

Fostering

makes an extraordinary difference

2017/18

Annual Report

Southwark Fostering Service



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KEY MESSAGES

A real area of success for the Fostering and Care Services for 2017/2018 is a strong focus on ensuring children for whom their Permanence Plan is long term Fostering are matched with long term foster carers and permanency is secured. This increase in children being matched with their carers for long term fostering was from 3 in 2016/17 to 15 children in 2017/18. This is a 400% increase and expected to continue to increase further during 2018/19.

Southwark Fostering Service continued to work together with the University of East Anglia to embed the Secure Base Model of therapeutic Caregiving. This approach was recognized in the Fostering in England report published in February 2018. The service has worked in partnership with foster carers and to roll out training to the Care Service and this will roll out further across all of Children's Services in 2018/2019. Training on Secure Base is co-delivered by social workers in the Fostering Service, foster carers, young people from Speakerbox and the Clinical Service.

The percentage of children placed with in-house foster carers has reduced however the service are proud that Southwark Fostering Service remains the largest inner London borough fostering service in respect of the total number of children placed. In comparing with outer London boroughs the only borough that offers more local authority foster placements is the London Borough of Croydon. *(Data based on the National Statistics Fostering in England 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017)

PURPOSE OF ANNUAL REPORT

The purpose of the document is to report on the activity of the Fostering Service fulfilling obligations in the Fostering Services Regulations (2011) to review and improve the quality of care, and National Minimum Standards (2011) to report to the executive side of the local authority. It will cover: performance and developments in Southwark's delivery of fostering services; how the council is compliant with key national minimum standards; and the service offered to those seeking to foster and those children in care who are fostered.

This report details the work of Southwark Council Fostering Service from 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

When a child enters care, it is one of the most important and significant changes in their life and it is critical that the families who look after these most vulnerable children through foster care are the best they can be. 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, good quality foster care offers them the best opportunity to experience a warm and loving family environment while the most appropriate plans are made for their future.

The Fostering Service is a service for children in care. It is committed to supporting stable placements for children and young people where foster care is the identified plan. The service is a key element in the council's drive to place more children and young people with Southwark foster carers in or near the borough where possible. It is a fundamental part of our sufficiency strategy to develop enough in-borough placements with the range and capacity to meet the needs of Southwark's children who cannot live at home for whatever reason.

The aim of the Fostering Service is to provide high-quality care for children and young people in safe, secure and nurturing families. The fostering service in 2017- 2018 have fully embedded the Secure Base Caregiving Model within the Fostering Service and worked to embed across Children's Services in particular the Care Service. We aim to develop highly skilled foster carers, supported by reflective, challenging and enabling social workers. Our goal is to give children and young people the best possible childhood, to help them become valued members of society and to maximise their life opportunities.

THE VOICE OF SOUTHWARK FOSTER CARERS

"As many people say, fostering is a vocation not a job and it's with good reason. Fostering is not a nine-to-five job. The best thing about fostering is seeing a child grow in confidence and leave care full of self esteem and making a go of life. Many of our foster children have gone on to get good jobs, stable partners, bought homes and have children of their own."

"To anyone thinking of fostering, I say go for it. Your life will be enriched and you will be helping a child who really needs it. Yes, it's hard at first but you get oodles of training and lots of support."

(Southwark foster carer in 2017/2018 began Fostering in 1972)

NATIONAL FOSTERING CONTEXT

During 2017-2018 two key reports on Fostering commissioned by the government were published:

- The Education Select Committee Enquiry into Fostering Published in December 2017
- Foster Care in England Report Commissioned by the Department of Education and published in February 2018 making 36 recommendations for Government.

Both reports state clearly that, for many children and young people, foster care provides the protective - and loving - environment that they need to develop and thrive. Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers write:

“The care system in England, in which fostering plays a predominant role, has an undeservedly poor reputation. The reality is that fostering is a success story.”

Positively many of the recommendations in the Foster Care in England report Southwark Fostering and Care Service were already working on this includes the recommendation for listening to the Voice of Young People in Care which Southwark were already underway with using the Coram Bright Spots Survey for all Looked After Young People in Southwark and the results of which will help to form the Service priorities and plans in 2018/19. In terms of matching and involving children and foster carers in this process in 2017/18 the Service has taken part on workshops on producing the best profiles which highlight the voice and strengths of young people. Southwark Fostering Service are working with Coram and the Care Service to plan a Fostering Activity Day in September 2018.

The full Government response to these crucial reports about fostering is due to be published in July 2018.

CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE IN SOUTHWARK

Activity Overview - children	31 st March 2014	31 st March 2015	31 st March 2016	31 st March 2017	31 st March 2018
Children in care	550	500	475	498	491
Children in foster care	424 (77%)	390 (78%)	369 (78%)	381 (77%)	381 (78%)
Children with Southwark registered foster carers	242	228	241	231	204
Children with Independent Fostering Agency carers	144	129	96	109	138
Children with friends & family foster carers (approved at Panel)	38	33	32	41	39
Matches for Long Term Foster Care during the year	3	4	3	3	15

There has been a slight decrease in the number of children in care on the 31st March 2018 compared to 31st March 2017 from 498 children to 491 children. The most recently published DfE data shows that 73.5% of children in care in England are in foster care. In Southwark over the last 5 years this has been 77 -78% showing Southwark are doing well in ensuring children in care are wherever possible being placed in a family setting. Southwark are part of the Looked After Children South London Commissioning Group which includes 7 boroughs: Bexley, Southwark, Croydon, Greenwich, Lewisham, Sutton and Merton and within this group for 2017 that the percentage of children in foster care ranges from Bexley at 67% to Croydon at 85%. Southwark is in line with Lewisham and Greenwich but have a significantly higher percentage of children looked after in foster care compared to our neighbouring borough Lambeth as well as Merton and Sutton.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

In contrast to the decreasing number of children in care the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) as at the 31st March 2017 was 36 and as at 31st March 2018 was 52 which is a significant increase of 44%. For these unaccompanied children as at 31st March 2018 39 (71%) were placed in foster care and 16 (29%) were placed in semi independent accommodation. 27 out of 39 (69%) were placed with Southwark approved foster carers and 12 out of 39 (31%) were placed in IFA foster placements. An analysis has been undertaken for the whole year in respect of UASC which shows over the full year period the total number of young people was 73 and that 85% of the young people were cared for in foster care and 67% of this time was with Southwark approved foster carers.

Changing Age Profile

The age profile of children looked after in Southwark is increasing. In 2016/2017 29% of children in care were aged 0 -9 but in 2017/2018 this fell 5% to 24% therefore reducing the number of younger children requiring placements and highlighting the need for placements for older children and sibling groups. The increase of Early Permanence carers dually approved as foster carers and adopters means that babies where there is strong likelihood the care plan being adoption can be placed with dually approved carers who are able to adopt them if this becomes the Care Plan. This is very positive for children as it means the Early Permanence carers manage the uncertainty rather than children experiencing more moves.

The dual impact of increasing early permanence, and decreasing numbers of younger children in care, has meant some very experienced foster carers who have specialised in caring for babies and very young children have felt frustrated that they have not had placements. The Fostering Service has offered training and support to foster carers to diversify and care for older children, but some have declined due to the needs of their birth children and other foster children who are permanently placed in their family, and some foster carers only have vacancy for a baby as the space is in their bedroom.

Southwark Provision

The last year has seen a disappointing decrease in the percentage use of Southwark's internal fostering provision based on the data on the 31st March 2018 compared to the 31st March 2017. This decrease in use of internal placements reflects that our own Fostering Service continues to need to recruit more carers who are able to look after adolescents and sibling groups. The age profile of the children who are becoming looked after is increasing and we do not have sufficient Southwark Foster Carers to meet this need. Recruitment of foster carers is slowly increasing but this is not yet making sufficient impact as at the same time many foster carers aged 70 plus are retiring and as part of service improvement and following implementation of the Secure Base Therapeutic Caregiving Model, some carers have not been able to meet the standards of care that the service requires and have decided to resign or in a very few cases it has been recommended they cease to foster.

In September 2017 an Access to Resources Team was established, unifying and strengthening the placement finding process. This has increased the focus on improving placement stability and getting the right placement for children as soon as possible. This aimed to improve placement stability primarily by getting the best possible matched placement for each child while in parallel seeking to maximise use of our own Fostering Service where the placement choice is right for the child. The early indicators are that this approach is leading to improved placement stability, and also a lower percentage of children are being placed more than 20 miles from Southwark.

As stated last years annual report, finding placements for teenagers with challenging behaviour, gang affiliation, those at risk of child sexual exploitation and those at risk of or stepping down from residential care remains the most significant challenge to placement sufficiency. The Fostering Service has worked closely with the Access to Resources Team and Clinical Service to develop more and better quality placement choice that has made a significant contribution to reducing the need for young people to be placed in residential care. Getting the support right for carers of teenagers is critical and it remains an area we will develop more, including recruiting more carers suited to this.

Friends and Family Foster Care

The use of Friends and Family Foster care has slightly decreased with 39 children placed with Friends and Family Foster Carers approved under Regulation 27 of the Fostering Services Regulations (following a recommendation by the Adoption and Fostering Panel. This is compared to 41 children at the end of the previous year. There is a higher number of children who are placed with friends and family who are temporarily approved as Friends and Family Carers, under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010), but wherever possible if the children cannot be rehabilitated to the care of their parents then where there is a positive assessment the local authority would support them applying for an SGO to secure permanence for the child/ children outside of the care service. The percentage of children leaving care subject to a Special Guardianship Order in 2016/17 was 8% and in 2017/18 was 10% and it is therefore likely there is some correlation between a very slight decrease in the number of children placed with approved Friends & Family foster carers and the number of children who became subject to an SGO.

Matches for Long term Foster Care

During 2017/18 a Permanence Tracking Panel was established to ensure all children in care with a plan of long term fostering had identified a family placement able to meet their long term needs, including thinking about therapeutic support and post 18 supports and Staying Put.

The Fostering Service has worked closely with the Safeguarding and Care Services to ensure that children in long term placements have their placement formally matched at the Adoption and Fostering Panel. This enables independent scrutiny by the panel to ensure the match is the best possible for the child and to provide optimum support. Coming to panel is also a day of celebration for children and carers and we have introduced a matching certificate and sending our photographs of children and their carers with the Panel. In 2017/18 15 children were matched, a 400% increase from the previous year and it is hoped in 2018/19 this will rise to at least 20 children. We recognise we need to continue to increase this so that all children whose plan it is to remain in foster care have a matched placement and that we are tracking that this happens in the right timescale for each child and challenging delay. In early 2018/19 we are revising the Long Term Fostering Policy and will within this include a focus on achieving permanence for children aged 14 and over as well as promoting new and innovative ideas working with the Carelink, the Clinical Service and the Family Group Conference Service to promote placement stability. We will also be co-running with foster carers, supervising Social Workers and a Team Manager from the Care Service lunchtime workshops to fully understand Delegated Authority.

SOUTHWARK FOSTER CARERS

Activity Overview – foster carers	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Foster carers approved	12	10	9	14
Foster carers ceased approval	16	8	4	13
Friends & Family Foster Carers (Regulation 27)	5	7	9	1
Family Link carers approved	3	5	5	5
Matches for Long Term Foster Care	15	3	3	4

Recruitment of foster carers

“I wanted to become a foster carer and especially a foster carer for Southwark Council because it’s where I live and I think it is important Southwark people foster Southwark children. We found ourselves in a situation where our youngest went away to university and we were rattling around a three bedroom flat and it’s a joy to have youngsters coming into the home. It’s something that we both wish we had done sooner.”

(Southwark Foster Carer in 2017/18 has been a Southwark foster carer since 2015)

In 2017/18 there was a slight increase in the number of households recruited from the previous 2 years. However we also experienced 13 carers resigning in 2017/18 many of whom via planned retirement having offered a fantastic service to Southwark children deciding to retire, some were in their 70s. There were also 3 carers who were de-registered. Very sadly in 2017/18, 4 foster carers also died through illness.

On 31/03/2017 in the Fostering Data set return there were 203 Fostering Households (including Friends and Family Foster Carers and Family Link Carers). On the 31/03/2018 there were 221 households. This increase reflects an increase in temporary placement of children with Family and Friends Carers under Regulation 24. Several children placed with temporary Friends and Family Carers may not remain looked after as with robust packages of support several carers will apply to be SGO carers rather than be approved by the Panel as Connected Person’s Foster Carers. In some cases where children are in Regulation 24 Placements children can also be rehabilitated home to the care of their parents.

In 2017/18 Southwark Recruitment Hub received 133 enquiries from households about becoming foster carers. This number of enquiries is a fall from 216 in 2016 /17 but the conversion rate from enquiry to having an initial visit and becoming a foster carer has significantly improved. The number of carers approved has also improved although did not meet the target set of 15 households. All enquirers who live in Southwark are informed about the Council Tax offer and this was advertised on the back of all Southwark Council tax bills in 2017-2018. It is acknowledged that this level of recruitment over the last few years is not providing the number placements needed for Southwark children to provide sufficiency and choice. During 2017/2018 a photo campaign working with Southwark Carers and Southwark Communications Team has been developed and this will launch during the autumn of 2018 and it is hoped this will lead to more Southwark residents and people in surrounding boroughs coming forward to foster for Southwark. Approvals for Southwark becoming a Fostering Friendly Employer and also incentives for staff across the Council who successfully introduce someone to becoming a foster carer are proposed for 2018/2019.

Retention of foster carers

Understanding the retention of foster carers is critical. Fostering Network reported in 2017 that on average a service will lose 10% of carers annually through, retirement, adopting, changing career and de-registration. The total number leaving fostering last year from Southwark Fostering Service was 20 which reflects around 10% due to the combination of resignation, retirement, de-registration and death.

The Fostering Service responds promptly and efficiently to issues and concerns raised by foster carers. Communication includes newsletters and e-mails and phone calls about community events and opportunities. Fostering supervising social workers visit carers monthly to support carers in their role, assessing the support needed prior to each new placement which contributes to increasing carers' confidence and capabilities in taking children with high needs. There is a monthly support group and coffee morning which takes place in East Dulwich, as well as a group run in Kent where there are a high number of Southwark foster carers. The group run in Southwark has regular attendance from staff in the Fostering Service as well as foster carers. A retired staff member facilitates the group in Kent. The support group often have guests on topics such as Welfare Benefits and on new initiatives for children in care. At the carers request every 3 months there continues to be a therapist available to offer carers massages to help them relax.

Training and Learning and Development

There is a strong and growing learning culture throughout the Fostering Service for both foster carers and also for staff learning together. The foundation of all learning and development is built upon the Secure Base Model as a foundation for therapeutic caregiving and the more advanced Empathic Behaviour Management (EBM). The aim of the two approaches empowers foster carers to develop confidence and equip them with the right skills and techniques to help children experience safe and secure care. There have now been over 50 fostering households trained in EBM with 3 courses in 2017-2018 this involves a 2-3 day training then follow up interactive workshop which takes place over 6 weeks. Follow up support on EBM happens in a support group every 2 months and is regularly attended by up to 15 foster carers.

Post approval training is compulsory for all new foster carers as part of their TSDs. The programme includes:

- Working with the Department
- Safeguarding Children
- Attachment, Child Development and Secure Base
- Therapeutic Play
- Active Listening Skills and responding effectively to challenging behavior.
- Supporting your Child with Education and PEPs
- Promoting the Health of children
- Transitions and helping young people prepare for independence.
- Emotional Health and Physical Well-being

The training sessions are dynamic and interactive they are delivered by social workers, foster carers and managers in the Permanence Service together with a multidisciplinary team that includes the Virtual School, the looked after children nurses and Designated Doctor, the Clinical Service and also most important input from care leavers from Speakerbox who have experience of fostering.

It has been recognised by the Fostering Service that training had traditionally been more accessed by women than male foster carers, and based on feedback a training and support group for men who foster has been established ran by a Supervising Social Worker and the Family Support Worker in the Fostering Service.

Foster carers are increasingly required to use computers and IT to support the children they care for and the Fostering Family Support Worker has provided both group and individual support to help foster carers to be able to use the online booking system for training and to use computers to support education for children.

As well as traditional training it was recognised that many foster carers look after everyone else but don't often have opportunities to think about their own health, relaxation and well-being. On the 21st March 2018 we held a Foster Carer and Special Guardians Well-Being Day at Theatre Peckham. It was opened by the Strategic Director for Children and Adults who spoke about his own experience of mindfulness and the Fostering Service Manager spoke about the health and well-being benefits of walking. The rest of the day consisted of experiential with workshops on: mindfulness; massage sessions; a juicing bar (run by the Youth Offending Service); healthy lunch and a Zumba dance workshop. Following on from this day groups of foster carers have continued two well-being groups one which is focussed on attending the gym, and one a group of Southwark Carers who have a Whats App Group and regularly meet for walks together in Southwark parks. Future well-being events run by Foster Carers with support from the Fostering Service are planned for 2017/2018.

" I wanted to say a great BIG Thank you to everyone involved in the organisation and delivery of today's Well Being day. It was fabulous. I knew I was going to enjoy it as it had key words like 'massage' and 'lunch' in it, and actually just one of those occurring will make my day. However it was so much more than that! I sat through some very well timed and interesting talks to open the day with and get us thinking. I had a head and shoulder massage, some Reiki, and a back massage - all of which were fabulous and felt like a combined hug."

Two experienced Supervising Social Workers deliver the Skills to Foster training for applicants who are starting their assessments to become foster carers. The training from participants on this programme is consistently rated as being excellent by prospective carers. The three day course includes multi-disciplinary input from health and education as well as the clinical service. One of the most popular parts and one which the Fostering Service recognise is crucial in fostering recruitment is the direct input of the Children's Rights Officer and young people who are care leavers. They are part of every Skills to Foster training and this is often one of the segments of the course that participants speak most highly of.

Feedback from existing foster carers is that while the training provided is excellent there is the need to develop more advanced training for really experienced foster carers to develop specialist skills and also the need for experienced carers to become more involved in supporting less experienced carers. During 2017 / 2018 this was recognised by the service and one of the experienced Supervising Social Workers who is passionate about learning and development took on the role of training lead for the Fostering Service to further develop the training offer. One of the really exciting developments during 2017/18 was designing a bespoke course for Southwark foster carers on becoming Parent Child Carers and the first 3 day course will take place in the first quarter of 2018.

Support for foster carers

Despite its rewards, foster care can be a very demanding vocation. Southwark's Fostering Service recognises this and understands good outcomes for children can only be achieved when foster carers feel valued, supported and equipped to provide the love and care that children who may have experienced neglect, harm and loss require.

Support for Foster Carers encompasses the following:

- Allocation and support of a dedicated Supervising Social Worker during the working week and access to dedicated out of hours support 7 days a week.
- Foster carer induction for all newly approved households and as a refresh to existing foster carers.
- A comprehensive post approval training programme that incorporates therapeutic care giving model. The aim of this approach is to help foster carers feel confident and equip them with the right skills and techniques to help children experience safe and secure care.
- A more advanced approach to caring – Emphatic Behaviour Management for more challenging behavior.
- Training pathway for foster carers to enhance professional development and quality of placements linked to a clear payment approach.
- Therapeutic intervention and support from a lead clinician, medical advisor, education, and Carelink service to support children in placements and the fostering household.

- Regular carer support groups accessible for all foster caring households run by the Fostering Service.
- Regular communication and information sharing is maintained via emails, quarterly fostering newsletters and coffee mornings.
- A Foster Carer run support group has also recently been set up and recently had their first coach trip day out.
- Following the service running a Well-being day in March 2018 a Foster carer walking group has established meeting regularly in Southwark parks and also a group of foster carers who use the gym.
- Southwark Foster Care Association (SFCA) is a foster carers group that brings Southwark foster carers together to provide a stronger voice to influence and develop services for Southwark. Carers benefit by having an opportunity to come together and share ideas to develop the service for them and the children in their care. The aim is to enhance foster care involvement by empowering carers to jointly lead social events, recruitment activities and buddy schemes etc.
- An annual foster carers dinner dance is held to thank carers for their commitment to improving the lives of looked after children and young people in Southwark.
- Membership and advice to Fostering Network for all Southwark foster carers which offer independent advice and support with allegations.

Staying Put

“This Christmas we had over 20 of our children at our house. This time they came back with their partners and their children. Seeing them now and remembering them how they were- that’s the real reward for foster carers.”

(Southwark foster carer 2017/18)

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a duty on the local authority to provide ‘staying put’ arrangements for children in foster care to continue to live with their former foster carer beyond their 18th birthday and potentially up to the age of 21 years if they are in education. This is a welcome development for young people who have not developed the maturity to move into independent living and who want to remain as part of a family. The service was well placed to implement these changes as we were already enabling young people to remain in their placements while they completed exams and were prepared fully for independence.

On 31st March 2015 there were 19 young people remaining in Staying Put arrangements, while on 31st March 2016 the number had risen to 40. On the 31st March 2017 there were 46 young people remaining in Staying Put arrangements this is broken down into 35 in provision with their former Southwark foster carer and 11 with former IFA carers. Based on the National Statistics for England for 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 Southwark had the highest number of young people staying put compared to any inner or outer London Borough. As of 31st March 2018 we had a total of 41 Staying Put arrangements; 31 with their former Southwark Foster Carer and 10 in IFA placements. While a slight fall this number represents for these young people a really positive placement choice continuing to enjoy family life. What is also increasing is the number of young people who have gone away to stay at University in halls of residence and shared accommodation but who also return to former foster carers for support and to enjoy family life during the University breaks.

Supporting staying put arrangements is a key part of offering a secure base to children that they are supported to obtain full family membership, a key aspect of this is being able to remain in a family setting until they are ready for independence. Some foster carers have also expressed concern that they feel financially disadvantaged by the reduction in their allowances when caring for young people who are staying put and some feel allowances for these arrangements should be the same as fostering allowances as is being campaigned for nationally by the Fostering Network. The approach we take in Southwark is very similar to that taken in other local authorities.

Short Breaks Care

At the end of March 2018 the Family Link Team had 30 short break respite carer households offering care to 42 children with disabilities one weekend a month allowing the child's parents to have a break. Short break carers are specialist carers assessed and matched to a particular child. These carers generally develop a good relationship with parents and often provide care for the children for many years. The short break service is part of the wider support service for families where a child has a disability and enables children to remain within their families and communities while at the same time providing a much needed break for parents.

During 2017/18 3 new family link carers were assessed and approved. 10 new matches for children were established.

Linking is based on children's needs and families preferences so families work together with the social worker and carer to carefully establish a relationship and design together the support for each child, for some children this can be daytime breaks for some overnight stays and for some children a mixture of daytime and overnight respite. Referrals come from the Children with Disabilities Team to Family link and each child with their social worker and family has a profile about them which includes EHCP plan. Carers and links are reviewed annually by an Independent Reviewing Officer.

Carers are recruited via people interested in fostering who may not be able to offer a full time commitment due to work as well as some carers recruited through having existing community connections to children who they want to support.

Over 2017/18 in total the service provided over 500 breaks. A key aim is supporting Children and their families and preventing children from needing to become permanently looked after. In terms of a joined up Service from April 2018 together with Children with Disabilities Family link has become part of the All Age Disability Service

Feedback from families and children who receive a service from Family Link is consistently high one parent in her feedback referred to the Family Link Carer as a Life Saver as although she misses her child when with the Family Link Carer it enables her to sleep and have a bath. She wrote

"It enables me to be the best parent she can when X is at home".

(Parental Feedback to Family Link 2017/18)

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Fostering Service has a Quality Assurance Framework. This includes: effective Adoption and Fostering Panel scrutiny; foster carer feedback including an annual survey; management oversight and review including audit activity; as well as learning from complaints and disruptions.

The audits areas in 2017-18 included: an audit on cases where there was a breakdown in a fostering or SGO placement, a focussed review on friends and family foster care, and a review looking at both stable and unstable placements. All of the audits led to an analysis of results shared with managers and social workers in the service and the development of an improvement plan. Key messages included the need to place more importance on Placement Planning meetings, and the need for Stability Meetings to happen early in placements when there are difficulties, rather than later when issues “set in” and the focus moves towards a potential “disruption”. Arising from the friends and family foster care audit it was apparent for the need for greater join up with front door teams in supporting children to be looked after by family and connected persons and this audit also highlighted that having two separate teams for connected persons and SGO assessment led to some cases “failing between the cracks” of these two services and joining them up would lead to improved outcomes for children and their families.

Fostering Panel (From January 2017 this became a joint Adoption and Fostering Panel)

Fostering Services Regulations (2011) and National Minimum Standards (2011) require a Fostering Panel to be constituted, chaired by an independent person. Panel members include representatives from the Children’s Social Care and independent members with a range of experience. The panel makes recommendations about the approval of foster carers, matches of children for long term foster care and in certain circumstances reviewing the approval of foster carer. The combined Panel is able to approve Early Permanence carers as both foster carers and adopters under both Adoption and Fostering regulations. Final decisions, based on the panel’s recommendations are made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADMs), Director of Children’s Social Care and the Head of Service for Permanence.

From January 2017 the Adoption and Fostering Panel combined. The Chair of the Fostering Panel since 2014 took over the role of chairing the Joint Panel which takes place fortnightly.

The rationale for this was to have a single panel with independent scrutiny of approval and matching for both foster carers and adopters. The joining of the panel functions creates administrative efficiencies and some financial savings. The strengths of this new panel approach becoming evident and going forward it will seek to ensure that children, adopters and foster carers have a consistent approach, and this is in regard to ensuring high standard of practice and robust and timely decision making. The overall aim is to deliver an integrated service to children requiring permanence through adoption and fostering, ensuring the care provided is of the highest quality and meets the needs of the children looked after in Southwark. There will be a quarterly review of the function of the joint panel to ensure it maintains a high standard in its service delivery.

The Key areas identified by the Independent Chair for improvement in the Fostering Service are:

- Consistently meeting timeframes for Regulation 24 approvals and Regulation 27 approvals
- Continued improvement of the quality of assessments of all foster carers including Friends and Family Foster Carers. Some improvement was seen in 2017/2018 but as a service we aspire to all assessments being excellent.
- Annual Review reports presented to panel have been reported to be variable in quality and while the introduction of the Secure Base Model as an analysis tool in the Supervising Social Worker report has been a welcome addition there is a need to ensure all reviews are high quality with robust analysis.

The Annual Report of the Adoption and Fostering Panel Chair is included at **Appendix 1** to this report. For 2018/19 the Permanence Service Plan will include a clear improvement plan for actions recommended above. It is very positive that the areas of improvement and strength highlighted by the Independent Chair were also those self identified by the Service in our own quality assurance.

Foster Carer feedback

In 2017/18 there were 52 respondents to our annual foster care survey. This was an increase of 80% on last years return when 29 responded. As a percentage of fostering households (not including Family Link and Regulation 24 carers), this is a response rate of 28%

The number of carers who think the support they get overall from the fostering service is excellent or good is 38 (73%). This has decreased slightly from last year when it was 76%

The number of carers who think the support they get from their Supervising Social Worker is excellent or good is 45 (87%). Again this has slightly decreased from last year, when 92% of carers thought this support was good or excellent.

In terms of permanence, 27 carers out of 41 who had a view thought that the quality of permanence planning for their child was excellent or good – 66%. Interestingly, we asked carers who were short term carers if they would consider caring for a child long term, and 22 out of a total of 30 (73%) said they would.

When asked about placement stability, 44 carers answered the question and 35 (80%) thought the support they were given to ensure placement stability was excellent or good.

Some of the comments from Foster Carers included:

“The support I receive from my SSW and child’s SW is excellent. We all work very well as a team of professionals.”

“I’ve been fostering for Southwark for 30 years and I’m very happy with the service.”

“She does an excellent job. I can phone her anytime of the day (sometimes in the evening) and she will always respond if I leave a voicemail.”

“I am satisfied with the support from my child’s social worker, I can’t think of anything she could do to better to support.”

“There have been good interventions to prevent placement breakdown – particularly from the clinical practitioner”

“My Supervising Social Worker has been invaluable in helping to keep my teenager in placement.”

“I think it (Staying Put) is excellent, I have recently had a Staying put child, and it has made her feel like a member of the family and it is a home to her, so not like being in a temporary placement all the time.”

Fostering Managers and Supervising Social Workers are working together to respond to the feedback from foster carers in the survey to show the improvements being made resulting from what foster carers have said. In addition to the Survey the Quality Assurance Lead for Permanence has attended the Fostering Support Group to speak to foster carers about ideas to improve the service offered. Areas identified for improvement in 2018/19 are permanence planning where only 66% of carers identified the service as being excellent or good, reviewing the out of hours support and also looking a payment mechanisms as some carers experienced delays in receiving payments. As a service we are pleased by the increased response rate but want to continue think about new ways to include the voices of more Southwark foster carers.

Complaints

Complaints made against the fostering service are taken very seriously and investigated thoroughly. The learning from complaints is shared amongst the whole team, and changes are made where appropriate to the practice and processes of the team.

The Fostering Service values the commitment and support that Southwark Foster Carers give to the children they look after, and will always communicate this to other professionals in children's networks. Complaints are often elevated to senior managers in other services in order to ensure that issues raised by Foster Carers are acknowledged and acted upon.

In 2017/8 there were three complaints made by Southwark foster carers about the services they receive from Southwark. In addition one carer referred a complaint she made last year to the Ombudsman. Part of this was upheld and recommendations were made by the Ombudsman, which the Fostering Service has agreed to implement.

The complaints included carers not being paid the correct amount of fostering allowance and fee, or carers not being at the correct payment level, a delay in obtaining passports for children looked after by a Southwark foster carer, and carers not feeling listened to by the professionals involved or being considered as having expertise in looking after children with additional needs.

A new system of financial payments has now been implemented which has been developed as part of Mosaic, Southwark's social care data base. In addition to this, during 2018/19, staff from the finance team are being transferred into the Access to Resources Team, which will tighten up payment procedures to foster carers. A much clearer payments policy is also being developed to ensure clarity and consistency around what payments foster carers can expect to receive.

Where the complaints by foster carers involved other teams such as the Care Service, and the Children with Disabilities Service, a number of changes have been put into place to ensure that similar situations do not arise again.

REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2017- 2018

This section reviews our commitments to improvement stated in the Annual Report 2016/17 and reflects on the progress we made.

We will recruit more foster carers able to meet the needs of Southwark Children and to ensure creative and robust support plans to enable more children to experience family life in foster care.

We will do our best to approve at least 15 fostering households in 2017-2018 and at least 20 households in 2018-2019. To have specific targeted recruitment to particularly meet the needs of complex needs older children, respite placements, crisis intervention, siblings, and parent and child placements.

For 2017/18 we approved 12 mainstream fostering households so did not reach the target of 15. In addition the panel recommended approval of 5 friends and family fostering households and 3 Family Link households. 5 out of the 9 adopter households approved were also approved as Early Permanence Carers (so dually approved as foster carers) to ensure that for very young children where appropriate an early permanence placement can be secured to ensure that rather the child experiencing multiple moves the uncertainty is held by the Early Permanence Carers.

To review in 2017- 2018 the Fostering Payments Policy and to consider the development of higher paid specialist carers for Adolescents with challenging behaviour and children with extremely high support needs.

The work has happened to draft an amended policy and the consultation with Foster Carers and interested parties will be undertaken in the autumn of 2018.

We will work with the Care Service to ensure that all children in care have on-going high quality Life Story Work and that they are supported to develop and maintain connections with people who matter to them.

We will promote and champion an ongoing programme of workshops, champions and training for life story work, as part of the Life Story Work *Works* ...campaign including helpful templates, guidance and standards. This will build on the work which we started in 2016 which included regular workshops and training for foster carers. We are one of 7 Local Authorities who are working with the Family Rights Group who received DfE Innovation funding to pilot the **Lifelong links a** with 50 Southwark children over a three year period. The Lifelong Links trial will be aimed at under 16 year olds who have been in care for less than 3 years and for whom there is no plan for them to live within their family or be adopted. The trial will be independently evaluated to determine whether Lifelong Links is effective in improving outcomes for children in care. This funding will enable 50 Southwark children to have a detailed genogram completed and then the Life long links co-ordinator would seek to link with extended family members and key connections in the child's life (which could for example include former foster carers) working with the child and their foster carer to then hold a family group meeting to look at how the extended family may be able to offer ongoing support and relationships with the child. <https://www.frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-group-conferences/lifelong-links>

We will ensure that achieving permanence is as robustly tracked and pursued for all Looked After Children as it is currently for children with a plan of adoption.

A monthly Care Permanence Tracking Panel was established. This has led to really significant improvement in the numbers of children who are being matched at the Adoption and Fostering Panel increasing from 3 children in 2016/2017 to 15 children in 2017/18 an increase of 400%. It is anticipated this will again increase radically in 2018/19 to at least 20 children. A key test of this is the difference this makes to the experience and support of these children in their permanent families and the impact on long term placement stability. The Lifelong Links project is underway and working with Southwark children helping them make connections.

We will ensure that the Access to Resources Team have the best possible information about children to achieve the best possible placement.

In 2017/2018 a new referral form for children has gone live on Mosaic to ensure the best possible information is captured for every child highlighting their views challenges, likes and dislikes and personalities. A workshop was held for Children's Social Workers on creating the best possible profiles for children.

In 2017-2018 a Steering Group was established with CORAM to plan a Fostering Activity Day for Children. This event will be similar to the Adoption Activity Days and will be attended by Children who are looking for a long term foster family, the event is booked for the 15th September 2018 and will be attended by a mix of Southwark approved and IFA Foster Carers.

We will ensure a robust Fostering Service improvement plan is in place to ensure all statutory checks remain in timescale and that recording on foster carer records is of an excellent standard.

Performance Reports on Mosaic have been development which provide up to date information on; visits, reviews, health and DBS checks. These are closely monitored by the Fostering Team Managers and Service Managers. Improvement is evident in this approach however this will require ongoing and close monitoring of performance during 2018/19.

We will seek to place more children and young people in, or near to, Southwark and ensure for those needing to be more than 20 miles from Southwark there is a Lead Manager in the Fostering Service tracking that they are not disadvantaged by living away from the borough.

The Access to Resources Team actively seek to place young people, in or near to Southwark where possible. For some young people there are reasons connected to risk factors which lead to a recommendation not to be placed in borough and for children with connected family carers the placements may be far from Southwark in some instances but are for that child enabling them to remain with family members.

DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR 2018/2019

- 1. We will continue to recruit more foster carers living within the borough or nearby to Southwark who are able to meet the needs of Southwark Children and to ensure creative and robust support plans to enable more children to experience family life in foster care.**
- 2. We will ensure that more children have their permanence confirmed and celebrated in Long term Fostering Placements to feel safe and secure and enjoy family life and that they have the right support to ensure the placement remains settled and happy.**
- 3. We will work with all Children's Social Workers to ensure that all children cared for by Southwark foster carers have Life Story work which their foster carers are actively involved with and that all children and their foster carers know why they are looked after and supported with this understanding.**
- 4. We will ensure that all Southwark foster carers continue to have access to high quality training and support to continue their professional development and to provide excellent care for Southwark children. All training will connect to the Secure Base Model of therapeutic Care Giving.**
- 5. We will ensure that the Voice of Young People, their birth families and foster carers is central to the development of the Fostering Service through listening to and working with young people, foster carers and family members. Wherever possible training will be co-delivered with experienced foster carers and young people with experience of being Looked After.**
- 6. We will champion the need for young people to be connected and have Lifelong Links. This will be by supporting Lifelong Links innovation project but also by ensuring children in foster care are supported to retain key connections in their foster and birth family including their brothers, sisters and their friends.**
- 7. We will implement an improvement plan for children placed with Friends and Family to ensure these assessments are completed in timescale and where possible families are supported to apply for Special Guardianship Orders, to promote family life and not remaining Looked After.**
- 8. We will undertake a peer and management review on the quality of Annual Reviews for foster carers (including the voice of foster carers) and a plan to ensure all reviews have high quality analysis will be developed and implemented in 2018/19.**

Appendix 1

Adoption & Fostering Panel Chair's Report

01/04 /2017 - 31/03/2018

Jane Fearon, Independent Chair Adoption & Fostering Panel

Date: 16th May 2018

Note: As this is an Adoption & Fostering Panel Report, for the purposes of this Fostering Service Annual Report, only the sections of this report relevant to the Fostering Service have been included. Those relevant to adoption will be contained in an Appendix of the Adoption Service Annual Report.

1. Introduction

This report summarises the work of the London Borough of Southwark's joint Adoption and Fostering Panel over the financial year April 1 2017 to 31 March 2018. It is intended to complement the six monthly summary reports which are provided by the council's executive under National Minimum Standard 25. This report should be read in conjunction with both the Southwark Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose and the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2017 – 2018 which sets out and gives the legislative and regulatory framework under which Southwark Council /Southwark Adoption Agency carries out the required function of the Adoption and Fostering Panel. The joint Adoption and Fostering Panel has an independent status and a role to assure good standards of practice, consistency of approach and fairness in the Adoption and Fostering Service. The National Minimum Standards for adoption require a report to be made by the Adoption Panel to the Agency on the local authority's Adoption Service; it is also good practice that an annual report be prepared detailing the work of the Fostering Service.

2. Constitution of Panels

Fostering Panel

The Panel is constituted in line with the:

- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011

The Southwark Fostering Panel makes recommendations for the approval of prospective foster carers; short breaks foster carers (Family Link) family and friends and connected persons (Regulation 24, 25 & 27). All first reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel and all reviews where there has been an allegation or where standards of care have been raised and require the independent overview of the Fostering Panel.

The Panel over the course of 2017-2018 has considered the long-term matches of Southwark children looked after with their respective foster carers, both Southwark and IFA carers, where the Care Plan for an individual child has been agreed for long-term fostering.

3. The Function and Overview of the Adoption and Fostering Panel

The Joint Panel is now functioning well and efficiently; at the outset of the joint Panel a number of Panel members required a period of adjustment to gain the strengths to enable them to be confident to deliver an integrated approach to ensuring the best outcomes for all children who are looked after. The Joint Panel has sought to ensure that children, adopters and foster carers have a consistent approach and this is in regard to ensuring high standards of practice and robust and timely decision making. The overall aim is to deliver an integrated service to children requiring permanence through adoption and fostering and to ensure the care provided is of the highest quality and meets the needs of the children looked after in Southwark. There continues to be a quarterly review of the function of the Joint Panel to ensure it maintains a high standard in its service delivery.

During the period of adjustment the entire Panel remained committed to ensuring that the work of the Panel was and is conducted with professionalism. Panel members' contributions evidence the importance with which they approach the business of the Panel. Those attending are able both to praise and challenge appropriately. The business is conducted in a thorough way and all Panel members participate and ask relevant questions, demonstrating that they have thoroughly read all of the papers submitted. The questions are relevant to the Panel role and function, and are agreed prior to prospective adopters, foster carers and social workers entering the Panel room. The Panel sees applicants and carers with social workers as well as seeing social workers on their own when additional questions need to be asked about practice or confidential references and checks.

An updated Panel booklet has been produced in order that prospective adopters and foster carers are informed of the Panel process. The booklet also gives a synopsis of each of the Panel members, detailing the experience they have, which is relevant to their role on the Panel.

From 1st April 2017 until 31st March 2018 the Southwark Adoption and Fostering Panel met on the first and third Wednesday of each month; The Panel has met twenty seven times in total during this period. There is flexibility for the Panel to be convened if required to ensure that no unnecessary delay occurs, and this has been necessary on four occasions over the course of the year.

The 2011 Guidance and Regulations allow Panel members on the Adoption and Fostering Panel to remain with no maximum or minimum tenure. This enables those Panel members who choose to remain on the Panel the opportunity to do so. Southwark's Adoption and Fostering Panel members are drawn from the Central List, a pool of people with the necessary experience and qualifications to be a Panel member. The Central List aims to be diverse in its range of experience and balanced in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity, reflecting the adopters, foster carers and looked after children of Southwark. A number of the independent members also sit on other Panels, both local authority and Independent Adoption and Fostering Agency. All 15 active Panel members have had appraisals in the period 2017 – 2018, conducted by the Panel Advisers and the Chair

The Joint Panel in 2017-2018 had two Agency Advisers; one who advised on adoption matters and one who advised on fostering. They have continued to ensure that the reports to the Panel are prepared correctly. It is no longer essential that legal advice is provided for all Panel meetings and during this period Panel have required legal advice on only one occasion and this remains available should an issue arise on a particular case. The Medical Adviser has attended the Panel meetings regularly over the course of the year; this has been a positive contribution. Having the Medical Adviser at Panel to summarise on the child's health and development or on the health of potential adopters has aided Panel greatly when considering the complex future medical and developmental needs of children being matched with adopters

The Agency Adviser that leads on fostering matters has worked tirelessly to improve the quality of reports that are presented to the Fostering Panel and ensure that they are presented to the Panel in a timely manner.

The Panel have benefited from a consistent Panel administrator; the reports arrive with members in good time and Panel operates a paperless Panel agenda. The production of the minutes of the meetings is timely and overall gives an accurate account of the Panel discussion and rationale for recommendations. When the Panel has had queries about a particular practice, there have been discussions between the Panel Chair and Panel members with the relevant senior managers in order to address any concerns and explain the thinking behind particular actions or decisions. Looking to the future, the Panel would benefit from further development of the Central List to ensure that it remains balanced in both terms of fostering and adoption, and that gender is equally represented at each panel. I would suggest that consideration to specific recruitment of male Panel members is given and recruitment of a Panel member with current foster care experience.

4. Effective working Relationship with the Adoption and Fostering Service:

The working relationship between the Panel, Southwark's Adoption Agency and Southwark's Fostering Service is good; before each Panel and after a Panel meeting an informal discussion between the Chair and Panel Adviser(s) takes place. This allows for any points to be raised prior to Panel and for actions which need to be carried out by the Fostering or Adoption Service to be discussed following the Panel meeting.

5. Panel Statistics

During this period the panel has met on 27 occasions.

Foster Carer Approval Data	
Number of approval households	18
Number of new carers	27
Single applicants	13
Couples	7
Approved Family Link	3
Approved Friends & Family	5
Approved Foster carer	12
Approved Foster Carers Living in Southwark	2
Numbers of deregistration's	3
Numbers of resignations	13
Number of carers deceased	4
Newly Approved Foster carers Ethnic Origin = 18	
Number of WB	5
Number of B/BB/BC	6
Number of B/BB/BA	4
Number of A/AB/AOAB	1
Number of B/BB/AOBB	1
Number of BA	1
Newly Approved Family Link Ethnic Origin = 4	
Number of M/MEG	1
Number of B/BB/BA	1
Number of WB	2
Newly Approved Family & friends Ethnic Origin = 5	
Number of WB	1
Number of B/BB/BA	1
Number of B/BB/BC	1
Number of OEG	2
Foster Carer De-registration by Ethnic Origin = 3	
Number of B/BB/AOBB	1
Number of B/BB/BC	1
Number of B/BA/BB	1
Matches	
Number of fostering matches	10 [15 children]
Of which number of siblings	5[10]
Ages of Children at the time of Fostering Match	
Number of Children Matched Aged 0 - 1 years	0
Number of Children Matched Aged 1 - 3 years	0
Number of Children Matched Aged 4 - 5 years	1

Number of Children Matched Aged 6 - 7 years	2
Number of Children Matched Aged 8 - 9 years	3
Number of Children Matched Aged 10 - 12 years	4
Number of Children Matched Aged 13 - 15 years	5
Fostering Ethnic Origin - Children Matched	
Number of WB	4
Number of WO	1
Number of B/BB/AOBB	3
Number of B/BB/BA	2
Number of M/MEG/W&BC	3
Number of A/AB/P	2

Ethnicity of Matches				
Carer 1 Ethnicity	Carer 2 Ethnicity	Child 1 Ethnicity	Child 2 Ethnicity	Child 3 Ethnicity
WB	WB	B/BB/BA		
WB	B/BB/C	M/MEG/W&BC	M/MEG/W&BC	
WB	WB	WB/OAWB		
B/BB/C	B/BB/C	B / BB/ BA		
A/AB/P	A/AB/B	A/AB/P	A/AB/P	
WB	WB	WB		
WB		WB	WB	
WB		WB	WI	
OEG		WB		
WB	WB	B/BB/AOB	B/BB/AOB	

First Reviews	
Number of first Reviews	19
1 st Review Family & Friends	7
1 st Review Family Link	3
1 st Review Foster carers	9

Family and Friends Foster Carers

The Panel have considered a number of prospective and approved Family and Friends carers. It has been evident that there is a high level of commitment offered to children. Of the cases reviewed over the course of the year, the Family and Friends' carers have provided a good standard of care in highly challenging circumstances. It is acknowledged that such applications can present Panel with a number of difficulties in respect to the nature of the cases where the judgment is based upon the existing relationship and the emotional attachment that often exists and is seen to outweigh the practical implications such as; limited accommodation, applicants who are working or have a number of children of their own. Of the number of cases considered both for approval and for review, the format, content and analysis in reports has not always been consistent and this has been dependent at what point the case has been referred to the Fostering Service. It has been the case that the Panel has continued to see an increased number of such cases. The developing F & F format remains ongoing.

Regulation 24 reports have been presented to the Panel; the timeframe for Regulation 25 extension and Regulation 27 approvals is not routinely met and remains a challenge. There has also been one occasion where the presentation of a Regulation 27 application as a way of regulating a placement has not been appropriate and alternative options should have been considered.

Going forward, the reports will require a more consistent focus on how the Family and Friends carers can meet the specific needs of the child or children concerned, as well as the applicant's ability to form a good working relationship with the Local Authority and an assessment of the support in place or anticipated, to ensure that the placement has good outcomes for children looked after.

Family Link Foster Carers (Short Breaks for children with disability)

Family Link carers are still presented to Panel for approval and first review. The overall quality of the reports is good; statutory checks and references are completed to a good standard and within the required time frame. The information and robust analysis provided in the reports enables the Panel to make informed and safe recommendations. The first reviews that have been presented to Panel have highlighted a good working relationship between Family Link Carer and Service, with many of the foster carers completing training and accessing support that has been available. The matching process for children undertaking short breaks presents as robust, with the Disabled Children's Team offering support and flexibility.

Annual Reviews

All first reviews have been presented to Panel, Panel have also had reviews presented where foster carers have been subject to allegation and Section 47 inquiries or where standards of care issues have arisen. The information provided in the review reports enables the Panel to make safe recommendations. Similar to the reviews of family and friends carers, the first reviews that have been presented to Panel have highlighted in the majority of cases a good working relationship between the foster carer and Service.

Quality Assurance of Annual Reviews

In some cases the quality of overall analysis is variable, this was a point raised in the previous Panel report; the inclusion of the Secure Base Model in the supervising social worker's report has been a welcome introduction and assists Panel in considering an individual foster carer's skills and abilities. Avocet provide the independent report and recommendation to the review, where there have been particular areas of poor practice highlighted on the part of the foster carer the analysis provided in some cases has lacked objectivity and clear rationale for the recommendation provided. A small number of cases have been presented to Panel with a management overview report; in these cases the report has been comprehensive and balanced.

F-Form Assessments

The standard of the Form F reports being presented to Panel has continued to improve; there have been some good quality reports presented which have provided the Panel with robust analysis of prospective foster carer's strengths as well as vulnerabilities, with an evidence based overview of the potential capacity in which to undertake the fostering task.

In evaluating the overall fostering reports presented to Panel, a small number of the reports were judged by Panel to be adequate in terms of quality. These reports could have been developed by having more robust analysis regarding potential strengths and vulnerabilities of prospective foster carers and exploring the applicants' understanding of Southwark's expectation of its foster carers. However Panel has seen an overall improvement in the quality of the reports presented in comparison to previous years.

Please note, the following data relates to the number of feedback forms received, not the number of cases heard by the Panel

Form F and Form C	
Excellent	3
Good	4
Satisfactory	3
Poor	1

Foster Carer Review & ARA Evaluation	
Excellent	0
Good	2
Satisfactory	2
Poor	1

Matching Report & Evaluation	
Excellent	0
Good	5
Satisfactory	1
Poor	0

National Minimum Timescales

The Fostering Panel has to measure some aspects of the work against the Fostering National Minimum Standards to see how far the standards are met. The National Standard for the assessment and approval of Foster Carers is eight months from the receipt of Stage 1 application.

National Minimum Timescales- Approval of Foster carers	
Number of Foster carer approvals presented to panel	12
Number of Fostering approvals completed within NMS – 8 months	8
Number of Fostering approvals completed outside NMS	4

National Minimum Timescales – Approval of family & friends/Connected Persons	
Number of Regulation 27 cases presented to panel	5
Number of Regulation 27 assessments completed within 24 weeks (16 weeks with a Regulation 25 extension of 8 weeks)	4
Number of Regulation 27 assessments completed outside 24 weeks	1

National Minimum Timescales – First Reviews	
Number of first reviews completed within 1 year of approval date	13
Number of first reviews completed outside 1 year of approval date	6

The ADM for Southwark has endorsed all of Panel recommendations when making Qualifying Determinations. All QD are available to Panel through Egress under Panel business.

Foster Carer Feedback

"Everybody was very polite and respectful." – Foster Carer

"I was worried about attending the Panel as I thought that they would ask me things that I could not answer. It was not like that and when I went there I was more relaxed." – Foster Carer

Fostering Social Worker Feedback

"Would have been good to see a more ethnically diverse Panel and maybe one more male?"
Independent social worker – Fostering

"Very good welcoming process." Advanced Practitioner – Safeguarding

"I got a sense that all papers were read well. The Panel showed an understanding of (foster carer's) journey into fostering." Supervising social worker - Fostering

"Plenty of opportunity for carer to show her skills, passion and commitment. Good questions asked." Social worker – Fostering

"Foster carer reported to me that she was made to feel at ease from the friendly nature of the Panel and being welcomed by smiling faces." Advanced Practitioner – Safeguarding

"Good explored strengths and possible areas of development." Supervising social worker – Fostering

"Carers were quite anxious about coming to Panel – might have helped if they had some general ideas about questions they would ask beforehand." Independent social worker – Fostering

"The Questions asked were in relation to the case and were appropriate for the purpose of the meeting." Student social worker – Fostering

"I think the foster carer felt very welcomed and that her excellent work with the young people was acknowledged." Social worker – Fostering

"I do sometimes feel it's difficult to raise a question when the Chair is focusing on the carers." Supervising social worker manager – Fostering

"Good Panel represented by members from various backgrounds." Supervising social worker – Manager Fostering

"Very relevant and positive attitude I thought." Advanced Practitioner - Social worker – Fostering

6. Overview from Panel members' Annual Review/Appraisals & Training:

Panel members have participated in a training session to do with learning and reflection on the report into the disruption of a placement during the past eighteen months. Panel members also received bespoke training on allegations against foster carers.

Panel members have continued to develop their roles and responsibilities over the last year. Panel Appraisals were completed by me as Chair and the Panel Advisors over the course of the year. Training for Panel members has also taken place, as well as the opportunity to participate in Adoption and Fostering Service training. Panel members have had access to the following workshops and training: SGO workshops, Foster to Adopt, Safeguarding, Understanding the Designated LA Officer, Child Exploitation, Induction to Adoption Panels, Adoption Learning Day, Achieving Permanence, Celebrating Difference, Panel Training Day, Managing Transition Training (University of East Anglia), and Unconscious Bias.

Where possible at the end of each Panel we have taken the opportunity on individual cases to discuss any relevant learning point in order to consider research or future learning for the Panel.

7. Summary /Conclusion

Overall the cases that were presented to Panel highlighted a positive working relationship between adopters and foster carers and the local authority. The vast majority of adoption reports that are presented to the Panel are excellent, and the feedback from adopters is positive regarding their experience of working with Southwark. The adoption agency has continued to take steps to plan, prepare and recruit potential adopters who are able to receive a child earlier as part of a Fostering to Adopt Scheme. This is very good for the child as it reduces the placement moves an infant may have to experience and means the child is placed much earlier with their potential future adopters. For those adopters approved and awaiting a placement, a number of training courses have been provided to support and enhance their skills in parenting adopted children.

The Government's adoption reform agenda continues to develop. The change in the court's attitude to agreeing to adoption plans continues to have an impact on the number of children available for adoption placements. The agency is creating and maintaining good standards of practice which must assist the provision and quality of the service in the face of so much change in the future including regionalisation.

A small number of the cases presented to Panel relating to fostering matters detailed a breakdown in communication with the fostering service, primarily where the supervising social worker had challenged standards of care or where the foster carer had failed to inform the social worker of key information, for example a change in personal circumstances. Reviews on the whole are within the correct time frame, although some reviews were not presented to the fostering Panel until sometime after the review took place.

Panel function has striven to embrace the joint function of the Panel and overall has worked well over the year. Panel have remained effective and made robust and safe recommendations for the safeguarding of children within Southwark. Panel have challenged the quality of the reports presented where it has been necessary to do so. The overall majority of the Panel function is in

relation to fostering cases. The Permanence Service has been part of the University of East Anglia Transition project. The project will be evaluated at the end of the academic year. It is not always evident to the Panel when a match is being considered if the UEA approach is being used in a particular case, and this has caused a degree of confusion at times.

I shall cease to be the Chair of the Adoption and Fostering Panel in May 2018 after a period of ten years. It remains for me to thank all those members of staff and the Panel members who have worked with me so well. I wish the Adoption and Fostering Service continuing achievements in promoting the best interests of children and in placing them with new, loving families in the unsettled times ahead.