

Item No. 11.	Classification: Open	Date: 21 April 2011	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Annual Adoption & Fostering Service Report	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Children's Services	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To note the annual report provided for Corporate Parenting Committee on the Adoption & Fostering Service for the period 1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010.
2. To note that the Statements of Purpose in regard to the Adoption and Fostering Services are at the present time being fundamentally revised to reflect changes in the regulations, best practice developments and also the restructure of the services that is being put in place on 1 April 2011. It is anticipated that the revised Statements of Purpose will be presented to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

KEY MESSAGES

3. The Council has a sound and strong performing Adoption and Fostering Service and this has been confirmed by Ofsted inspections of the services
4. The Fostering Service has a large pool of 205 fostering households as at 31st March 2010 (compared with 208 on 31st March 2009). This is an ethnically diverse group of foster carers, reflecting the ethnicity of the Council's looked after children. Consequently it is generally possible to place children with a foster family that is well matched in cultural and ethnic background. This is an important aspect of meeting children's needs and in achieving placement stability.
5. The Adoption service continues to make good progress in placing children for adoption, where the courts have decided this is in the best interests of the child, and in placing children without undue delay in families that are able to meet the child's needs including identity needs.
6. At the end of the year 2009/10, the service is anticipating the introduction by the government of new "sufficiency" regulations that will place additional requirements upon all local authorities in planning strategically with partners in order to maintain a sufficient range and quantity of placement opportunities for looked after children. The committee will receive a report in the coming months giving further information on these regulations and measures to be put in place to ensure compliance.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. Southwark's Adoption and Fostering Service is part of the Children looked After (CLA) Business Unit in the Children's Specialist Services Division. The service has a key role to play in meeting the department's strategic aims in relation to:
 - Providing permanency and placement stability for looked after children;
 - Reducing the number of children looked after by adopting children from care;
 - Reducing placements costs by providing an ample supply of foster carers and prospective adopters so that the department is less dependent on higher cost independent fostering agencies and residential care.
 - Providing a high quality placements service which will contribute to improving outcomes for children looked after
4. Southwark is an approved adoption agency under the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005
5. The adoption team undertakes the following key functions:

Supporting two independent agency adoption panels who make recommendations with regard to:

 - the suitability of adoption as a permanency plan for specific children
 - whether a proposed adopter is a suitable person to adopt a child and whether the child should be placed for adoption with a particular approved adopter or adoptive couple (this is known as the "matching process")
 - recruit and assess appropriate potential adopters for recommendation as adopters by Southwark's adoption panels
 - deliver post adoption support to adopted children and their new families
 - manage post adoption contact between adopted children and their birth families as directed by the courts
 - provide specialist advice and support to looked after children social work teams who are considering adoption as a permanent outcome for identified children
 - deliver overseas adoption advice, assessment and support service
6. A service manager provides management direction and oversight for the Fostering and Adoption service. The adoption team is staffed by a team manager, 2 practice managers, senior practitioner (post adoption support) and team of social workers. The Service Manager and the Adoption Team Manager retired in 2010, and the service is now being reorganised, to meet both the requirements of the new care planning guidance, and to respond to the need to reduce costs.
7. Adoption is one of the most highly regulated and high profile areas of childcare practice. An adoption order irrevocably transfers full parental responsibility (PR) for a child to a new parent or parents including changing of the child's name. The making of a final Adoption Order by the Courts removes parental responsibility from the birth parent. However, in some circumstances there can be post adoption contact between birth parents and the child. This can be directed by the court through the making of a contact order or it may be a voluntary arrangement subject to the agreement and discretion of the adoptive parents. In all cases the primary concern is the best interests of the child.

8. The 2002 Adoption Act, which came into effect in 2005, introduced a new order known as Special Guardianship. Special Guardianship was created, following a lengthy period of consultation, to provide the Courts with an alternative permanency outcome for a group of children for whom adoption was either not achievable or desirable. It was thought that Special Guardianship would be particularly applicable to older children and in situations where it proposed that a child should be looked after permanently by a member of the child's extended family, such as a grandparent or aunt. A Special Guardianship Order confers parental responsibility to the permanent carer but does not go as far as adoption with regards to removing PR from the birth parent(s) and changing the child's name. Carers who are granted Special Guardianship may also be eligible for ongoing financial and social work support from the local authority and other agencies where appropriate.
9. Adoption performance (adoption and SCO orders granted) is reported to the Department for Education (DfE) on an annual basis as part of the set of performance indicators relating to children in public care. Southwark's adoption performance is then benchmarked against other similar local authorities.
10. Ofsted also undertakes regular independent inspections of Adoption services.
11. Southwark Council is a "fostering service provider" under The Fostering Services Regulations 2002. These regulations (and the accompanying National Minimum Standards 2002) require the local authority to compile a written statement of purpose setting out the aims and objectives of the fostering service and also a statement as to the services and facilities to be provided by the fostering service. The relevant National Minimum Standards specify that the elected members should "formally approve the statement of purpose of the fostering service and reviews, updates and modifies it where necessary at least annually".
12. Southwark's fostering service covers an inner city area containing a wide range of racial and cultural diversity. It provides fostering placements for children and young people aged from 0 – 18 who are looked after by the council either on a voluntary basis or as a result of a court order. The service also provides respite or short term breaks for children with disabilities who live with their families (family link scheme).

The service manager with overall responsibility for the fostering service also oversees the adoption service. The fostering team is staffed by a team manager, three practice managers (one of whom manages the family link service) and a team of social workers.

13. The fostering service has a number of key responsibilities, these being:
 - The recruitment, training and approval of foster carers.
 - Publicising and advertising the fostering service so as to maintain a constant supply of people interested in being assessed as foster carers
 - The delivery of a planned short term break scheme for children with profound disabilities who usually live with their families.
 - Delivery of ongoing support to foster carers including specialist advice (drugs, teenage pregnancy, education, health) and direct support concerning challenging behaviour (care link).
 - Delivering foster care allowances (payments)
 - Maintaining appropriate safeguarding and reviewing systems for all

approved carers

- Provision of a 24 hour support, advice and back up system for Southwark carers to improve placement stability and resilience.
- Deliver comprehensive post approval training for Southwark foster carers.
- Deliver additional supports to enhance foster carer provision of leisure, recreation, access to libraries and on line learning materials to support education.

14. The Adoption and Fostering service also has responsibility for delivering independent fostering and adoption panels who are legally required to approve and review foster placements and approve and match adoptive placements.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Adoption & Permanence Service

Adoption Panels

15. During the year 2009/2010 Southwark has had two Adoption panels operating, each chaired by an independent chair. The panels recommend children for whom adoption is in the child's best interests, recommends prospective adopters for approval as adopters and recommends matches for approved adopters with children. The final decision, based on the panel's recommendations is made by the Agency Decision Maker (Business Unit manager for the CLA Service).

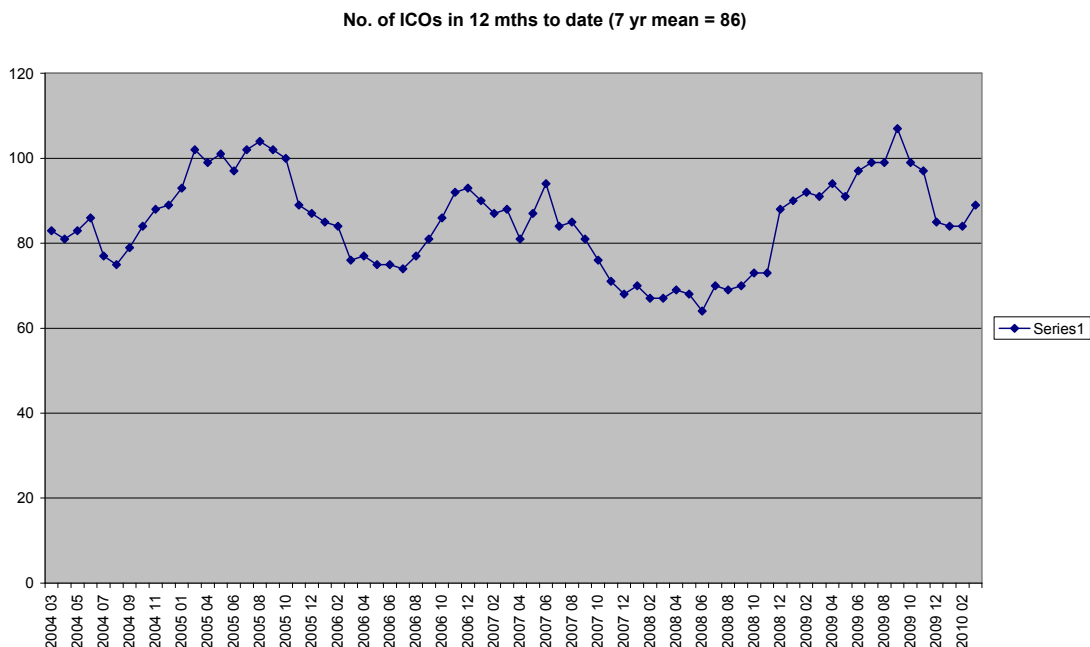
Adoption Panel Activity 2003/04 – 2009/10

	2009-10	2008-9	2007-8	2006-7	2005-6	2004-5	2003-4
Children:							
Decision for Adoption	28	23	34	29	31	31	25
Applicants:							
Domestic Adoption	16	17	16	11	14	15	11
Inter Country Adoption	3	03	02	02	03	04	01
Matches:	12	27	31	14	28	29	17

Comments on Adoption Panel activity and outcomes

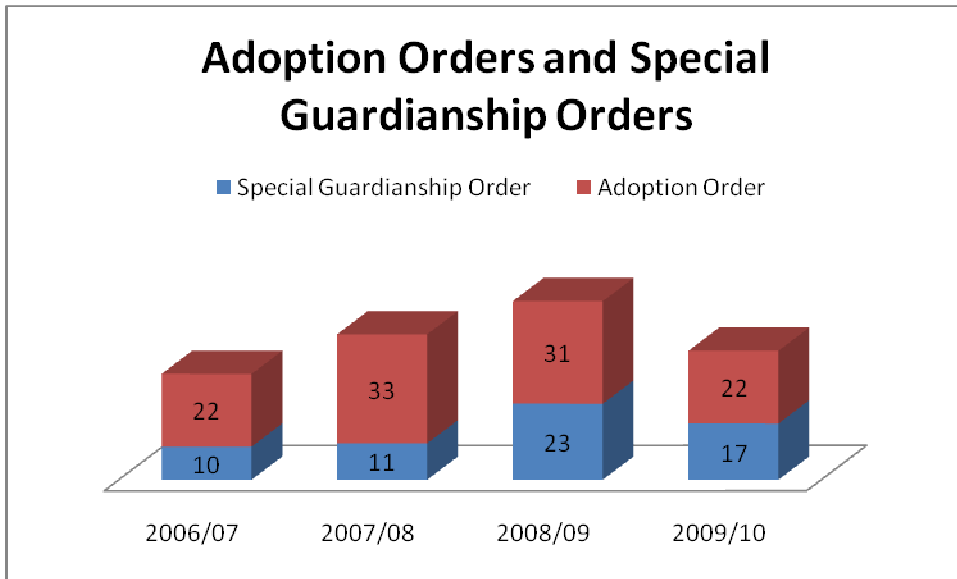
- During the year 2009/2010 the two adoption panels have seen an increase in the number of children being considered for an adoption decision (28 as compared with 23 in the previous year).
- The year 2009/10 saw a sharp drop in the number of children who were matched to adopters following a recommendation by panel (12 as compared with 27 the previous year). The main reason appears to have been the lower number of

decisions for adoption made in the preceding year – this was the lowest number in the previous 5 years. Lower numbers of decisions in one year will result in lower numbers of matches the following year. The lower number of decisions to adopt is directly related to the lower number of court proceedings with proposed care plans for adoption during the year 2008/9. The graph below illustrates this showing the period of 2008/9 having perhaps the lowest number of court proceedings for at least 5 years. Trends in adoption performance are most significantly influenced by levels of care proceedings. Notwithstanding this the number of matches is probably lower than expected and this is most probably further explained by the delays experienced in court proceedings experienced from Autumn 2009, following the publicity around the death of baby Peter, all through 2010. It is estimated that the well publicised reduced capacity of the courts and CAFCASS to deal with cases in a timely way lengthened the time it took for final orders (Placement Orders) to enable children to be adopted. This is supported by the bar chart below showing that SGOs as well as Adoptions reduced in this year demonstrating that issues were related to court proceedings and outcomes generally not just Adoption. Alongside this there is the ongoing challenge in finding carers for children with a high level of need.



- Of the 12 children matched, 3 were placed for adoption with their foster carers and a further 3 were placed for adoption with family members.
- 16 new prospective adopters were recommended for approval. This is in line with the number of new approvals over each of the previous five years. These new prospective adopters are then available as adopters for Southwark children or children from other local authorities. Whenever a child is placed by another local authority with an adopter approved by Southwark, this is known as an inter-agency placement and the placing local authority pays an interagency fee to Southwark.

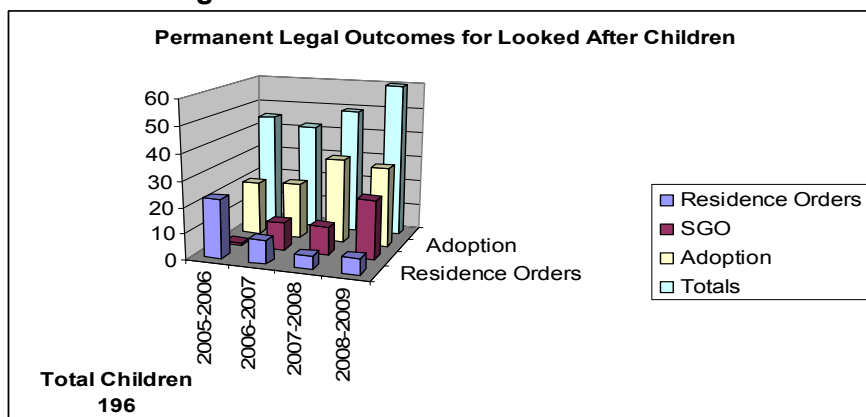
Permanency Outcomes – Adoption Orders and Special Guardianship Orders



Adoption Orders and Special Guardianship Orders

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Special Guardianship Order	10	11	23	17
Adoption Order	22	33	31	22
Total	32	44	54	39

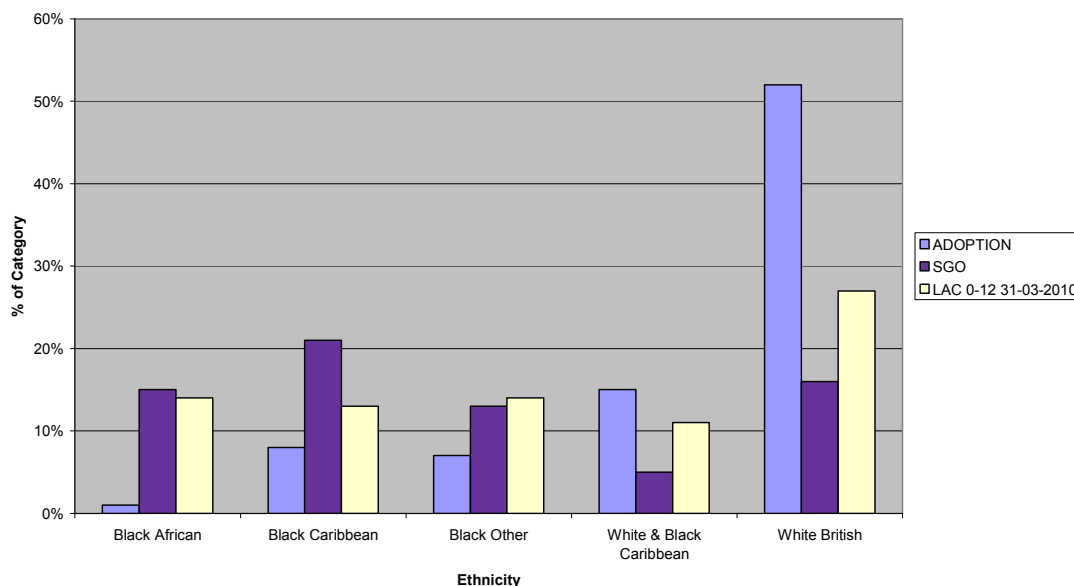
Permanent Legal Outcomes



22 children were adopted during this period and 17 were made the subject of Special Guardianship Orders.

Permanency outcomes by ethnicity of children

Comparison - Adoption / SGO / CLA 0-12 by Ethnicity - 5 years to March 2010



16. There is an on-going challenge to the care system to enable the adoption of children of black and minority ethnicity. This is a national issue and the above graph illustrates the evidence supporting this within Southwark. What it also shows however is that special guardianship as a route to permanence in Southwark for BME children illustrating there is a legitimate and well used facility through the courts that enables such children to leave the care system and achieve permanence with family members. The introduction of Special Guardianship Orders was made deliberately with the value base of enabling a route to permanence for BME children in recognising that some minority ethnic communities have religious and cultural difficulties with adoption.

Permanence Tracking

17. There have been regular quarterly meetings chaired by a senior manager, involving CLA 0-12 Team Managers, Adoption & Permanence Service and Independent Reviewing Officers to track the permanence plans of all children looked after aged 7 years and under. About 120 children have been tracked through this process to ensure that there are no avoidable delays by the local authority in permanency planning for these children. These meetings often highlight complex legal and interagency issues

Panel Training & Panel Review Day

18. Members of both Adoption Panels attended a Training Day in December 2009 to examine trends and emerging practice issues. The day included input from an adopter and from an external expert. Feedback from people attending the training indicated that they had found it stimulating and helpful.

Children's Adoption Day Celebration

19. The 5th adoption celebration was held for Southwark adopted children in April 2009 with a range of entertainment provided. It was attended by approximately 70 children and 80 adults. The event celebrates being adopted and is also used as an additional opportunity for children to have contact with their siblings and with previous foster carers.

Ofsted Adoption Inspection programme

20. The Southwark adoption service was last inspected by Ofsted in December 2008. These inspections tend to occur every 3/4 years so there is a high chance of an inspection during 2011.

The following is a summary of the findings of the 2008 Adoption inspection by Ofsted.

Summary Extract

21. The overall quality rating is good. This was a key, announced inspection, conducted over five days by two inspectors.

"Southwark delivers a solid and strong adoption service with elements of outstanding practice in all outcome areas inspected, but particularly so in relation to the support offered to adoptive families who commented, for example: 'Southwark was amazing and would recommend it to everyone' "

"Adopters are welcomed without prejudice; they are highly satisfied with the way their assessment and preparation is conducted and with what is offered to enable placements to settle and develop into stable families."

"Birth parents value the information and support received and the arrangements made regarding direct and indirect contact, to ensure that children maintain heritage."

"There is excellent attention to individual needs and the positive promotion of diversity. This is especially so in relation to the identification and support of adoptive children's emotional and mental health issues and the successful work done to find adoptive placements for children with disabilities."

"There is a commitment to improve the quality and timeliness of life story work. There is a sense that all are aware of its importance; the shortfalls are mainly caused by difficulty in finding the time to do it."

"No actions arise from this inspection. Recommendations are made regarding a number of records, applications from prospective adopters and the support to birth parents before adoption. "

The Fostering Service

22. The following is a summary of the statistical information provided to the then DCSF for the year ending 31 March 2010.

	Descriptor	2009/10
1	New fostering households approved	6
2	Number of fostering households at year end	205
3	Number of households deregistered	9
4	Number of new fostering households approved	6
5	Number of exemptions (an exemption is where a foster is asked to look after more than 3 children who are not all part of a sibling group)	18
6	Ethnicity of approved foster carers - white - mixed - Asian / Asian British - Black / Black British	128 7 0 153
7	Placements on 31 March 2010 - Approved placements - Filled placements - Vacant placements - Non available placements	332 307 12 13
8	Number of places purchased from independent fostering agencies on 31 March 2010	91
9	Number of sibling groups not placed together where the LA placement assessment was for them to be placed together	0
10	Number of long term placements	64
11	Number of time limited placements	223
12	Number of emergency care placements	10
13	Number of disabled children who used short break services in full year	31
14	Number of "family and friends" placements	34
15	Number of parent and baby placements	6
16	Number of unplanned endings of placements of over 3 months duration	14
17	Number of applications from new prospective foster carers	22
18	Number of new fostering households approved	6
19	Number of foster carers who have successfully completed CWDC training	10
20	Ethnicity of foster children placed with the service on 31 March	

	Descriptor	2009/10
	- White	83
	- Mixed	64
	- Asian / Asian British	15
	- Black / Black British	139
	- Other	6
21	Number of placements provided to children seeking asylum	19
22	Number of allegations of misconduct made against foster carers	11

Recruitment

23. Recruitment plays a key role in Adoption & Fostering Services and we operate in a competitive market for both adopters and foster carers. Successive inspections of both areas have commended the impressive support to both foster carers and adopters.

As noted previously, we have a high success rate in placing children in-house, initially but we wish to increase capacity for children who require long term fostering, and that requires a different strategy.

Developing and commencing a Long Term Fostering Strategy will be a key objective for 2009.

Policy implications

24. There are no policy implications contained in this report. Community impact assessment would say that where ever possible Southwark seek to recruit foster carers from within the London Borough of Southwark. Southwark is in a unique position however as one of the biggest social landlords in the country which places it at a disadvantage because of the statutory requirement that children should have their own bedroom. By its nature, the allocation of council tenancies does not afford residents additional bedroom space. During the last twelve months however the fostering service has revised its screening processes in partnership with Southwark housing where potentially high quality applicants (likely to become approved following the assessment process) could be allocated a larger tenancy.

Resource implications

25. There are no resource implications outlined in this report.

Community impact statement

26. It is judged to have no or very little impact upon local people and communities.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Method of Statement for Adoption Method of Statement for Fostering	47B East Dulwich Road	Can be requested in writing from Paul McCarthy at Children's Specialist Services

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Rory Patterson, Deputy Director, Specialist Children's Services	
Report Author	Chris Saunders, Head of Services for Children in Care and Susan Sinclair, Team Manager Adoption and Fostering	
Version	Final	
Dated	7 April 2011	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director, Communities Law & Governance	Yes	No
Finance Director	No	No
Cabinet Member	Yes	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	7 April 2011	