

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 26 th November 2009	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Report of the Southwark Adoption & Fostering Service	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Assistant Director of Children's Specialist Services & Safeguarding	

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. To note the annual report provided for Corporate Parenting Committee on the Adoption & Fostering Service 1st April 2008 – 31st March 2009.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Southwark's Adoption and Fostering Service is located within the children looked after (CLA) Business Unit.

2. Southwark is an approved adoption agency.
3. The adoption team undertakes the following key functions:
 - Supporting two independent agency adoption panels who make recommendations with regard to:
 - the suitability of a child for adoption
 - whether a proposed adopter is suitable to adopt a child and
 - whether the child should be placed for adoption with a particular approved adopter, this is known as the matching process..
 - Recruit and assess appropriate potential adopters for approval 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 teams who are seeking adoption as a permanent outcome for identified children
 - Deliver overseas adoption advice, assessment and support service
4. A service manager provides overall management responsibility 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.

5. Adoption is one of the most highly regulated areas of childcare practice as an adoption order transfers full parental responsibility (PR) for a child to a new family arrangement including changing of the child's name. The making of a final adoption order by the Courts actually removes parental responsibility from the birth parent although in some circumstances there can post adoption contact between birth parents and the child.
6. The 2002 Adoption Act introduced a new order (arrangement) which would offer Courts considering permanent outcomes for children, an alternative to adoption which would be particularly applicable to slightly older children and members of extended family. This new order is known as a "special guardianship order" (SGO) which has the effect of awarding the new carer parental responsibility but does not go as far as adoption with regards to moving PR from birth family and changing the child's name. Families who are granted special guardianship may also be eligible for ongoing support from the local authority and other agencies where appropriate.
7. Adoption performance (adoption and SCO orders granted) are reported to the DCSF on an annual basis as part of the set of performance indicators relating to children in public care. Southwark's adoption performance is then compared with other similar local authorities.
8. The DCSF (Ofsted) also undertake regular independent inspections of Adoption services.
9. Southwark's local authority fostering service is located in an inner city area with a wide range of racial and cultural diversity. It provides fostering placements for children and young people looked after by the council. The service also provides respite breaks for children with disabilities who live with their families (family link scheme).
10. 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 (1 of whom manages the family link service) and a team of social workers.
11. The fostering service has a number of lead responsibilities, these being: -
 - The recruitment, training and approval of 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.
12. 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

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Be a part
of **History**

Adoption & Fostering

There are a large number of Black and Dual Heritage children currently in care. These children have a long wait to be placed in a family of the same cultural background, and Black boys have to wait even longer. We can't change their past, but with your help we can ensure they have a better future.

Contact us today for more information on:

0800 952 0707

Fostering & Adoption
building today for Southwark's tomorrows

Southwark **NHS**
Primary Care Trust

Southwark
Council

a) Adoption & Permanence Service

Adoption Panels

- 13 Southwark has 2 Adoption panels which recommend children for whom adoption is a child's best interest, recommends prospective adopters for approval as adopters and recommends matches for approved adopters with children. The final decision based on the recommendations is made by the Agency Decision Maker who is the Business Unit manager of the CLA Service.

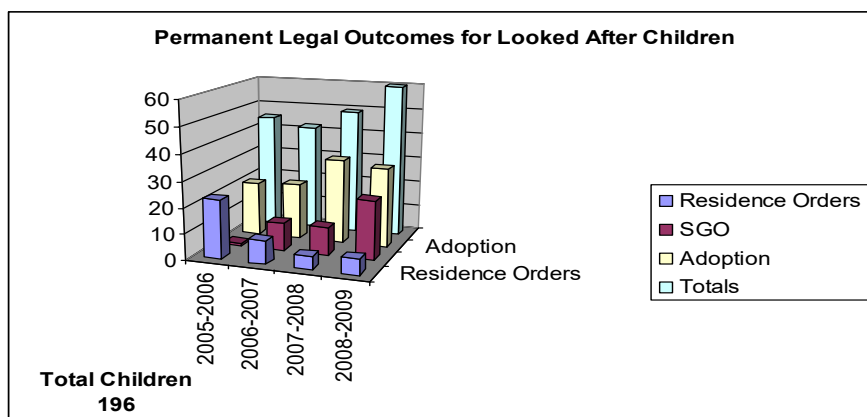
Adoption Panel Activity

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

Comments

- 14 This year panels have had the lowest number of children being considered for an adoption decision for over 6 years. This is not a reflection of the number of young children needing permanent substitute parents being looked after by the department. Nor is it a reflection of delays and drift in the system. What we have seen is a continued rise in the number of children leaving care with a Special Guardianship Order to a member of their family or kinship network. This order, introduced on 30 December 2005 was originally expected to be used for older children for whom adoption was not appropriate, children from cultures where adoption was unusual or unacceptable and children placed in foster homes where there was an enduring relationship but neither child nor carer wanted adoption. What has happened throughout the country, not just Southwark, is an ever increasing use of this order for very young children who might previously have been considered for adoption.
- 15 It is worth noting that of the 27 children matched this year 10 were matched with foster carers, including family foster carers, another child was matched with previous kinship carer. Southwark has a particularly good record of getting children already looked after and settled, adopted by their carers.
- 16 Adoption & Permanence Team workers have completed the highest number of assessments for 6 years and we were all pleased by the improvement in the number of Black and Mixed Ethnicity carers we approved. This may well have contributed to the lowest number of inter agency placements needed for our children this year.

Permanent Legal Outcomes



- 17 31 children were adopted during this period and this gave a return to the NI 61 (% CLA adopted during the year within 12mths of the decision) of 90%. When taken with Special Guardianship Orders, the total number of children who are now with families who can exert legal parental responsibility is 54.

Permanence Tracking

- 18 There are regular meetings between CLA 0-12 Team Managers and the Adoption & Permanence Service to track the permanence plans of all children looked after aged 7 years and under. About 120 children are tracked through this process to ensure that there is no avoidable delay by the local authority and that key information is shared and updated.

Panel Training & Panel Review Day

- 19 Members of both Panels attended a Training Day on 27th November 2008 which included a very useful round up of legal cases and trends during the last year. A further training day is booked for November 2009. The Adoption Panel Review day is an annual event, involving social workers from the adoption service, children's social workers, panel members and representatives from Quality Assurance. The work of the panel is shared and various stakeholders provide their own experiences of adoption. Feedback is always positive.

Children's Adoption Day Celebration

- 20 The 4th adoption celebration was held for Southwark adopted children in March with a range of entertainment provided. It was attended by 79 children and 84 adults. The event celebrates being adopted and is also used as an additional opportunity for children to meet up with siblings and previous foster carers.

Ofsted Inspection December 2008

- 21 The Southwark adoption service was inspected by Ofsted in December 2008. Panel 2 was observed in action and both Adoption Chairs were interviewed. In addition various stakeholders in the Adoption Service were interviewed and files audited. This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Summary Extract – Inspection Report (Adoption)

- 22 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".

"Those actions and recommendations set at the key inspection of 2005 were followed up at the interim inspection conducted in January 2006 and found to have been complied with".

There were no actions or recommendations arising from the interim inspection.

b) The Fostering Service

- 23 The Fostering Service has 208 fostering households able to take 1-3 children and for whom approval is given as to the ages and gender of children who can be placed. This is a slight increase on the previous year. 348 children were in placement on March 31st 2009 and 45 young people left their placements,. Of these 28 had been in placements for less than 12 months.
- 24 The total number of children looked after at this time was 547 and the percentage of children in family placements with Southwark foster carers was 64%. There has been a marked reduction in the use of the Private and Voluntary sector to 17% of all placements.

Fostering Duty and Responses

- 25 The Fostering Duty is the first port of call for all children needing to be looked after.
- 26 In July 2008, Fostering Duty commenced a new duty tracking system as a precursor to Carefirst.

Initial Results

Since July to mid August

Month	Referrals	No Longer required	Referral to Brokerage	Placed	Exemption required	Active Referrals	P&V refs Notes
July to mid Aug	20	7	2	11			C S 17 H H 16 Twins - teens
Aug	76	28	6	42	Croy -1		
	19	11	0	8		25*	S M S N
		46					JW BN
	115	(40%)	8	61			2 boys currently in P&V and needing LTF
Sept	71	32	2	37	none		1 needed Bucks 1 High Risk
Oct	47	3	3	41			
Nov	41	5	0	36			
Dec to 9	20		3	17			x 3
Total	294	86	16	192			

88% of all children referred requiring placements were placed in house. (P&V referrals were largely teenagers and one younger child could not be sustained in a foster placement)

In September 100% of all children requiring placements were placed in- house.

27 By December, we had placed 92.3 % of all required referrals. 7.7% were referred to the P&V sector. This is a very high in-house referral success rate for any Fostering Service

Children in Placement

Gender	Girls	Boys
White British	41	37
White Irish	5	6
Any other White background	7	3
Traveller of Irish Heritage	0	0
Gypsy/Roma	0	0
White and Black Caribbean	25	24
White and Black African	4	3
White and Asian	0	1
Any other mixed background	12	11
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	1	2
Bangladeshi	3	0
Any other Asian background	4	8
Caribbean	19	23
African	27	26
Any other Black background	15	16
Chinese	1	2

Ethnicity Foster Carers

White British	120
White Irish	9
Any other White background	4
Traveller of Irish Heritage	0
Gypsy/Roma	0
White and Black Caribbean	2
White and Black African	0
White and Asian	0
Any other mixed background	4
Indian	0
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Any other Asian background	0
Caribbean	105
African	36
Any other Black background	7
Chinese	1
Any other ethnic group	2

Given the diversity of Southwark's population, exact cultural and ethnic matching is very difficult. We are slowly increasing our proportion of African foster carers and remain over-represented with Caribbean foster carers. Obtaining better matching takes particular priority when it comes to matching for long term fostering or adoption

The Fostering Panel

28 The Fostering Panel meets monthly, recommends approval of new foster carers, reviews new foster carers, approves matches for long term fostering, considers de-registration, allegations against foster carers and any other matter which the service wishes to be considered. Training is provided on a yearly basis and this year concentrated on safeguarding.

Fostering Panel Activity

New fostering households April 2008 - March 2009

29 A total of 16 new fostering households (20 people) were approved during the year out of these, 10 were single carer households and 6 were couples

Capacity of new fostering households

1 child/young person	8
2 children/young people	2
3 children/ young people	6

Ethnicity of New Foster Carers

White British	9
White Irish	
Any other White Background	
Traveller of Irish heritage	
Gypsy/Roma	
White and Black Caribbean	
White and Black African	
White and Asian	
Any other mixed background	
Indian	
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	
Any other Asian background	
Caribbean	2
African	5
Any other Black Background	
3	
Chinese	
Any other ethnic group	
Refused	
	20

Religion of New Foster Carers

Christian	3
C of E	9
Pentecostal	2
Roman Catholic	3
Muslim	1
None	2

Information about complaints made about the fostering agency or service (including foster carers) between 1 April 08 and 31 March 09					
	How many complaints did you receive?	How many of these were upheld?	How many and what percentage were resolved in 28 days?		How many are on-going? CURRENT INFORMATION
From:	Number	Number	Number	%	Number
children/young people	6	3	4	67	0
foster carers	0	0	0		0
other professionals	9	4	8	89	0
children and young peoples' parents	2	0	2	100	0
others for example: members of the public, Members of Parliament	1		1	100	0

Complaints and Allegations

Allegations resulting in child protection referrals between 1 April 08 and 31 March 09	a) A foster carer	b) Member of the fostering household other than the foster carer	c) Staff of the agency/ service	d) Unrelated to foster care placement
	Number			
How many children in foster care were the subject of child protection/safeguarding enquiries following allegations about the following people?	7	0	0	0
How many child protection enquiries for a foster carer, member of the fostering household other than foster carer and staff of the agency/ service led to a child/ young person being the subject of child protection plans?	Number			
	0			

- 30 The Fostering Service takes all complaints and allegations seriously. Each year there is an annual audit of complaints about foster carers involving Service Managers from CLA , Safeguarding and the Independent reviewing Service.
- 31 Although most allegations and complaints do not meet the Safeguarding criteria, recommendations are often made with respect to improvements in standards of care. As a result a new Standards of Care Document has been

produced and this clarifies the process of standards of care investigations – specifically and generally.

Recruitment

- 32 Recruitment plays a key role in Adoption & Fostering Services and we operate in a competitive market economy 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.
- 33 Developing and commencing a Long Term Fostering Strategy will be a key objective for 2009 this service.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 34 There are no policy implications contained in this report.

COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 35 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 it's 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

- 36 There are no resource implications outlined in this report.

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Assistant Director Children's Specialist Services and Safeguarding	
Report Author	Head of Services for Children in Care and Team Manager Adoption and Fostering	
Version	Final	
Dated	17/11/09	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director of Communities, Law and Governance	No	No
Finance Director	No	No

Executive Member	Yes	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional/Community Council/Scrutiny Team		17 November 2009