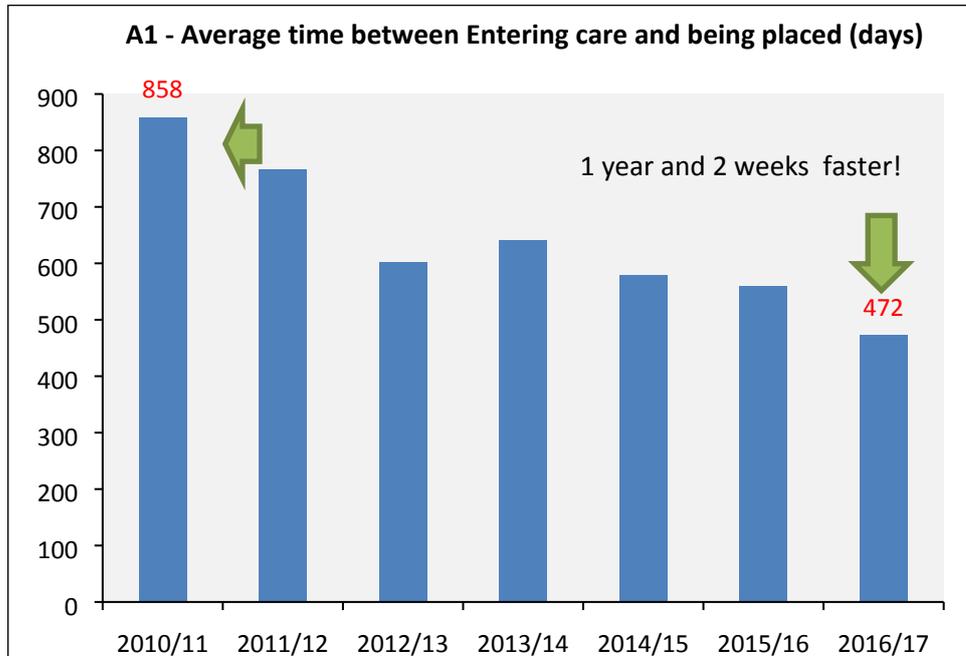
<i>The average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (A1)</i>					
Rolling 3-year average					
2009-12	2010-12	2011-14	2012-15	2013-16	2014-17
775	736	684	615	603	549*
Threshold 639	Threshold 608	Threshold 547	Threshold 487	Threshold 426	Threshold 426

(*Please note that data for 2014-17 is provisional as not yet published)

The table above shows continuing improvement since 2010 in the A1 figure which measures how many days from a child becoming looked after to the date they move in with their prospective adoptive family. The figure of 549 days for the rolling period of 2014-17 is indicative of ongoing improvement. Latest 2013-16 published data shows London at 599 days and statistical neighbours at 642 days. Southwark are successful in care proceedings being concluded within 26 weeks and this much swifter decision making is having a huge impact on reducing the amount of time children spend being Looked After before being placed with an adoptive family. This success in reducing the length of care proceedings is illustrated in the graph below.



The graph on the next page shows the average number of days for A1 in each individual year, rather than the 3-year rolling average, that children waited between entering care and being placed for adoption. The chart shows that in 2010/11 this was 858 days, last year 2015/16 this was at 560 days which was on par with the national average and in 2016/17 this reduced further to 472 days which is now below the national average.



Matching children with adopters

<i>the average time between court authority to place a child and match decision (A2)</i>					
Rolling 3 year average (days)					
2009-12	2010-13	2011-14	2012-15	2013-16	2014-17*
173	218	233	221	240	262*
		Threshold 152	Threshold 121	Threshold 121	Threshold 121

**Please note that data for 2014-17 is provisional as not yet published*

This performance area measures the number of days from a Placement Order being granted until a match is made for a child with an adoptive family. In looking at the rolling three-year average above the figure has increased and so it appears based on averages that the speed of finding adoptive families is declining. Detailed analysis of the data shows however that this is not the case but that the data is significantly impacted by some outliers. Latest 2013-16 published data shows London at 232 days and statistical neighbours at 267 days.

In 2016-2017 two children have really high A2 figures which significantly impact the averages set out in the table above. Both have an A2 figure in excess of 1000 days, one is a disabled little girl where a family member of her foster carer was assessed as her adoptive carer it meant she was adopted and remained in the foster family network and this was an excellent outcome for her. The other case was a little girl whose kinship placement broke down and she was then adopted by her former foster carer and this was again a very positive outcome for her. Analysis shows in 2016-17 that without these two cases included in the A2 average the A2 figure would be 162 days.

In 2016-17 there were 14 matches presented to the Adoption and Fostering Panel. In 9 of these the A2 figure was below the government threshold with a range of between 0 days and 92 days. The range was between zero days and over 1000 days. In the five cases where the A2 is over 92 days an explanation report is written to understand the reasons why and this is presented to the Permanence Taskforce which is chaired by the Director for Children and Families so that the Service is capturing the learning on the reasons for this which can be challenged by the Director and members of the Permanence Taskforce.

Children who are harder to place will continue to comprise a significant proportion of those that the Adoption Service in Southwark needs to find families for. This will need to remain an area that needs continuing focus and challenge to ensure we are not limiting the children for whom adoption may be the right Care Plan. The Service are committed to give all children the best possible opportunity of finding an adoptive family if that is the right care plan for them. It is critical to our service that we understand individual children's journeys and that our focus is on these not on the 'averages' in timescales. Southwark has during 2016 - 2017 sought to utilise their own adoptive placements, and use a range of other placements from Voluntary Adoption Agencies and other Local Authorities to ensure choice and that children do not wait longer than necessary for an appropriate match.

Early Permanence

The Early Permanency scheme began in October 2014 and gave it this name to cover both 'Concurrency' and 'Foster to Adopt' placements. The scheme built on an initial partnership and expertise from Coram as well as multi-disciplinary support from CARELINK who are a key part of the ongoing steering group for the scheme. We have had ten Southwark babies now placed in Early Permanent Placements. Five were placed soon after birth and 5 later but all under the age of 1 year old. Four cases were relinquished babies with one becoming subject to care proceedings due to mother's disengagement with social workers. Within the Permanence service, we also provided birth parent counselling and took on case responsibility for the relinquished babies once their parent/s had met with CAF/CASS worker which made case planning easier. Eight out of ten of the children were from a BME background and three out of 10 were placements made transracially. The Early Permanence placements require a high level of support to the adopters throughout the process as they are managing the uncertainty about whether they will be able to continue to care for the child, while assessments are undertaken of both birth parents and of extended family members. The key benefits of the Early Permanence scheme have been identified as being:

- Promotes early attachment and no disruption for the child if care plan for adoption is agreed.
- A high level of commitment and love has been observed towards the babies from carers from the start
- More opportunities for birth parents to build a relationship with the carers. In 7 out of 10 cases the early permanence carers have met the birth parents and in several cases the carers regularly bring the child to contact.
- Good for life story work in the future as carer is involved from beginning of story and knows birth parents more than mainstream adopters who may have one meeting.

Since March 2016, Southwark adoption service has led a steering group for South London Adoption and Permanence managers to discuss how we can work in partnership to promote early permanence placements across South London using adopters from both local authorities and voluntary agencies. This steering group has met bi-monthly to develop a strategy on how to work together and sharing information on children and adopters who are being considered for the early permanence scheme as well as disseminating learning across the boroughs. With Coram Southwark also submitted a bid to the "Practice and Improvement Fund" to the DfE and have got to the second stage of the application and are in the process of negotiating with Coram about our plans to develop the Early Permanence Scheme across London. This includes developing the training for early permanence carers, support group, some therapeutic input and improving consistency across south London regarding these placements. The outcome of this bid will be known during 2017-2018.

Relinquished Babies

The Adoption Service provide a service for birth parents that wish to voluntarily relinquish their babies for adoption. These assessments require intensive support by social workers including highly skilled counselling. The Adoption Service supported 2 relinquished babies during this period, both proceeded to placement with adopters. In one case the birth mother supported the identification of a foster to adopt placement to prevent her child needing to experience another loss moving from foster carers to an adoptive placement. In one case there is a high level of direct contact between the birth family and the adoptive family.

Children waiting for adoption

Number of children waiting as at the 31st March for each year:

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
35	44	48	45	18	7	9

The Adoption Service and in particular the Achieving Permanence Practice Group (APPG) carefully track children now working closely with colleagues in both Assessment and Intervention and Safeguarding using a permanence consultation approach. The aim is working together and achieving the right permanence for every child. The numbers for individual children can have a very statistically high impact for both A1 and A2 figures. As a service as well as looking at averages we have detailed management oversight of the journey for individual children and we want to be ambitious to find adoptive families for more children who cannot return to their lives in their birth families. Proactively exploring adoption for a greater number of older children and those with complex needs is a desired outcome to reduce the numbers of children in care and to open up this possibility for more children. It is however very likely to achieve adoption for more children then the impact could be skewing timescales so that averages increase and this will reflect on the Adoption Scorecard.

At the end of 2016/17 there were nine children waiting for adoption with Placement Orders. This included two sibling groups of three and two children. The sibling group of two were already linked with a prospective family with Panel booked in April 2017. The sibling group of three had high level of needs and the assessments indicated they would benefit from individual placements with ongoing support and contact with each other. For the four remaining children there was highly proactive family finding with possible links being followed up. The chart above shows while as of the 31st March 2017 there was a slight increase of 2 with 9 children waiting compared to 7 the previous year there is a trend to less children waiting for adoption.

The Adoption Service continues to extensively use all means possible to find adopters for children including Link Maker, the Adoption Register, advertising in Be my Parent, exchange days and activity days. All resources possible are used including DVDs and iPads to be able to show prospective adopters the most recent picture of children. Creative support packages that have been designed around the needs of the child in the adoptive family have enabled children with a higher level of needs to be adopted.

Siblings

The Adoption Service is highly committed that whenever possible siblings should be placed together and where this is not possible it is crucial that placements are found that enable brothers and sisters to stay in touch. Sometimes the needs of each sibling are too great for one carer to be able to meet them all. Siblings are considered harder to place because of their greater needs and the smaller pool of adopters who wish to care for them. All sibling groups for whom there is a plan of adoption are assessed using the Together or Apart Assessment Model (BAAF 2008) and work is often jointly undertaken with Carelink the CAMHS service for children looked after.

Of the 20 children adopted during 2016/17 there were 3 sibling groups of 2. Two sibling groups of two are placed together. One sibling group was separated due to a Together and Apart assessment showing both had such high needs in light of the abuse they experienced that a placement together would place them at significant risk of a placement disruption. These two siblings are in separate adoptive placements but have regular direct contact with each other which both adoptive families report has gone really well.

It is of note that the two sibling groups placed together who were adopted one group were both aged over 4 and the other was from a BME background and had been matched with an adoptive family in under the government target of 91 days.

Recruitment of adopters

Activity Overview - adopters	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013/14	2012/13
Adopters approved	10	21	25	29	19
Percentage approved within Government Minimum Timescales	100	21	16		
Adoption inquiries	319	264	262	341	217
Adoption breakdowns prior to Adoption Order	0	0	2	0	1

Numbers of adopters approved in 2016/17 significantly decreased. Recruitment became more focussed on assessing adopters who are able to meet the needs of Southwark children waiting for adoption, and in particular to meet the needs of older children, children in sibling groups and children who need early permanence placements. The service became really aware that assessing more adopters but adopters who were clear they only wished to care for children under two, meant in 2013-14, 2014-2015 there was a high number of adopters who waited a very long time to be matched which then required a high level of support to them waiting to be matched for children. The reduced number of adoption assessments also reflects that the adoption service moved from having two small teams assessing Social Worker's to one team and not replacing some assessing social workers when they retired or moved on.

There have been 319 adoption enquiries in the last year. This was an increase on the previous year. The team are now staying touch with more enquirers who are interested in fostering and adoption but are not at the time of enquiry ready to go forward with this due to other life events. Recruitment has also now got more of a focus on helping a Southwark child, so people can enquire and consider Adoption alongside Fostering or becoming a Family Link Carer. The Adoption Co-ordinator has also developed a link with the Service recruiting Independent Visitors for children looked after and for some applicants not feeling ready to pursue adoption or fostering they have volunteered for this scheme recognising it gives them really relevant experience if they later decide to pursue being assessed as a Foster Carer or Adoptive parent.

Adopter assessment timeliness

In 2016/17 10 adoptive households were approved from a wide range of backgrounds, reflecting the diverse ethnic communities in Southwark. This includes single carers and same sex couples. 6 of these 10 households were approved under the Early Permanence scheme as both foster carers and adopters.

In 2016/17 100% adoptive households were assessed within the National Minimum Standards of six months. This improvement began at the end of 2015/16 and has been consolidated and built upon by the service with visible and effective management oversight of key areas including:

- Efficient allocation of cases to Social Workers
- Contingency arrangements to cover periods of staff absence to ensure assessment continuity
- Efficient panel processes and referee visits
- More in-depth analysis of couple complexities
- DBS completed at earlier stage

Having reviewed these improvements all of these have been achieved and are now embedded in the adoption assessment practice. The aim over the next 12 months will be to continue to try to maintain all assessments being completed to an excellent standard within the required timescale while increasing pace in a new more robust framework to ensure the target of 15 adopter assessments are completed.

Approval to matched performance

The pace of matching adopters to children following their approval has improved in 2016/17. Out of 8 families approved as at Q3 2016/17 4 of these families were matched within 3 months. Four families were not matched within 3 months; one family were just 4 days over the 3 month threshold, one family was matched in 7 months (224 days) this family wanted a specific child who is the younger sibling to the two older siblings and the delay was in the Court process for this child, 1 family – matched in 10 months (321 days) were referred to the register promptly with regular and active family finding with links made however adopters decided not to pursue these and were matched with a London LA child, 1 family – was matched in 12 months (355 days) - referred to the register promptly, regular and active family finding with links made, including one with very complex needs.

Adoption disruptions

During 2016-17 there were no disruptions of placements of children placed for adoption and no information about any post Adoption Order placements made by Southwark disrupting in the year. Learning previous disruptions has been embedded into matching practice. The service aim is to continue to ambitious in trying to find adoptive families for older children, those in sibling groups and children with additional needs. In placing older children and those who have experienced high levels of harm prior to placement, a robust support plan is crucial, but it is also recognised that there is increased risk in adoption disruption in particular for children aged 4 or above at the time of placement.

Six adoption placements have disrupted prior to Adoption Order in the years 2006 to 2017. Two were placements with voluntary adoption agencies, three with Southwark and one with another local authority. This highlights a disruption rate of under 2%. From national research the estimated rate of post-order disruption is 3.2%. There is no data on pre-order disruption.

ADOPTION SUPPORT

The need for adoption support has continued to grow as more children have been placed for adoption and adopted. It is very much recognised that adoption now is not a one-off event, but something that evolves over a lifetime involving the child, birth parents and family and the adoptive family (the adoption triangle). It is a complicated and often a mix of joy and loss. Bespoke support is needed over time to support all involved in adoption and this will be required to varying degrees with some families never needing support and others requiring an ongoing package of support and most requiring some time limited support at critical points.

Adoption support plans are tailored to the individual needs of the child and their adoptive family, and are prepared prior to cases being presented to the Adoption and Fostering Panel for a match. There is a good range of effective pre and post adoption support provided by the in-house workers and commissioned services that are spot purchased as needed. The nature of support provided varies considerably, from advice on strategies for integrating children into families, telling difficult life story information, Theraplay support to promote attachment, in addition to specialist commissioned support with attachment difficulties.

A real strength in the Post permanence team is that a Psychotherapist from the Carelink CAMHS Service attends fortnightly group supervision and provides expert guidance and support to social workers and sometimes directly to adoptive families and accessing the right types of therapeutic support. In addition, the team is able to offer therapeutically informed support as all of the social work qualified staff are trained in Theraplay Level 1.

On 31st March 2017 there were 162 financial support packages for adopters. The adoption team are creative in utilising support packages for adopters to enable more children to be adopted. It remains the case that the majority of adoptions are made without an ongoing package of financial support.

Support groups

The Adoption Service has worked closely with Southwark We Are Family (WAF) to support and promote a number of groups within the area to meet the needs of adoptive families. The service greatly values the relationship with WAF which is an adopter led support and advocacy charity, established by Southwark adopters. WAF convenes a weekly support group which alternates between a morning play group one week and an evening adopter support group the next. These groups have both a support and social function and meet in Southwark. In addition, WAF holds monthly family meetings at the weekend to include working adoptive families. WAF also run a monthly support group for adopters who are waiting for children to be placed and have invited social workers from Southwark's post adoption service to share information at their group as well as speakers from the Virtual School and other interesting speakers.

In 2016/17 Southwark started a group facilitated by an Advanced Practitioner to provide help, advice and support to Adopters waiting across the South London consortium. Early feedback from this group is that it has been helpful and appreciated by adopters in addition to the group run by WAF. Southwark have also started a bi-monthly group for single adopters across the South London consortium and this is also reported by adopters to be helpful and was attended by a mix of adopters from across the consortium.

Southwark set up a South London Adoption and Permanence Consortium support group for all Early Permanence carers. This group runs on the last Friday of each month and has a varied programme which has included baby massage training and learning about Theraplay techniques.

Training

A rolling programme of training and workshops is provided for adoptive parents directly by the Southwark Adoption Service as well as training available through the South London Adoption Consortium and training events run by the Adopter led group 'We are Family (WAF). In 2016-17 this included a rolling parenting course "*The Great Behaviour Breakdown*" and rolling Saturday workshops. The topics for the Saturday workshops have included:

- "Exploring Identity and Difference in Transracial Placements"
- "An introduction to Adoption for Family and Friends" –
- "Managing the challenges of Adolescence"
- "Building attachment"
- "Making sense of adoption"
- "Moving into placement"
- "Supporting your child's education"

Southwark runs preparation training for adoption in partnership with Lambeth and Wandsworth and these groups run regularly at weekends and are facilitated by Social Workers and Managers across the consortium.

In 2016/17 Southwark were a lead agency together with PAC in setting up a PAN London Conference on supporting Adoptive Children in Education which took place in February 2017 and received very positive feedback from adopters and Social Workers who attended.

Adoption support fund

The Adoption Support Fund has been in operation since 1st May 2015 with 19.3 million available for agencies to apply for on behalf of their adoptive families for the provision of therapeutic services. The fund has been set up to reduce the gap between adoptive families needing therapeutic services and receiving them. In October 2016 the government has made an additional £2m available for the fund with a fair access limit of £5k per child for the duration of 2016 and which has continued since it was implemented.

To date Southwark have made 55 applications to the adoption support fund to support children and families placed for and post adoption and this includes some group applications and applications for some children to attend residential camps together with other adopted children. The total funding to date received by Southwark is £351,496.26.

Post adoption contact

The Adoption Service managed approximately 160 'letterbox' contacts during 2016/17 as well as in the region of 10 face to face contacts between adopted children and their birth families. The nature of this contact will vary from an annual meeting to very complex arrangements involving a number of birth family members (siblings, grandparents and parents).

The impact of social networking on adoption is far reaching and extremely difficult to support effectively. There can be safeguarding concerns as young people do not recognise the issues that necessitated the plan for adoption. It can also undermine the stability of the adoptive placement. The South London Adoption Consortium (SLAC) which Southwark is a member of held a training session on social media in 2016/17. This is an area which is ever changing with new software enabling the use of Social Media using face recognition technology. It is identified as an area for ongoing updating training needed for Social Work staff and even more crucially for up to date information and training to be available to adoptive families when they need this on a continual ongoing basis.

Work with birth families

The Adoption Service has a contract with South London Adoption Counselling and Consultation Service to provide independent counselling for birth parents. The take up of this service has been increasing over the last 2/3 years. During 2015/6 there were seven referrals of birth parents/family to the service: four were birth mothers, two were birth fathers and one was a birth Grandmother. Of those referred the two Birth fathers and two of the birth mothers engaged in counselling sessions. In 2016/17 there was an increase to 13 referrals for birth parents/ family to the service: 10 were birth mothers, 2 were birth fathers and one was a birth grandmother. Of those referred in this year 8 of the birth mothers; 2 birth fathers; and one birth grandmother engaged with counselling. It is thought this increase in birth family accessing support is directly linked to establishing PAUSE in Southwark who offer key support to birth mother's and often have proactively supported birth parents in accessing these sessions.

Mums supportive

In 2015 a support group for birth mothers who are separated from their children was set up. The group is run fortnightly in a community venue. A range of women attend the group, some of whom who have children who have been adopted, some subject to SGOs, and some whose children are within the care service. The group has around seven women who regularly attend and a cohort of around 11 who have attended some sessions. The group is a mixture of talking and activities that have included baking quiches, art and craft activities and has incorporated some Theraplay group techniques. The group facilitators have developed local community links with mental health and well-being services and the group development has been collaborative with the participating women. The group has recently celebrated its second-year anniversary and is strongly valued by the women who attend as a place where they have not felt judged and that has given them an opportunity to make friends. The group has benefited adoption as practitioners feel there is better offer of support for birth parents and there are cases where this support has meant birth parents are more able to maintain on-going contact via letterbox with their children or have been able to access birth parent counselling support.

Birth records counselling

The Council has a legal responsibility to provide a birth record counselling service to adult adoptees. Some of these requests are completed by the post permanence team social workers working directly with adult adoptees providing both counselling and a summary of the information on the file. Some of these requests in 2016/17 were undertaken by PAC on behalf of Southwark as part of a Service Level Agreement that was in place.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Adoption Service has a Quality Assurance Framework. This includes: effective adoption panel scrutiny; comprehensive adopter feedback; management oversight and review including audit activity; as well as learning from complaints and disruptions. During 2016-17 an Audit on Supervision and Management Oversight highlighted areas of improvement needed and an Action Plan was developed and recent audits and the scrutiny during the Ofsted inspection was indicative that management oversight is now consistently evident on children's and adopter records.

Adoption Panel (From January 2017 this moved to a combined Adoption and Fostering Panel)

The panel has undergone a significant change in the period October 2016 to March 2017. The previous Adoption Panel Chair stood down from his role in October 2016 after being the Independent Adoption Chair for a number of years. The Chair of the Fostering Panel since 2014 took over the role supporting the transition of the panel in becoming a joint Adoption and Fostering Panel which became effective in January 2017.

The rationale for this was to have a single panel with independent scrutiny of approval and matching for both foster carers and adopters. The joining of the panel functions creates administrative efficiencies and some financial savings. The strengths of this new panel approach becoming evident and going forward it will seek to ensure that children, adopters and foster carers have a consistent approach, and this is in regard to ensuring high standard of practice and robust and timely decision making. The overall aim is to deliver an integrated service to children requiring permanence through adoption and fostering, ensuring the care provided is of the highest quality and meets the needs of the children looked after in Southwark. There will be a quarterly review of the function of the joint panel to ensure it maintains a high standard in its service delivery.

Adoption Panels recommend prospective adopters for approval as adopters; matches of approved adopters with specific Southwark children; and the suitability of relinquished children for adoption. The final decision, in all of these cases, based on the panel's recommendation is made by the Agency Decision Maker, the Director of Children and Families. The panel is able to approve Early Permanence carers as both foster carers and adopters under both Adoption and Fostering Regulations,

Southwark's Adoption and Fostering Panel meets twice a month. There is also flexibility to organise additional Panels to ensure that panel dates do not ever delay permanence for children. In the lives of children days and weeks matter and there would be no hesitation to hold an extra Panel if this made a difference for an individual child being able to move to their adoptive family in the timescale that is right for them. In 2016-17 one additional panel was held.

All Adoption and Fostering panels are independently chaired. The chair writes a six-monthly report on the activity of the adoption service. The last report up to March 2017 identifies all of the PARs, CPRs and APRs in the year 2016/17 have been rated by the Panel as excellent or good. It is also acknowledged as significant improvement that all adopter assessments were completed within national minimum standards.

Adopter feedback

Adopter's views on the adoption service are gained as part of the assessment process but also routinely by questionnaire following approval, and when they have adopted their child or children.

Adopters work collaboratively with assessing Social Workers and they have an opportunity to write in and contribute their comments on the final PAR written by the assessing Social Worker to be presented to the Adoption Panel. In addition, at Panel adopters are asked by the Panel chair about their experience of being assessed and also post Panel have an opportunity to feedback on their experience of the Adoption and Fostering Panel.

In 2016/17 5 adoptive households returned feedback questionnaires following their approval as adoptive parents. All 5 described their experience of Southwark's Adoption Service from their first point of contact as being excellent. All of the adopters in their questionnaire said they did not feel there were any unnecessary delays caused by Southwark during the assessment process. Four out of five households described their experience of attending the Panel as being Excellent and one household described their Panel experience as good. In the survey they were asked to rate the service they received from Southwark from first enquiry to approval from 1 to 5 with 5 being the best and all 5 households rated their experience as 5 out of 5.

During the March 2017 Ofsted inspection of Children's Services, the Adoption Inspector met a group of Southwark adopters at different stages of their journey some pre- and some post children being placed and some who had recently adopted. In their feedback the adopters told the inspectors that they "highly rate the service that they receive from Southwark, informing the inspectors that '*they get things done*'. "

Complaints

Learning from complaints is a crucial aspect of the Quality Assurance Framework, which ensures continuous improvement in the adoption service. The service received one complaint in 2016-17 and this related to questions about the levels of financial support post adoption. The learning from this complaint was that it is essential that all support is clearly set out in an adoption support plan and that all parties have had time to consider this plan and have signed a copy. In looking at learning from this all support plans now are signed by all parties prior to the matching panel and then if there is a need for revision or additional support this should be added into the support plan with a re-signing to confirm the support.

REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS DURING 2016/17

Children go to live with their adoptive families quicker and without delay.

The A1 measure shows significant improvement in 2016-2017 and children are spending less time in care and are moving more quickly to their adoptive families. Tracking for every child is clear and as a Service it is very clear that there is commitment to achieving the best possible timescale for each child. The A2 measure on how long it takes from Placement Order to match is not improving as an average but this is well understood and there are particular outliers over 1000 days set out earlier in this report which have significantly impacted the A2 average.

Adopter recruitment: maintain a pipeline of adopter recruitment by assessing adopters that are reflective of service need.

There were 10 adoptive households approved in 2016-17 and all were assessed within the national government timeframes this contrasts to 2015-16 where only 4 families were assessed in government timeframes. The service improvement plan was effective in drastically improving the robust management of the timescales of adopter assessments so the pipeline works well. While assessment numbers have reduced the service are confident that the adopters approved are more likely to match more quickly with children.

Extend early permanence scheme to enable older children in care benefit from a potential dual approval carer. This will offer continuity of care for child and carers before adoption is achieved.

In 2016-17 the service had one adoptive family approved under the Early Permanence scheme as dual approval carers who were able to consider early permanence for a much wider age range of children. The recruitment co-ordinator is speaking to all prospective carers about the possibilities of caring for an older range of children and being dual approved to foster a child first and then have then the possibility to go on and adopt them. Discussions have happened with Sunshine House and Carelink on providing bespoke help and support to Dual Approved Carers. Some excellent foster carers who adopted an older child have also been consulted to be champions in recruitment to the scheme. The numbers of carers and children in a Dual Approval scheme are likely to be low but this is something that could expand the option of adoption to a wider pool of children and the at the Service is committed to continue to develop the early permanence scheme to option this possibility up to older children during 2017 -18.

Review and implement a refreshed adoption structure to respond to evolving service needs and regionalisation agenda.

In January 2017 the service structure was updated to reflect the reduction in the number of children for whom the plan was adoption. It was recognised that there was a need to strengthen the quality of Special Guardianship Assessments and one of the teams undertaking adoption assessments became the Special Guardianship Assessment Team. In line with having a joint Adoption and Fostering Panel the recruitment of adopters and foster carers was brought together under a Carer Recruitment manager, in line with the campaign on trying to encourage prospective carers to consider how they can help a Southwark child.

Maintain a permanent and skilled stable workforce – recruit permanent appointments to all locum, positions - Ensure all new team members are trained at Theraplay Level 1 with opportunities for staff to have supervision and become foundational level practitioners in using Theraplay techniques.

The Adoption Service is a fully permanent and highly skilled workforce and there was only one locum staff member during 2016/2017 who was covering maternity leave and has subsequently successfully applied for a role within the service following the retirement of an experienced social worker. All social work qualified staff are trained in Theraplay Level 1. Two social workers have received clinical supervision working to become foundation level practitioners. During 2016/17 an AYSE social worker successfully completed their assessed year in practice and undertook Theraplay Level 1 training. In the March 2017 Ofsted Inspection, the inspector wrote in their final report *“Children and adopters receive high-quality support from a stable, experienced and well-trained workforce, resulting in children benefiting from a permanent home. “*

Develop closer links with the lead in the Virtual School in Southwark and PAC to ensure all children placed for and who have been adopted have the best possible educational support.

During 2016/17 Southwark had a Service Level agreement with the Post Adoption Centre and offered additional support to adoptive families to ensure those that needed to have the best possible educational opportunities. The Adoption Service maintains a good relationship with the Virtual School and regularly consult with and get advice from the Education Advisors and the Virtual Head teacher. Southwark worked with PAC to help facilitate a PAN London event for adopters in February 2017.

The Adoption Service to be a key part in a campaign across children’s services to start life story work as early as possible to capture photographs and key memories for children in real time.

The Head of Service for Permanence chaired a steering group which champions for Life Story Work were identified across all of Children’s Services. The steering group organised training day on 1st November 2016 for both social workers and some foster carers and adopters facilitated by Richard Rose who is an expert in Therapeutic Life Story Work and an experienced social worker in the Care Service. This day was attended by over 50 people and received really positive feedback. The Adoption Service also developed templates for social workers working with children prior to them becoming looked after to write down key memories about the child. The focus of the group was that Life Story is not a one-off event or something that happens retrospectively it is about capturing and recording memories in real time. Workshops have been running facilitated by an experienced social worker from the Care Service and a Supervising Social Worker in the Fostering Service for foster carers on Life story work.

Life Story work is so vital for all looked after and adopted children, this campaign needs to continue and gain momentum in 2017/18 and needs to be a collaboration across Children’s Services working with families, adopters and foster carers. It is recognised that there is some very high-quality Life Story Work undertaken in Southwark but there needs to be ongoing development of this and also ongoing challenge to ensure it is always done in the best possible timeframe for the child. In the March 2017 Ofsted report it is noted that: *“Life story work is of high quality. Comprehensive and sensitive descriptions of the reasons for children entering care, histories of their birth families and their cultural identities through pictures and photographs provide helpful illustrations. The books also include details of foster families and children’s new families. Some adoptive parents spoke of how they regularly refer to the books with their children to help them to understand their pasts. Later life letters are clear, accurate and sensitively written”.*

DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR 2017 -2018

We will continue to ensure that children move to their adoptive families quicker and without delay. We will always strive to achieve the right timescale for each child understanding their needs and individual journeys and remaining ambitious to achieve adoption for all children where this is the most appropriate care plan. We will carefully measure Southwark Performance using the Adoption Scorecard.

We will maintain high quality adopter assessments being all undertaken within the national minimum standards. We will increase the pace of assessments being undertaken while maintaining the quality with the aim that in 2017-18 that the target of 15 adoptive households are approved.

We will develop the Life Story Work Works campaign to build upon the work undertaken in 2016-2017 and to have an ongoing dynamic approach that co-ordinates Life Story Work across Children's Services that works with social workers, birth family members and all carers in an ongoing and dynamic way.

We will further develop the Early Permanence Scheme to include approving adoptive carers who can meet the needs of older children initially under a fostering arrangement but with the approval to go on and adopt if that is the right care plan for the child. We will continue to consider early permanence for all children where adoption is a possibility. We will continue to lead practice across the South London Permanence Consortium and to increase the scope of this work if successful in application to the Practice Innovation Fund with Coram in 2017-2018.

We will improve the quality of our transitions to ensure children have the best possible transitions when moving from foster care to adoption. In 2017-2018 we are participating in a research study with the University of East Anglia looking at how introductions happen in practice and how children move from foster care to adoption. The study will look at materials to support the best transition and how the introductions can be done in the most child centered way at the pace of the child. In addition, the study aims to promote foster carers retaining ongoing contact with children post adoption as adopted children and adults have spoken of the benefits of these continuing relationships. We would seek to use the learning from this research and the materials to support children who are moving not only to adoption but for children moving between foster placements.

We will work proactively with regionalisation to ensure any changes to our services positively impact our children and adopters. We are committed to working to continually improving the offer for children, adopters and birth families. Southwark managers and practitioners want to be at the centre of discussions about regionalisation ensuring changes have a positive impact and that we are able to promote and expand the areas of good practice where Southwark have lead service development for SLAPC.

Item No. 13.	Classification: Open	Date: 6 November 2017	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Fostering Service Annual Report 2016-17	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director, Children and Families	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the corporate parenting committee notes the annual report of Southwark Fostering Service 2016-17.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The purpose of the annual report document is to report on the activity of the Fostering Service fulfilling obligations in the Fostering Services Regulations (2011) to review and improve the quality of care, and National Minimum Standards (2011) to report to the executive side of the local authority. It will cover: performance and developments in Southwark's delivery of fostering services; how the council is compliant with key national minimum standards; and the service offered to those seeking to foster and those children in care who are fostered.
3. This report is presented late due to delays in finalising data within the report.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

4. Southwark fostering service continues to provide good quality care for a significant proportion of children and young people in care to the council.
5. Southwark Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted in March 2017 and rated as good overall with a needs improvement sub-judgement for children looked after and achieving permanence. The Ofsted report highlights very important areas of improvement for the Fostering Service which form part of the Fostering Service Improvement Plan for 2017-2018.
6. In 2016-2017 Southwark Fostering Service published an updated Foster Carers Handbook which is based on the Secure Base Caregiving Model. The updated handbook is an excellent resource and has been positively received by foster carers in Southwark.

Community impact statement

7. Southwark is committed to ensuring children looked after by its fostering service, from all parts of the community, are enabled to live close to their communities as far as possible and appropriate and with families able to meet most of their needs.

REASONS FOR URGENCY

8. Corporate parenting committee are not due to meet until February 2018 and it is necessary for the committee to consider the report at this meeting so that they are given a chance to provide feedback and consider any of the relevant issues arising, at the earliest opportunity.

REASONS FOR LATENESS

9. It is not been possible to circulate this report five clear days in advance of the meeting because due to delays in finalising data within the report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Annual Report – Southwark Fostering Service

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Alasdair Smith, Director, Children and Families	
Report Author	Alasdair Smith, Director, Children and Families	
Version	Final	
Dated	2 November 2017	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
	Officer Title	Comments sought
	Director of Law and Democracy	No
	Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No
	Cabinet Member	No
	Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	2 November 2017

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2016/17

Annual Report

Southwark Fostering Service

KEY MESSAGES

Southwark Fostering Service continues to provide good quality care for a significant proportion of children and young people in care to the council.

Southwark Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted in March 2017 and rated as good overall with a needs improvement sub-judgement for children looked after and achieving permanence. The Ofsted report highlights very important areas of improvement for the Fostering Service which form part of the Fostering Service Improvement Plan for 2017-2018.

In 2016-2017 Southwark Fostering Service published an updated Foster Carers Handbook which is based on the Secure Base Caregiving Model. The updated handbook is an excellent resource and has been positively received by foster carers in Southwark.

PURPOSE OF ANNUAL REPORT

The purpose of the document is to report on the activity of the Fostering Service fulfilling obligations in the Fostering Services Regulations (2011) to review and improve the quality of care, and National Minimum Standards (2011) to report to the executive side of the local authority. It will cover: performance and developments in Southwark's delivery of fostering services; how the council is compliant with key national minimum standards; and the service offered to those seeking to foster and those children in care who are fostered.

This report details the work of Southwark Council Fostering Service from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

When a child enters care, it is one of the most important and significant changes in their life and it is critical that the families who look after these most vulnerable children through foster care are the best they can be. As part of its wider agenda to create a fairer future for the most vulnerable children and families, Southwark Council wants every child to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. For those young children who cannot remain or return safely to their birth families, good quality foster care offers them the best opportunity to experience a warm and loving family environment while the most appropriate plans are made for their future.

The Fostering Service is a service for children in care. It is committed to supporting stable placements for children and young people where foster care is the identified plan. The service is a key element in the council's drive to place more children and young people with Southwark foster carers in or near the borough where possible. It is a fundamental part of our sufficiency strategy to develop enough in-borough placements with the range and capacity to meet the needs of Southwark's children who cannot live at home for whatever reason.

The aim of the Fostering Service is to provide high-quality care for children and young people in safe, secure and nurturing families. The fostering service in 2016- 2017 have fully embedded the Secure Base Caregiving Model. We aim to develop highly skilled foster carers, supported by reflective, challenging and enabling social workers. Our goal is to give children and young people the best possible childhood, to help them become valued members of society and to maximise their life opportunities.

National Fostering Context

While Adoption has had strong Government focus many years there has been less focus and scrutiny on foster care which is where most children looked after live. In October 2016 the Education Committee in Government announced a Fostering Inquiry to take place which would look at:

- The recruitment and retention of foster carers, and the capacity of the fostering system
- Stability of foster care placements, including the impact of the Staying Put initiative since its introduction
- The role of voluntary and independent foster care providers, and their relationships and cooperation with local authorities
- The foster care market, including the costs of commissioning of services, financial incentives in the recruitment of foster carers
- The sufficiency of current recognition, support and recompense given to foster carers
- Foster care for young people with specific or challenging needs, and its relationship with residential care
- The involvement of young people in their care, including their role in decision making
- What the Government should consider in its stock take of foster care

The Inquiry had a call for written evidence up till the 25th November 2016 which Southwark fostering service contributed to. Oral evidence was then given to the committee by a broad range of academics, foster carers and practitioners in February 2017. The subsequent General Election led to a break in the Inquiry and to date the report from the Inquiry has not been published.

In addition to this, in 2016 Edward Timpson the former Children's Minister announced a national fostering stocktake. Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers were appointed by the Secretary of State for Education to conduct the stocktake. Its aim was to gain a really good understanding of the current state of foster care in England and how the prospects of children in care might be improved through changes to fostering. They wanted to understand what is working well and why, where improvements are needed to achieve better outcomes for children and identify areas where further research is needed. This renewed Government focus on fostering is likely to lead to increased understanding of what works well and how this can be achieved for more children to enable more children to have placement stability in high quality foster placements.

CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE IN SOUTHWARK

Activity Overview - children	31st March 2014	31st March 2015	31st March 2016	31st March 2017
Children in care	550	500	475	498
Children in foster care	424 (77%)	390 (78%)	369 (78%)	381 (77%)
Children with Southwark registered foster carers	242	228	241	231
Children with Independent Fostering Agency carers	144	129	96	109
Children with friends & family foster carers	38	33	32	41

There has been a slight increase in the number of children in care on the 31/03/2017 compared to 31/03/2016 this represents a percentage increase of 5%. The DfE National Statistics for the year ending 31st March 2017 reflect a national increase of 3% in the number of children becoming looked after in England so the increase is close to national trends. This date shows 74% of children in care in England are in foster care. In Southwark this is 77%. This has been consistent over the last 4 years.

The last year has seen a decrease in the percentage use of Southwark's internal fostering provision based on the data on the 31st March 2017 compared to the 31st March 2016. It is notable, based on this snapshot approach, over the last 3 years usage of IFAs declined by 24% and use of our own foster carers declined 5%. The overall care population declined 10%. Thus in the round our own Fostering Service holds up very well in relation to caring for the great majority of children within the council's care.

While this data is important, it only gives a snapshot picture of the number of children on a specific date. During 2017/18 we want to be able to report in a way that gives a more accurate picture of use of the internal placement over the 12 month period. At the end of 2016-2017 and into 2017-2018 work has begun to ensure the MOSAIC electronic recording system is able to have a highly effective foster carers register with all key foster carer data. This will enable much more accurate data collection and analysis.

In terms of understanding why on this specific date less children were in Southwark foster placements there are two key factors. Firstly the age profile of children entering care in Southwark has increased with more children aged 10 and over are becoming looked after. Secondly is being part of a sibling group, in particular being part of a sibling group of more than 2 children. This is as carers approved for 3 or more children are limited as many Southwark carers may have an existing child in their family or may not have the physical space for more than two children.

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As stated last years annual report, finding placements for teenagers with challenging behaviour, gang affiliation, those at risk of child sexual exploitation and those at risk of or stepping down from residential care is a growing challenge and often have led to the use of external IFA's and residential care. In 2017-2018 the Fostering Service will carefully consider what we can do help give Southwark foster carers the resources and support that they need to meet the needs of more children in this group. In 2017-18 the challenge will be to work with foster carers and with the newly formed Clinical Service to be able to co-design what this clinical and peer support can look like and to also consider bespoke financial packages for foster carers taking very challenging placements in particular as an alternative to or as a step down from residential care for children.

In their report of the 13th June 2017 Ofsted state; *"There is a lack of sufficient placements for adolescents who have challenging behaviours..."* This a key area to develop in 2017- 2018 and over the next five years the challenge is great and will involve partner working with foster carers, health, education, the Clinical Service, the views of young people as represented by Speakerbox and requires an outward looking approach of investigating together with the commissioning service what has worked in other local authorities who are working to meet this challenge.

The use of Friends and Family Foster care has increased with 41 children placed with Friends and Family Foster Carers compared to 31 children in the previous year. This is an increase from around 9% to 11% of the children in foster care and has enabled siblings to continue to be placed together. There is now a lead Advanced Practitioner leading on Friends and Family care in the Fostering Service and a very clear process for assessment and support. There have now been two sets of friends and family carers who have expressed interest as the children they have cared for are growing up in continuing fostering for non related children, and this pathway is a way to increase the capacity of the Fostering Service.

SOUTHWARK FOSTER CARERS

Activity Overview – foster carers	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Foster carers approved	10*	9	14
Foster carers ceased approval	8	4	13
Friends & Family carers approved	7	9	1
Family Link carers approved	5	5	5
Matches for Long Term Foster Care	3	3	4

**Approval was of 8 new full time fostering households, one respite household and one household who had resigned and then later re considered and were reassessed and re approved by the Panel.*

Recruitment of foster carers

Southwark fostering recruitment and assessment was outsourced to an external agency for a two year period from 2013-2015. The in-house recruitment hub became established from May 2015 and in 2015/16. In November 2016 the Fostering Recruitment Manager who had worked in Southwark for a long period retired. An Interim Carer Recruitment Manager was recruited. Recruitment is underway for a permanent Carer Recruitment Manager, and there is also exploration of what has worked in other local authorities to significantly increase the pool of in-house carers. It is recognised that currently while Southwark has a relatively large Fostering Service. On 31/03/2017 there were 203 Fostering Households (including Connected Persons and Family Link Carers) there are not currently enough placements to meet the needs of Southwark children.

In 2016- 17 Southwark Recruitment Hub received 216 enquiries from households about becoming foster carers. For 2017-18 we are tracking monthly how many of these enquiries and subsequent initial visits were from households within the borough. Since April 2016, a recruitment incentive to attract Southwark residents to foster is Council Tax relief to all approved Southwark foster carers. The first quarter of 2017-2018 is showing a significant increase in enquires from Southwark residents and it is anticipated recruitment will be higher in 2017- 2018 with at least 15 households approved, 8 of these within Southwark. All enquirers who live in Southwark are informed about the Council tax offer and this was advertised on the back of all Southwark Council tax bills in 2017-2018.

It is acknowledged that this level of recruitment over the last few years is not providing the number placements needed for Southwark children to provide sufficiency and choice. A key part of the sufficiency strategy going forward will be looking critically at our system and thinking about what we need to do differently to recruit the families that children in Southwark require.

Retention of foster carers

Understanding the retention of foster carers is critical. Fostering Network reported in 2017 that on average a service will lose 10% of carers annually through, retirement, adopting, changing career and de-registration. While our data does not show this level of carers formally ceasing to foster, there is an increasing trend for foster carers to step-down from fostering to staying put placements without formally ceasing their registration as foster carers. This trend masks a higher rate of carers ceasing to foster and we will look at that more closely during 2017/18. It should be emphasised that this is still a very important contribution to supporting a young person on their journey to adulthood.

The Fostering Service responds promptly and efficiently to issues and concerns raised by foster carers. Communication includes newsletters and e-mails and phone calls about community events and opportunities. Fostering supervising social workers visit carers monthly to support carers in their role, assessing the support needed prior to each new placement which contributes to increasing carers' confidence and capabilities in taking children with high needs. There is a monthly support group and coffee morning which takes place in East Dulwich, as well as a group run in Kent where there are a high number of Southwark foster carers. The group run in Southwark has regular attendance from staff in the Fostering Service as well as foster carers. A retired staff member facilitates the group in Kent. The support group often have guests on topics such as Welfare Benefits and on new initiatives for children in care. At the carers request every 3 months there is also a therapist available to offer carers massages to help them relax.

In November 2016 there was a training day with Professor Gillian Schofield and her team reviewing the impact of implementing the Secure Base model in partnership with Southwark. On this day supervising social workers fed back on case examples where they had used this model together with foster carers and the difference this had made to the child and foster family. Two key messages came out of this day. Firstly, for foster carers to be able to provide a secure base for the children that they look after it is critical for them to be provided with a secure base in their relationship with their supervising social worker, with the fostering service supporting them. Secondly, while the Secure Base model was successfully implemented in the Fostering Service, some of the barriers and challenges had occurred as the roll out of the model was not fully implemented with all children's social workers and it was felt that this was really important to happen in a way that directly involved foster carers who were using and had seen the difference the approach made. Events have been planned in 2017/2018 where all social workers in the Care Service will receive training on the Secure Base model. Southwark foster carers who are using this approach will be helped to deliver this.

In April 2015 a new training program for Southwark Foster Carers was launched closely aligned to the payment policy for foster carers with clearer development pathways for them. The program was developed to integrate a systemic and therapeutic approach to retain, support and enable foster carers to look after children who require more than “ordinary” parenting. Much of the training is underpinned by the Secure Base model as a foundation, and the more advanced Empathic Behaviour Management (EBM). The aim of the two approaches empowers foster carers to develop confidence and equip them with the right skills and techniques to help children experience safe and secure care. There have now been 40 carers trained in EBM with 3 courses in 2016-2017 and this involves a 2-3 day training then follow up interactive workshop which takes place over 6 weeks. Follow up support on EBM happens in a support group every 2 months and is regularly attended by up to 15 carers.

Support for foster carers

Despite its rewards, foster care can be a very demanding vocation. Southwark’s Fostering Service recognises this and understands good outcomes for children can only be achieved when foster carers feel valued, supported and equipped to provide the love and care that children who may have experienced neglect, harm and loss require.

Support is a generic term which in a fostering context encompasses the following:

- Allocation and support of a dedicated Supervising Social Worker during the working week and access to dedicated out of hours support 7 days a week.
- Foster carer induction for all newly approved households and as a refresh to existing foster carers.
- A comprehensive post approval training programme that incorporates therapeutic care giving model. The aim of this approach is to help foster carers feel confident and equip them with the right skills and techniques to help children experience safe and secure care.
- A more advanced approach to caring – Empathic Behaviour Management for more challenging behavior.
- Training pathway for foster carers to enhance professional development and quality of placements linked to a clear payment approach.
- Therapeutic intervention and support from a lead clinician, medical advisor, education, and Carelink service to support children in placements and the fostering household.
- Regular carer support groups accessible for all foster caring households.
- Regular communication and information sharing is maintained via emails, quarterly fostering newsletters and coffee mornings.

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- Southwark Foster Care Association (SFCA) is an foster Carers group that brings Southwark foster carers together to provide a stronger voice to influence and develop services for Southwark. Carers benefit by having an opportunity to come together and share ideas to develop the service for them and the children in their care. The aim is to enhance foster care involvement by empowering carers to jointly lead social events, recruitment activities and buddy schemes etc.
- An annual foster carers dinner dance is held to thank carers for their commitment to improving the lives of looked after children and young people in Southwark. It is an opportunity for them to enjoy and relax for an adult night out. In 2016 this event was also attended by the Southwark Mayor which was very much valued by the foster carers who attended.
- Recognising and acknowledging the dedication and commitment of Southwark foster carers who make a difference to vulnerable children and young people is evident in the nominations and awards.
- Membership and advice to Fostering Network for all Southwark foster carers which offer independent advice and support with allegations.

Staying Put

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a duty on the local authority to provide 'staying put' arrangements for fostered young people to continue to live with their former Foster Carer beyond their 18th birthday and potentially up to the age of 21 years if they are in education. This is a welcome development for young people who have not developed the maturity to move into independent living and who want to remain as part of a family. The service was well placed to implement these changes as we were already enabling young people to remain in their placements while they completed exams and were prepared fully for independence.

On 31st March 2015 there were 19 young people remaining in Staying Put arrangements, while on 31st March 2016 the number had risen to 40. On the 31st March 2017 there were 46 young people remaining in Staying Put arrangements this is broken down into 35 in provision with their former Southwark foster carer and 11 with former IFA carers. It is positive for young people this number is rising as staying with a former foster carer at 18 is what is best for many young people. This does however present a challenge as it impacts the availability of foster placements for children. It is a key part of offering a secure base to children that they are supported to obtain full family membership, a key aspect of this is being able to remain in a family setting until they are ready for independence.

Short Breaks Care

The Fostering Service had 31 short break respite carer households offering care to 46 children with disabilities one weekend a month allowing the child's parents to have a break. Short break Foster Carers are specialist carers assessed and matched to a particular child. These carers generally develop a good relationship with parents and often provide care for the children for many years. The short break service is part of the wider support service for families where a child has a disability and enables children to remain within their families and communities while at the same time providing a much needed break for parents.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Fostering Service has a Quality Assurance Framework. This includes: effective fostering panel scrutiny; foster carer feedback including an annual survey; management oversight and review including audit activity; as well as learning from complaints and disruptions.

The audits areas in 2016-17 included: unplanned moves; supervisory visits; placement support and stability; and management oversight. All of the audits led to an analysis of results shared with managers and social workers in the service and the development of an improvement plan. Key messages included the need to place more importance on Placement Planning meetings, and the need for need for Stability Meetings to happen early in placements when there are difficulties, rather than later when issues "set in" and the focus moves towards a potential "disruption". The audits had also picked up the need for an improved recording and performance protocol in the Fostering Service. Electronic records were not consistently up to date with supervisory visits and reviews were not always being signed off in the required timescale. These areas were picked up in the Ofsted inspection during March 2017.

Arising from this, there has been increased management oversight to ensure that updated DBS checks are undertaken well in advance, and this updated information is promptly recorded in Mosaic so all are within timescale. In 2017-18 monthly performance meetings are being introduced with clear standards to ensure visits, unannounced visits, reviews and statutory check are within timescale with reports to senior managers on Mosaic to monitor compliance.

Fostering Panel (From January 2017 this became a joint Adoption and Fostering Panel)

Fostering Services Regulations (2011) and National Minimum Standards (2011) require a Fostering Panel to be constituted, chaired by an independent person. Panel members include representatives from the Children's Social Care and independent members with a range of experience. The panel makes recommendations about the approval of foster carers, matches of children for long term foster care and in certain circumstances reviewing the approval of foster carer. The combined Panel is able to approve Early Permanence carers as both foster carers and adopters under both Adoption and Fostering regulations. Final decisions, based on the panel's recommendations are made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), Director of Children's Social Care.

From January 2017 the Adoption and Fostering Panel combined. The Chair of the Fostering Panel since 2014 took over the role of chairing the Joint Panel which takes place fortnightly.

The rationale for this was to have a single panel with independent scrutiny of approval and matching for both foster carers and adopters. The joining of the panel functions creates administrative efficiencies and some financial savings. The strengths of this new panel approach becoming evident and going forward it will seek to ensure that children, adopters and foster carers have a consistent approach, and this is in regard to ensuring high standard of practice and robust and timely decision making. The overall aim is to deliver an integrated service to children requiring permanence through adoption and fostering, ensuring the care provided is of the highest quality and meets the needs of the children looked after in Southwark. There will be a quarterly review of the function of the joint panel to ensure it maintains a high standard in its service delivery.

Foster Carer feedback

Results from the Foster Carer Survey of Southwark foster carers in November 2016 found:

93% considered the support they receive from their Supervising Social Worker to be good or excellent. In one case a foster carer wrote: *"I don't think there is anything my SSW could do better. She is 100% supportive, always very informative and prompt to return calls. She keeps me updated with training and events, nothing is ever too much trouble for her and I value her enormously."*

76% considered the overall support they receive from the service as good or excellent. This was a 1 % rise from the previous year.

62% considered the support from the child's Social Worker as good or excellent.

Having an annual questionnaire for foster carers is very helpful for the Service but is acknowledged for the last few years the response rate is very low with under 25% of carers returning these questionnaires which in 2016 were online and available as a paper copy. Foster carers are busy meeting the needs of children and often juggling, school runs, fun activities and contact and completing questionnaires either online or on papers seems not be well received. For 2017-18 we are looking at other ways to promote this annual survey to increase return rate as well as focus groups with a lunch where foster carers can meet other carers and give feedback to the Quality Assurance Lead and managers in the service. In addition consideration is being given to whether an online platform such as *Yammer* could be developed securely for foster carers to connect with each and with staff in the Fostering Service.

Complaints

Complaints made against the fostering service are taken very seriously and investigated thoroughly by the complaints team and by fostering managers. The learning from complaints is shared amongst the whole team, and changes are made where appropriate to the practice and processes of the team.

In 2016/17 there were three complaints made by foster carers (or former carers). One carer made several complaints, one of which was upheld. This related to the carer's early experiences as a new foster carer and the lack of important information given to her at the start of a placement by the children's social worker. This overshadowed all subsequent relationships with Southwark staff, and led to difficulties in communication. The lessons learnt were the importance of preparing new carers for the role which lead to improvements in the comprehensive post approval induction programme to ensure new carers have more input at the start of their fostering career. The service is in process of implementing a buddy system of experienced carers with new carers.

The second complaint related to a carer not being given written notification that her approval had been terminated. The complaint was upheld and there is now a process in place whereby carers are formally notified by letter of termination of approval.

The third complaint related to the length of time taken to undertake a fostering assessment. The complaint was upheld, and systems have been reviewed to ensure this does not happen again.

REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR 2016/17

The following is a review and progress update of the development plans set out in the Annual Report in 2015/16:

Quality and stability of placements – Making Placements Better

Develop and implement an Access to Resource Service to offer an integrated and coordinated service to manage resources effectively to make placements better. This will maximise placement choice, strengthen matching and support placements from the outset.

This action was not fully achieved during 2016/2017 although considerable progress was made to set the foundations for this which will begin operation fully from October 2017. The Access to Resources Team (ART) involves the Brokers from Commissioning Service in Tooley Street, moving to Children's Services and merging with the Fostering Placements Team. This will create a one stop shop approach for placements with social work leadership. The foundation work for this has been undertaken during 2016/17. Consultation work has been completed to develop a new Integrated Referral Form which will give a more thorough, balanced and personalised picture of each child looking for a placement to help ensure the best possible opportunity to find the best possible placement. The movement to a single team to consider all referrals for resources and placements will lead to the team developing stronger links with social workers to build profiles and find the best possible placement for each child.

The ART will endeavour to fully utilise the pool of Southwark approved carers. The team will also encompass the Contact Service which will enable the development of how contact workers and other experienced foster carers can be drawn upon to provide additional support to foster carers and enable full use of the in-house resource and improve placement stability. The ART will sit within the Permanence Service and for some children looking for a long term placement the family finding experience and skill of the Adoption Service will also be drawn upon with joint allocation to an adoption social worker to support family finding. In 2017/2018 significant development work will happen in ART to include a review to look at how the Clinical Service can help create packages of support to particularly support carers to care for adolescents with challenging behaviour and those at risk of or stepping down following residential care.

Review and amend the permanence structure to realign the teams within the appropriate function.

In 2016-2017 the Permanence Structure was reviewed this led to a reduction in some roles in Adoption and the creation of a Special Guardianship Assessment Team.

Recruit to vacancies to achieve a competent and motivated permanent fostering workforce.

In 2016/17 the Fostering Service moved to a position of having a permanent social work qualified workforce. There were two agency members of staff who were covering sickness and maternity absence. The Supervising Social Workers in fostering are passionate about supporting foster carers to provide the best possible care for the children they look after. The supervising social workers are all trained in and using the Secure Base model with foster carers. The fostering workforce while supporting foster carers are child centred and when standard of care or allegations occur these are dealt with carefully and sensitively working with the LADO where this is required.

Review and evaluate the Advanced Practitioner role to strengthen and develop leadership and management support in the fostering service.

This was considered as part of the review of the Permanence Service, however the Advanced Practitioner is the key frontline manager role across Children's Service and it was decided the role would continue as part of the key leadership team with the Practice Group Lead and Head of Service role.

Embed the Secure Base framework as the care giving model across the permanence service.

Secure Base is embedded across the Permanence Service and most strongly within the Fostering Service. In 2016/17 workshops on Secure Base took place with both the Adoption Service and Virtual School were well received. In 2017- 2018 we will continue to further embed Secure Base as part of the Practice Framework across Children's Services and Foster Carers will be involved in delivering this.

Permanent Fostering – policy and practice guidance with a scheme for more internal placements

Develop a permanence consultation approach and offer to ensure early permanence planning for fostering or kinship is considered at the earliest opportunity for children and young people.

The Achieving Permanence Practice Group (APPG) in the Adoption Service now ensure that permanence consultations consider all possible permanence options. If the most likely permanence option is fostering then a follow up permanence planning meeting is held with an Advanced Practitioner in the Fostering Service. The approach to permanence for all children is set out at Appendix 1.

Review and streamline the long term fostering process for children whose care plan is permanent fostering. This will include a refresh of the policy and practice guidance to comply with statutory changes.

It was recognized in 2016-2017 that achieving permanence for children whose plan was long term fostering needed to be given much higher priority. A monthly Permanence Panel is now in place to track and challenge quality and permanency planning, focusing on key cohorts such as younger children as it is key for permanence planning to happen as early as possible. This Panel will report to the Permanence Taskforce which is chaired by the Director of Children and Families to ensure the most senior oversight on raising the priority of children in foster care being matched with robust support plans to appropriately matched long term foster placements. This approach is designed and modelled on what has worked effectively in the Adoption Service.

Supportive Lodgings Scheme to be developed to support young people's transition to independence and balance the demand and requirements of "Staying Put" arrangements.

The Supportive Lodging Scheme has not yet been developed during 2016-2017. It is planned that the Permanent Carer Recruitment Manager who is appointed in 2017-2018 will be able to work with partners to develop this scheme. It is hoped that the Catch 22 Southwark Care Leavers innovation partnership can work with the Carer Recruitment manager to design, develop and recruit to a Supported Lodging scheme.

Capacity of Service – to increase the number of active fostering households by 25%

Review and evaluate the effectiveness of the fostering recruitment hub and implement developments for 2016/17.

During 2016-2017 the existing manager retired and an Interim Manager was appointed. The new manager and the advertising with all households in Southwark receiving a Council tax bill has led to increased activity in fostering recruitment which is predicted to be reflected in at least 15 households being approved in 2017- 2018. In 2016-17 recruitments was of 8 new full time fostering households, 1 respite household and 1 set of carers who had resigned but then re-considered and returned to Panel where they were re-approved as foster carers. The impact of the hub has been reviewed and improved working practices and leadership has lead to significantly increased projections of fostering approvals during 2017/18.

Implement the fostering recruitment strategy with a much greater focus on utilising digital and social media.

Digital and Social Media have been used in campaigns in 2016-2017 including Facebook Adverts and paying for higher priority in google searches. Digital newsletters that go to all households in Southwark have included adverts for adoption and fostering in Southwark. The evidence shows while this has some impact the biggest and most powerful recruitment resource which Southwark need to harness more effectively is word of mouth from other foster carers. In 2017-18 part of the renewed approach will be working with and having champion foster carers for recruitment.

Develop a recruitment group that incorporates foster cares and Speaker box representatives to support recruitment activities for 2016/17.

An Interim Carer Recruitment Manager has developed a close working relationship with Speakerbox who support care leavers to facilitate and present at the Skills to Foster training. A renewed recruitment drive is needed for 2017 -2018 and a steering group with Speakerbox representatives, foster carers, the Communication Department, the Carer Recruitment Manager and Head of Service is needed to drive recruitment plans for 2018 -2022 in line with the new Sufficiency Strategy.

Refresh and maintain a foster carer register to ascertain actual vacancies. Carers who have routinely been vacant need to be resolved to either increase their scope to foster or cease approval.

Significant improvement work on MOSAIC started in 2016-2017 to enable the system to hold a Foster Carer Register and effective workflows that allow reports to be drawn from MOSAIC. This work is continuing into 2017-18 and it anticipated would be completed in early 2018. The Service holds a foster carer register currently as a Secure spreadsheet but the aim is for all information and the register to be up to date and on MOSAIC which is essential for the ART team and making placements.

Friends and Family Carers – analyse and review service need to respond to increase in demand and efficiencies.

There is a trend for an increased number of Friends and Family Carers with 41 children placed with friends and family carers as at 31st March 2017. The option of remaining within the family network is positive for many children, for some this will be via a Special Guardianship Order so that the child does not remain Looked After but has a plan of support in the placement. In 2017-2018 the Service has a Fostering Support Team who leads on Friends and Family foster care and the process and has a Special Guardianship Assessment Team. In 2017-2018 the processes for becoming both a Friends and Family Foster Carer and Special Guardian should be reviewed to ensure we are doing our utmost to support children who cannot safely be cared for by their parents to have high quality placements with the right level of support.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2017- 2018

We will recruit more foster carers able to meet the needs of Southwark Children and to ensure creative and robust support plans to enable more children to experience family life in foster care.

We will do our best to approve at least 15 fostering households in 2017-2018 and at least 20 households in 2018-2019. To have specific targeted recruitment to particularly meet the needs of complex needs older children, respite placements, crisis intervention, siblings, and parent and child placements.

To review in 2017- 2018 the Fostering Payments Policy and to consider the development of higher paid specialist carers for Adolescents with challenging behaviour and children with extremely high support needs.

We will work with Speaker Box and the Comms team to see how the Siblings Matter to Me campaign could be used to attract potential foster carers and adoptive carers who would like to explore caring for a sibling group as this is a significant area of need for children in Southwark.

We will work with the Head of the Clinical Service and with current foster carers to develop support for placements that could enable foster carers to look after children with higher level needs.

We will build on what the EMB group have started with experienced foster carers becoming Buddy's to newly approved carers, or carers starting their EMB training. The EMB support group have also started a Whats App group to support each other outside of the support groups and this could be built upon for more groups of carers.

We will work with the Care Service to ensure that all children in care have on-going high quality Life Story Work and that they are supported to develop and maintain connections with people who matter to them.

We will promote and champion an ongoing programme of workshops, champions and training for life story work, as part of the Life Story Work *Works* ...campaign including helpful templates, guidance and standards. This will build on the work which we started in 2016 which included regular workshops and training for foster carers. We are one of 7 Local Authorities who are working with the Family Rights Group who received DfE Innovation funding to pilot the **Lifelong links a** with 50 Southwark children over a three year period. The Lifelong Links trial will be aimed at under 16 year olds who have been in care for less than 3 years and for whom there is no plan for them to live within their family or be adopted. The trial will be independently evaluated to determine whether Lifelong Links is effective in improving outcomes for children in care. This funding will enable 50 Southwark children to have a detailed genogram completed and then the Life long links co-ordinator would seek to link with extended family members and key connections in the child's life (which could for example include former foster carers) working with the child and their foster carer to then hold a family group meeting to look at how the extended family may be able to offer ongoing support and relationships with the child. <https://www.frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-group-conferences/lifelong-links>

We will ensure that achieving permanence is as robustly tracked and pursued for all Looked After Children as it is currently for children with a plan of adoption.

We will consolidate and further develop a monthly Permanence Panel to carefully track for each child with a plan of remaining in looked after that this is being proactively pursued in a timescale that is right for the child. For all children to have a permanence plan and support plan and for this to be quality assured and presented to the Adoption and Fostering Panel for a match. To always remain open to other permanence routes for some children looked after to include, rehabilitation, placement with family members, adoption and special guardianship.

We will ensure that the Permanence Taskforce has the information needed to track and have oversight on the number of children matched and timescales for this to be able to monitor and scrutinise that progress is being made. We will also look at how we as Corporate Parents can creatively celebrate children being matched and achieving permanence in foster care.

We will ensure that the Access to Resources Team have the best possible information about children to achieve the best possible placement.

We will develop a new integrated referral form to be implemented in 2017-2018 to ensure the best possible information is captured about every child highlighting their views, challenges, likes and dislikes and personalities. We will develop workshops on creating profiles for children to support finding the right placement for every child. We will develop close working relationships between the Children's teams and Access to Resources Team so that there are face to face meetings and conversations to capture the best possible up to date information for placement referrals.

Exploration of what other ways could be tried to find families for children who on paper referrals foster carers feel they cannot meet the needs of. In adoption Adoption Activity days have been ways in which children have met adopters who may not have otherwise felt able to meet the needs of an older child or a child with their profile. Coram have tried these Activity Days with local authorities and 2017-18 Southwark would like to explore running an event for children and both Southwark Foster Carers and IFA carers for children looking for a long term family some of whom may currently be in residential placements.

We will ensure a robust Fostering Service improvement plan is in place to ensure all statutory checks remain in timescale and that recording on foster carer records is of an excellent standard.

In 2017-18 we will implement a Fostering Service improvement plan to raise the quality of recording on foster carer files and ensure, visits, unannounced visits, reviews and all statutory checks are undertaken within the required timescale and the evidence is on the electronic file.

We will seek to place more children and young people in, or near to, Southwark and ensure for those needing to be more than 20 miles from Southwark there is a Lead Manager tracking that they are not disadvantaged by living away from the borough/

For the Fostering Service to ensure that strategic connections are developed via a Lead Manager for all Southwark approved foster carers living more than 20 miles from Southwark so that children placed with these carers are not disadvantaged by slower access to Services in particular to CAMHS support.

CORPORATE PARENTING DISTRIBUTION LIST (OPEN)**MUNICIPAL YEAR 2017-18****NOTE:** Original held by Constitutional Team; all amendments/queries to
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