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| <b>Item No.</b><br>10.             | <b>Classification:</b><br>Open | <b>Date:</b><br>25 February 2014                         | <b>Meeting Name:</b><br>Corporate Parenting Committee |
| <b>Report title:</b>               |                                | Update Report on Adoption Recruitment                    |   |
| <b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b> |                                | Children Looked After                                    |   |
| <b>From:</b>                       |                                | Director, Specialist Children's Services and Social Care |   |

## RECOMMENDATION

1. That the committee note the information and discuss any further actions required.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

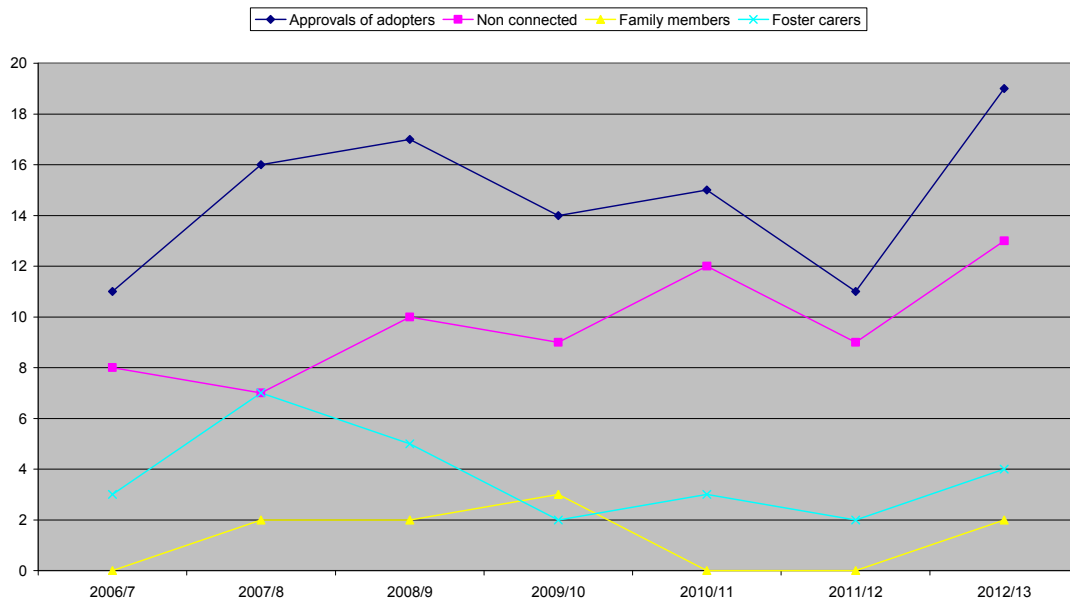
2. The adoption of children from care receives a high profile nationally promoted by the Department for Education. Southwark's performance came under scrutiny from the DfE in December 2012. The outcome of that visit was that the DfE believed that Southwark already had a robust analysis of the performance challenges and had put in place an implementation plan which would deal with the issues identified and lead to improved performance.
3. As part of the visit the department was offered the opportunity to voluntarily participate in a diagnostic peer review. This entailed working with recognised experts in the field of adoption who could provide a deeper analysis of the issues for the borough and provide helpful advice on how to improve performance further. This independent peer review was undertaken in February 2013.
4. There was a specific recommendation regarding the recruitment of adopters which was to:

"Secure a more detailed and dynamic strategy regarding the recruitment of adopters and family finding for children with adoption plans."

### Adoption Recruitment Performance 2012/13

5. 19 new prospective adopters were approved in 2012/13. This was a 70% increase in availability of adopters. Of those approved 6 were foster carers, 2 of whom were friends & family carers. This was the highest figure of adoption approvals in 8 years.

Adoption Panel - approvals of adopters



### Adoption Performance Information for Quarter 3 2013/14

6. We will not have the full picture until the end of the year but as of Quarter 3 we have had 28 adopters were approved by Southwark. 17 of these adopters are matched with a child or children.
7. We estimate that by the end of March 2014 we will have 31 children adopted compared to 21 children in the previous year.
8. In July 14 there was a national change to the way authorities are required to assess adopters. It is hoped that the 2 stage process will speed up the assessment process.
9. This is just bedding in and assessments are not yet being completed as quickly as we would like. The new process should take 6 months in total with foster carers and previous adopters being able to be fast tracked.
10. We are currently meeting that target for 1/3 of adopters although once approved adopters are matched very quickly to a child with no adopters waiting more than 6 months.

### Adoption Recruitment Campaign

11. There has been an extensive adoption campaign. DfE research indicated that effective recruitment campaigns are specific and targeted hence the development of the Find 40 Families campaign which was designed to be bright and hard hitting.
12. Southwark undertook research to understand why so few of our adopters were BME. This was important because we were finding black African boys hard to place. This informed our messages and the development of a myth busting leaflet.

13. The website was refreshed to make it more representative of our local community and a video commissioned to demystify the adoption assessment process.
14. A partnership with children's services corporate communications the media office and the community engagement team, Councillors under the active leadership of the lead member Councillor Dora Dixon Fyle our Adoption Champion helped us access a broad range of community and media opportunities.



15. The DfE are particularly interested in the £1000 reward scheme and our work to reach the local community via the 'call to action' letters to churches, schools and community groups. DfE are commissioning the British Association of Fostering and Adoption to use it as a best practice case study.
16. Having established the general messages the recruitment campaign is focusing on particular children needing families and building a relationship with interested groups with a focus on communities supporting children of their community.
17. This has been complimented by work with the social media, frequent information and 'cafe' sessions to make us accessible as possible and informed by demographic data.
18. A Southwark child and Southwark adopters are being featured in a 12 part programme on adoption which will be broadcasted at the end of April and we are currently gearing up to be able to make the most of this opportunity as we have been advised that it is likely to lead to a surge in enquiries.

### **Results to date of the Recruitment Campaign**

19. There have been nearly 8,000 visits to the Southwark Adoption website. This is an increase of 150 %
20. There have been 300 adoption enquiries 14% of which are BME.

### **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

21. This report sets out the impact that a comprehensive recruitment strategy can have in increasing the number of adopters coming forward to Southwark.
22. That targeted campaigns can be successful in finding adopters for children who have been previously harder to place.
23. Our responsibility work to ensure that all parts of the community able to offer safe and loving care, know that their application to adopt will be welcomed.

### **Implications for Looked After Children**

24. More children with a plan for adoption will be matched and placed with adopters in the shortest possible timescale.
25. More children live with their adoptive parents rather than being looked after by the local authority.

### **Conclusion**

26. It is important to recruit adopters for the 40 -45 children in Southwark who need families of their own.
27. A partnership/ community focused approach seems to be the most effective.
28. The recruitment strategy needs to be continually evaluated and refreshed to capitalise on current media events and what works rather than poster campaigns

### **Policy implications**

29. No specific policy implications, although the adoption performance is a key consideration in evaluating the effectiveness of council services for the children it serves.

### **Community impact statement**

30. Looked after children are a vulnerable group particularly those who require new families. The strategy identifies the need to promote the needs of this group through increasing the cohort of adopters. Further the strategy recognises that within this cohort that some children are at particular risk of not being matched to families and advocates targeted campaigns to give these children a more equal chance of being adopted.

### Resource implications

31. All local authorities have had a part ring fenced grant to develop adoption recruitment in 2013/14. The specific allocations for 2014/15 have not yet been announced but it is known that the total pot is less than a 1/3 set aside for last year.

### Legal implications

32. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

| Background Papers | Held At | Contact |
|-------------------|---------|---------|
| None              |         |         |

### AUDIT TRAIL

|   |   |                          |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| <b>Lead Officer</b>   | Rory Patterson, Director Children's Social Care |                          |
| <b>Report Author</b>  | Michelle Whiting, Senior Permanency Advisor     |                          |
| <b>Version</b>  | Final   |                          |
| <b>Dated</b>  | 12 February 2014                                |                          |
| <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> |
| Director of Legal Services  | No  | No                       |
| Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services                    | No  | No                       |
| <b>Cabinet Member</b>   | No  | No                       |
| <b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>                    | 12 February 2014                                |                          |