

<b>Item No.</b> 10.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 20 October 2015	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Cabinet
<b>Report title:</b>		Response to Recommendations of Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee Review of Southwark's Adoption Services	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>		Councillor Victoria Mills, Children and Schools	

## **FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR VICTORIA MILLS, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND SCHOOLS**

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.

This Review of Southwark's Adoption Service by the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee was a timely and welcome focus on how we deliver outcomes for some of our most vulnerable children. The analysis and understanding gained through the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders including members, officers and adopters has led to a richer understanding of our strengths but importantly what we need to do further.

I have recommended we take this further through the creation of an Adoption Charter. This will be a visible sign to adoptive families of our commitment to them and will form a significant part of how we measure the effectiveness of our Adoption Service.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the cabinet agree:
  - i) the proposed response to the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee Review of Southwark's Adoption Service.
  - ii) That cabinet support the principle of an Adoption Charter and agree that the draft Charter in Appendix 1 is consulted on by key stakeholders including potential and existing Adoptive parents.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

2. The education & children's services scrutiny sub-committee undertook a review of Southwark's Adoption Service commencing with a scrutiny session in October 2014 culminating in a policy seminar in April 2015.
3. The recommendations of the review were presented to cabinet on 20 May 2015 with a request for the relevant cabinet member to bring back a report to respond to the recommendations provided.

4. The report therefore provides a proposed response to the recommendations to be approved by cabinet.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **5. Recommendations on education**

- Recommendation 1: Ensure the needs of Permanently Placed children are highlighted to schools, alongside the training programme provided by PAC – UK.
  - Recommendation 2: Link the expertise of the LAC team to local schools with Permanently Placed children.
  - Recommendation 3: Monitor the long term educational outcomes of all permanently placed children.
6. Cabinet recognises the quality of Southwark's schools and the significantly improved outcomes they have achieved for their pupils. They have a strong track record for identifying and supporting vulnerable children in need of support including children who have been permanently placed. Schools work closely with Southwark's Families Matter service so that children who have additional needs can receive the right help quickly. A strong universal service with access to good quality support services is the best way to secure good outcomes for permanently placed children and their families.
  7. The director for education will discuss the needs of permanently placed children with the Heads Executive and help them identify their training needs in relation to this issue.
  8. Once children have been adopted, their records are sealed and no longer accessible to Southwark social workers. For families adopted through Southwark they can seek support through the post adoption support service which will work with adoptive parents to identify their support needs and ensure they have access to the appropriate services. This is a discrete confidential service which can help avoid any unnecessary stigma for children who have been adopted.
  9. The LAC Education Team is dedicated to improving the educational outcomes for children in care, and is not in a position to support permanently placed children.
  10. The council will continue to support the development of a strong post-adoption support service to ensure that adoptive families can have access to advice and support whenever they need it, which includes help with accessing the best schools.
  11. These developments must be seen in the light of the Government's intention to move to regional adoption agencies as they believe they will help: speed up matching and markedly improve outcomes for children; improve adopter recruitment and adopter support; and reduce costs. It is expected that all local authorities will be part of a regional adoption agency by the end of this parliament.

12. On 20 July the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) agreed that the London Adoption Board should work up a proposal to develop a London wide adoption agency. One of the key aims of the agency will be to transform adoption and special guardianship support, ensuring high quality support is available when and where it is needed, particularly therapeutic and mental health services. This will ensure that there is more consistent adopter support across London with the potential for a more strategic response to raising awareness in schools and delivering improved access to support services.
13. Through the London Adoption Board and the ALDCS, Southwark will be well placed to influence improved service delivery across London along the lines recommended by the Scrutiny Committee. It is anticipated that the new arrangements will be implemented in September 2016.

### Recommendations on the Adoption Charter

14. The Cabinet supports the creation of a Adoption Charter incorporating the recommended draft principles listed below. We will work with key stakeholders to develop and finalise the Charter and ensure that it recognises the Council's commitment to involving adoptive families in the continual improvement of its Adoption Service.
15. The draft Adoption Charter for Southwark is attached at Appendix 1 for consideration by Cabinet.
16. Once agreed, the Adoption Charter will be publicly available and incorporated into an updated version of Southwark's Adoption Service's Statement of Purpose which is required by National Minimum Standards.

### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Overview and scrutiny recommendations report to cabinet	Constitutional Team Southwark Council 160 Tooley Street London SE1 2QH	Paula Thornton <a href="mailto:Paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk">Paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk</a> 020 7525 7055
<a href="http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s55557/Report%20Cover%20report%20for%20Southwarks%20adoption%20services.pdf">http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s55557/Report%20Cover%20report%20for%20Southwarks%20adoption%20services.pdf</a>		

### APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Adoption Charter for Southwark
Appendix 2	Leaflet on adoption charter

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Victoria Mills, Children and Schools	
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Rory Patterson, Director, Children's Social Care	
<b>Report Author</b>	Alasdair Smith, Head of Service, Permanence	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	9 October 2015	
<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 Law and Democracy	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes	Yes
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	9 October 2015	