

<b>Item No.</b> 10.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 8 November 2011	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Adoption Service Report	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Strategic Director of Children's Services	

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To note the revised Adoption Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide to Adoption which reflects changes in regulations, statutory guidance and National Minimum Standards as well as the restructure of the Service from 1 April 2011 (Appendix 1).
2. To note the annual report provided for Corporate Parenting Committee on the Adoption Service for the period 1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011 and Mid Year Report 1 April 2011 – 30 September 2011 (Appendices 2 and 3)

## KEY MESSAGES

3. There has been a significant rise in the number of children placed for adoption which should see an increase in the number of adoptions in the year 2011/12.
4. Special guardianship while increasing over the past 12 months is projected to significantly decrease over 2011/12 as a whole, with full care orders slightly increasing overall with an over-representation of black African children.
5. New regulations now require adoption agencies to submit two annual reports (full year and mid year) to their respective executive (see paragraph 18)
6. Interest in adoption has increased with more activity in recruitment, preparation and assessment. This is anticipated to continue for the coming months.
7. Scrutiny has increased on family finding activity with tracking, auditing and analysis improving with the intention to deliver better outcomes

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

8. Southwark's Adoption Service is delivered primarily through the Adoption and Permanence Team. It is part of the Children Looked After (CLA) Business Unit in the Children's Specialist Services (CSS). The Service has a key role to play in meeting CSS's strategic aims in relation to:
  - Providing permanent families and placement stability for CIC (children in care)
  - Reducing the number of CIC by adopting children from care;

9. Southwark is an approved adoption agency under the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011)
10. The Adoption Service undertakes key functions as set out in the proposed Statement of Purpose 2011/12 (Appendix 1)
11. Significant changes to the management and structure of service delivery in respect of adoption were implemented from April 2011. The Adoption and Fostering Service Manager and the Adoption and Permanence Team Manager retired in Autumn 2010. The Service was reorganised and the Adoption and Permanence Team moved to the management of the Service Manager for CIC 0-12 years. This was both to meet the requirements of renewed regulation, statutory guidance and National Minimum Standards relating to all aspects of CLA, and to respond to the need to reduce costs. In doing so this created a natural synergy with social work teams heavily involved in the above strategic aims particularly around adoption.
12. Adoption is one of the most highly regulated and high profile areas of childcare practice. It has received increased national political scrutiny. An adoption order irrevocably transfers full parental responsibility for a child to a new parent and therefore is a very carefully considered process.
13. Adoption performance (adoption and Special Guardianship 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.
14. Ofsted is expected to undertake an inspection of Adoption Services in the second half of 2011/12

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **Changes in regulation, statutory guidance and NMS**

15. Significant changes in adoption regulations were introduced by the DfE at the same time as many other areas affecting CIC, such as children's homes, friends and family care, fostering services, care leavers and children looked after generally in respect of care planning. The renewed emphasis on *permanence* reiterates the importance of system wide awareness that the clock should be heard ticking for children from the moment they come to the attention of Children's Services, with time '*reckoned in days and months rather than years*'. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: *Care Planning, Placement and Case review: Statutory Guidance (DfE 2010) paragraph 1.5*)
16. The proposed Statement of Purpose 2011/12 takes into account all these changes and central values and its revision has been instrumental in enabling the agency to reflect on a number of areas of its approach.
17. Each care plan for a child is expected to have a clear pathway to permanence. Adoption standards and guidance have to be seen as part of a much broader agenda to improve outcomes for CIC. In summary there is an impetus for better care planning and more responsive adoption services.

18. A key part of this imperative is explicit oversight by those responsible for the adoption agency. NMS 25.6 states as follows: *The executive side of the local authority, the voluntary adoption agency's/Adoption Support Agency's provider/trustees, board members or management committee members:*
- a. *receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every 6 months;*
  - b. *monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users;*
  - c. *satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration*
19. Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 3.3 expands on the above outlining the information required to be provided to the 'executive side'. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report below.
20. Accordingly Southwark's Adoption and Permanence Service have produced the required reports/documentation: -

Revised Statement of Purpose	Appendix 1
2010/11 Annual Report	Appendix 2
2011/12 Mid Year Report	Appendix 3
Children's Guide to Adoption (Leaflet)	Appendix 4

**Policy implications**

21. Statutory guidance, regulations and procedures have lead to some changes in policy for example transracial placement of children. This is integrated into the Statement of Purpose 2011/12 which captures all key changes.

**Resource implications**

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

**SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

**Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance**

23. The legal implications are set out in the report.

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
1	Statement of Purpose 2011/12
2	Adoption and Permanence Report 2010/11
3	Adoption and Permanence Report 2011/12 Mid Year
4	Children's Guide to Adoption (Leaflet)

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Rory Patterson, Assistant Director Children's Specialist Services & Safeguarding	
<b>Report Author</b>	Chris Saunders, Head of Services for Children in Care	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	25 October 2011	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Strategic Director of Communities, Law and Governance	Yes	Yes
Finance Director	No	No
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	26 October 2011	