

Item No. 9.	Classification: Open	Date: 29 April 2013	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Adoption Service Annual Report	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Children's and Adults' Services	

RECOMMENDATION

1. To receive the Adoption Service Annual Report and note the recommendations of the Adoption Improvement Plan which seek to deliver a step change in the number of approved adopters and children adopted from care.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. There is a heightened level of interest and scrutiny both nationally and locally in local authority performance on adoption. In the last Ofsted Inspection of Southwark's adoption service in January 2012 the service was rated as good with some outstanding features.
3. The first adoption scorecards were published November 2012 and covered data for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2012. The scorecard covers a range of performance indicators averaged over a three year period. The scorecard highlighted a number of performance concerns for Southwark, particularly in relation to the length of time children had to wait between entering care and being adopted, and the number of children who were waiting to be adopted based on the number of placement orders granted by the courts in relation to Southwark children. The second release in November 2013 will not yet evidence the strong improvements made during the year in Southwark's approach to adoption, as the data is based on a three year period.
4. The report fulfils the regulatory requirement to provide an annual adoption service report which describes current activity and future challenges.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

5. Current performance information indicates that some children in Southwark are waiting too long to be adopted. However, performance improves when delays associated with foster carer adoption are taken into consideration. The number of children waiting for adoption has reduced and this brings Southwark in line with some other London authorities.
6. An adoption improvement plan is now in place to ensure that changes are made in both culture and adoption activity. Widespread system changes are also in hand to address some of the systemic delays in adoption for children. This includes the Care Proceedings Project which aims to reduce the length of proceedings to 26 weeks in line with the Family Justice Review recommendations. The post-adoption support role is increased from a 0.5 FTE to a full time role.

7. Additional capacity has been provided to speed up recruitment and minimise bureaucratic delays. A new recruitment strategy has also been developed to reach out to more local people, particularly those from black and minority ethnic communities. It is anticipated that this will ensure more black children are adopted from care.
8. The post adoption service is being strengthened as this encourages people to adopt, knowing that they will have ongoing access to support once the child is permanently placed.
9. The role of Adoption Improvement Manager has been created to oversee the improvement plan and ensure timely implementation of actions to improve the performance of the service.
10. It is planned that this role would lead the implementation of fostering for adoption and concurrency schemes in Southwark required by the government and difficult to deliver without additional expertise and capacity. This change will enable children to move quicker to adoption.
11. The Post-Adoption Support Manager role is adapted to manage mainstream adoption work and that additionally identified in this delegated item (social work with children waiting for adoption and early assessment of family members).

Policy implications

12. There are no new policy implications relevant to this report.

Finance implications

13. Funding for these posts and improvements will be met from the Adoption Improvement Grant.

Resource implications

14. There are none.

Community Impact Statement

15. The Adoption Service provides permanent adoption families for Southwark children and specifically recruits adopters to meet the diverse needs of Southwark children. Our recruitment strategy is that of maintaining a continuous presence in Southwark and neighbouring boroughs through the local press and targeting publications for black and ethnic minorities, cinema adverts, billboards and summer fairs as appropriate.
16. The Adoption Service is one of inclusion and research based and recognises that the quality of the relationship of perspective adopters is the key determinant for adoption success.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Adoption Service Annual Report

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Rory Patterson, Director Children's Social Care	
Report Author	Alasdair Smith, Interim Head of Services for Children in Care Special Needs	
Version	Final	
Dated	18 April 2013	
Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Director of Legal Services	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Service	No	No
Cabinet Member	Yes/No	Yes/No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	18 April 2013	