

2017/2018

Annual Report

Southwark Adoption Service



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KEY MESSAGES

We are proud to work through this year as an outstanding Adoption Service, as recognised by Ofsted in their inspection judgement published in June 2017.

Early Permanence is now extremely well embedded in Southwark practice within the Adoption Service and across permanence planning for children in Southwark. We are also working with Coram through a grant from the DfE to lead developing Practice Expertise and Support to Early Permanence Carers across South London Local Authorities. In 2017/18 more Early Permanence Carers approved by Southwark been matched as Inter-Agency placements with children from other Local Authorities and this has been for some other Local Authorities their first experiences of Early Permanence.

Southwark are working collaboratively with local authorities across the South London Adoption and Permanence Consortium around working towards becoming part of the South London Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) which is a requirement in legislation set out by Government. Southwark have offered to be a host for the London South RAA and are ambitious to ensure any move to regional arrangements goes beyond meeting Department of Education requirements but has at its heart practice improvement and improving outcomes for children.

Children are continuing to be adopted quicker (over a year quicker than 5 years ago). This is supported by a well embedded early tracking approach. There have however been several children in 2017/18 for whom adoption is the right care plan, but we have not been able to identify the right adoptive family for them, which raises concern about adopter sufficiency for older children.

The number of adoptions in 2017/18 was 14 this was a reduction from 20 in the previous year.

PURPOSE OF ANNUAL REPORT

The purpose of the document is to report on the activity of the adoption service, fulfilling obligations in the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) to report to the executive side of the local authority. It will cover: performance and developments in Southwark's delivery of adoption services; how the Council is compliant with key national minimum standards and the service offered to those seeking to adopt and those affected by adoption through the provision of adoption support. It will also identify any significant trends within adoption and how Southwark can continue to meet changing demands within the adoption service. This report details the work of Southwark Council Adoption Service from 1st April 2017 to end of March 2018.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Adoption is one of the most important and significant decisions that can be made for a child. As part of its wider agenda to create a fairer future for the most vulnerable children and families, Southwark Council wants every child to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. For those young children who cannot remain or return safely to their birth families, adoption offers them the best opportunity to experience a warm and loving family environment throughout life. Southwark Adoption Service is part of the Permanence & Resources Service within the council and there is a strong focus on working closely with all the children's social work teams, in particular the Safeguarding Service, to ensure permanence is thought about as early as possible for children and for most children the best possible permanence option is remaining with their birth parents or extended family but for those for whom this cannot be safely achieved then considering adoption as early as possible increases the chances of finding a matched adoptive family in the child's timescales.

Southwark have invested in having a high-quality Adoption Service and this has led to on-going improvements in the quality and pace of the adopter assessments undertaken and with the pace at which children are matched with prospective adoptive families. The service invested in having a team dedicated team tracking child as early as possible to ensure that where appropriate the parallel plan of adoption is considered as early as possible enabling consideration of early permanence. This team working closely and successfully with colleagues in the Safeguarding & Family Support Service, as well as Assessment and Intervention Service, have enabled several children to be placed in Early Permanence placements rather than experiencing moves from foster care then to adoption.

Southwark continues to develop its practice and systems in order to deliver the extensive change agenda outlined in *Putting Children First: delivering our vision for excellent children's social care* (July 2016). This sets out the programme of reforms to children's social care over the next four years. *Adoption – A vision for Change* (March 2016) reiterates the government pledge to tackle delay for children in the adoption process. The government has reinforced their policy ambition through provisions in the Education and Adoption Act 2016. The Act also gives the Secretary of State a new power to direct one or more named local authorities to make arrangements for any, or all, of their adoption functions to be carried out on their behalf by of the local authorities named, or by another agency.

Following the general election in June 2017, the Minister of State for Children and Families reaffirmed commitment to this policy. The DfE has shared five organizational requirements that should be in place in all Regional Adoption Agencies:

- A single line of authority with the ability to act as a single service and a head of service in place.
- Transfer of staff into the organisation.
- Inclusion of core adoption functions of recruitment and assessment of adopters, early permanence and family finding, and adoption support.
- Pooled funding from local authorities into the RAA.
- Pan-regional approach to matching i.e. one pool of children and adopters.

Southwark have offered to host the South London Regional Adoption Agency (hosting the adoption functions of nine other local authorities), and during 2017/2018 with an appointment of a Project Manager there has been increased momentum and engagement in developing a clear business case and model.

At heart of the proposition for Adopt London is that a pooled and dedicated service will deliver better outcomes through stronger leadership, more resilient services, pooled resources and a dedicated focus upon implementing the learning of what works best for every adopted child and every adopter across the capital. The specific improvements that are intended relate to:

- Early Permanence Planning, including increased use of Foster for Adoption
- Children are placed more quickly
- Children with harder to place characteristics placed more quickly
- A pan-London pool of approved adopters for matching
- Improved marketing and recruitment
- Adopters receiving a more rapid and consistent service
- Improved and more consistent post-adoption support
- Efficiencies derived from operating at scale

WHAT WE DID - CHILDREN

Activity Overview - children	17-18	16-17	15-16	14-15	13-14	12-13
Children with a Placement Order made (plan for adoption agreed by Court)	11	17	13	21	40	42
Children matched with adopters	12	14	21	32	29	28
Children with an Adoption Order granted	14	20	32	39	33	20

Numbers of children adopted have decreased to 14 in 2016-17. This was lower than expected but is reflective that in 2015-16 there were only 13 Placement Orders made for Children and in 2016-17 this number only rose slightly to 17. The number also reflects that for some children where the Court agreed a plan of adoption the plans for the child subsequently changed due to a change of circumstances or legal challenge. For example in one case relatives came forward after the Placement Order was made but were assessed to be able to offer a high standard of care and hence we recommended and the Court agreed that the child should be placed within their extended family. In another case the birth parent challenged the Placement Order and unfortunately due to the length of the Court process although the Court agreed that adoption remains the most suitable care plan the prospective adoptive family withdrew.

The reduction in the numbers of Placement Orders being granted, and thus Adoption Orders made, is in line with national trends. For 2017/18 the 20 children adopted represents 6% of children leaving care which is a 1% decrease compared to 7% in 2016/17. 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 an increase in those leaving care for a Special Guardianship Order and a reduction in those leaving care to adoption.

National trends are of the looked after population increasing but in Southwark there was a small decrease with 499 children as at 31st March 2017 and 491 children as at 31st March 2018. There is from 2016/17 to 2017/18 a slight reduction in the rate of children becoming Looked After from 78 per 10,000 of the Southwark population compared to 77 per 10,000 of the Southwark population. This rate continues to be high compared to the national average for 2017 which is 62 per 10,000 of the population. The age profile of children looked after in Southwark is increasing and so in 2016/2017 29% of the looked after children were aged 0 -9 but in 2017/2018 this fell 5% to 24% therefore reducing the number of children for whom adoption is likely to be a suitable possibility.

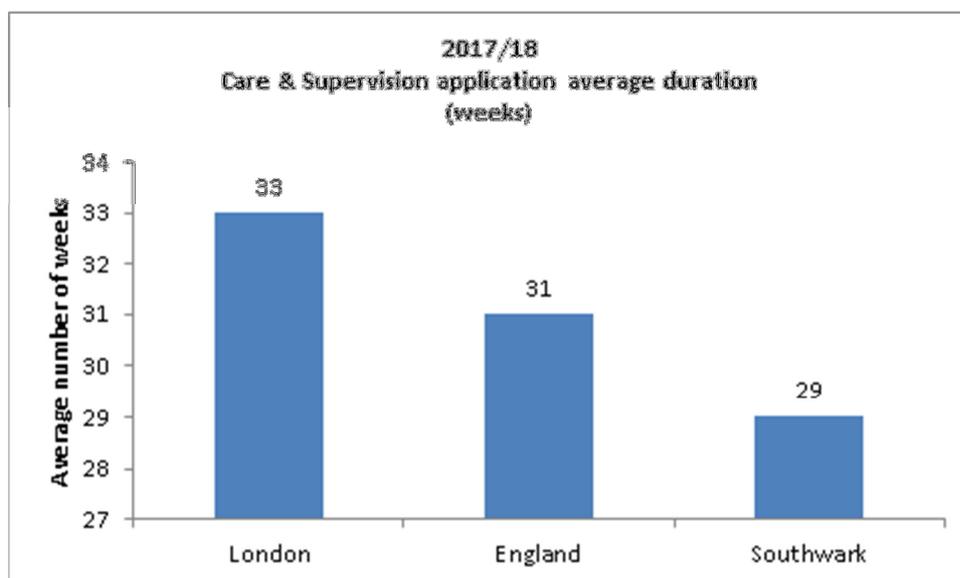
Of the 14 children adopted in 2017/18 2 out of 14 (14%) were aged 4 or above at the time they were adopted, this compares to 20% in 2016/17. 1 out of 14 (7 %) were aged 7 or over compared to 20% in 2016/17. The age range for children being adopted ranged from aged six months to aged 7. In Southwark 79% of the children adopted were from a BME background and this compares to 70% of the Looked After Children in Southwark as at 31st March 2018 being from a BME background. Three of the children adopted had been placed with their adoptive carers under the Early Permanence Scheme and this represents 21%.

Adoption timeliness for children

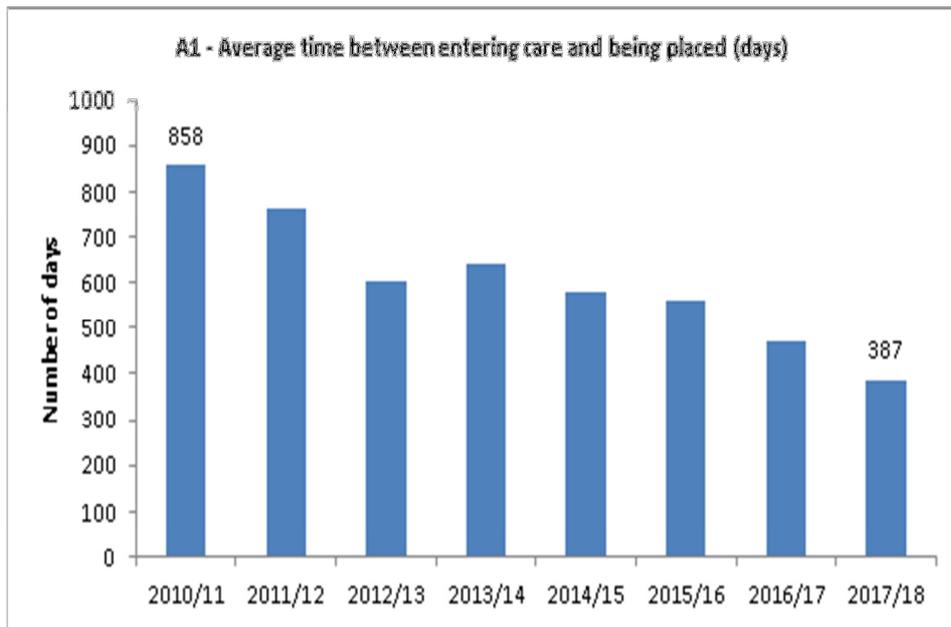
<i>The average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (A1)</i>						
Rolling 3-year average						
2009-12	2010-12	2011-14	2012-15	2013-16	2014-17	2015-2018
775	736	684	615	603	572	472*
Threshold 639	Threshold 608	Threshold 547	Threshold 487	Threshold 426	Threshold 426	Threshold 426

**Please note that data for 2015-18 is provisional as not yet published*

The table above shows continuing improvement since 2009 in the A1 figure which measures how many days from a child becoming looked after to the date they move in with their prospective adoptive family. The figure of 472 days for the rolling period of 2015 to 2018 is indicative of ongoing improvement. Southwark are successful in the majority of care proceedings being concluded within 26 weeks, due to some much longer cases the average for 2017/18 is 29 weeks but this is significantly better than the London average of 33 weeks and the England average of 31 weeks. Swifter decision making continues to impact on reducing the amount of time children spend being looked after before being placed with an adoptive family. The chart below shows how Southwark compared the England and London average for 2017/2018:



The graph below shows the average number of days for A1 in each individual year, rather than the 3-year rolling average, that children waited between entering care and being placed for adoption. The chart shows that in 2010/11 this was 858 days, last year 2016/17 this was at 472 days which was below the national average. This has fallen further in 2017/18 and so is 387 days. While this reduction in how long children spend in care is reducing and this is positive it also reflects some of the oldest children with the highest level needs were not found adoptive families in 2017/18 and it is hoped the right family for them will be found in 2018/19 and while this would lead to the A1 average increasing significantly this would reflect finding adoptive families for these children rather than them remaining looked after.



Matching children with adopters

<i>the average time between court authority to place a child and match decision (A2)</i>						
Rolling 3 year average (days)						
2009-12	2010-13	2011-14	2012-15	2013-16	2014-17	2015-18*
173	218	233	221	240	265	212*
		Threshold 152	Threshold 121	Threshold 121	Threshold 121	Threshold 121

**Please note that data for 2015-18 is provisional as not yet published*

This performance area measures the number of days from a Placement Order being granted until a match is made for a child with an adoptive family. In looking at the rolling three-year average above the figure has shown a significant decrease. Detailed analysis of the data shows however that this reflects that in the time period counted several older children had not been matched or adopted and it is absolutely hoped they will be and this will then significantly increase the A2 figure. Latest 2014-17 published data shows the England average as being 220 days.

In 2017/18 there were 12 matches presented to the Adoption and Fostering Panel. This compares to 14 matches in 2016/17. In 6 of these cases the A2 figure was within a range of 0 and 91 days, this is 50% compared to 64% in the previous year. The Adoption scorecard threshold is 121 days and 7 out of the 12 children matched at the Panel was matched in less than 121 days this represents 58.3%. The range was between zero days and 328 days (compared to a range of zero to 1000 days in the previous year). In the 6 cases where the match occurs in over 91 days an explanation report is written to understand the reasons why and this is presented to the Permanence Taskforce which is chaired by the Director for Children and Families so that the service is capturing the learning on the reasons for this which can be challenged by the Director and members of the Permanence Taskforce.

Children who are considered to be harder to place (those 3 and over, with additional needs and in sibling groups) will continue to comprise a significant proportion of those that the Adoption Service in Southwark needs to find families for. This remains an area that needs continuing focus and challenge to ensure we are not limiting the children for whom adoption may be the right Care Plan. The Service are committed to give all children the best possible opportunity of finding an adoptive family if that is the right care plan for them. It is critical to our service that we understand individual children's journeys and that our focus is on these not on the 'averages' in timescales. Southwark has during 2017/2018 sought to utilise their own adoptive placements, and in parallel consider and use a range of other placements from Voluntary Adoption Agencies and other Local Authorities to ensure choice and that children do not wait longer than necessary for an appropriate match. For older children particularly boys from a BME background it has felt exceptionally challenging in 2017/2018 to find a match with the right adoptive family. The Achieving Permanence Team have report that in this year sufficiency of adopters looking adopt older children particularly boys aged over 3 from a BME background has been a real concern and looking across the whole of the UK they have been looking at small pool of adopters for children waiting which has led to children waiting too long to find a permanent family.

Early Permanence

The Early Permanency scheme began in October 2014 and gave it this name to cover both 'Concurrency' and 'Foster to Adopt' placements. It built on an initial expertise from Coram as well as multi-disciplinary support from Southwark CARELINK who are a key part of the ongoing steering group for the scheme.

We have now made 15 placements but these are not all Southwark children. We have continued to support our Early Permanence placements and at end March 2018 have four babies placed who we hope to have Adoption Orders in the next few months. These placements have been increasingly Inter-Agency with other boroughs placing children with our Early Permanence carers. We have placed our children with Coram and Lewisham Early Permanence carers. We are using our Early Permanence Contract in these cases to ensure we are being paid as a Fostering Agency for the support we provide to these placements.

Southwark were awarded funding from the Practice Innovation Fund with Coram in 2017/2018 to develop early permanence across the South London Permanence Consortium. Southwark provide a monthly support group for Early Permanence carers across South London Permanence Consortium – including those in Stage 2, approved and with a child in placement. Early Permanence carers have fed back that they appreciate the opportunity to meet with others in similar situations as they feel different from other adopters and foster carers. They also appreciate the therapeutic input from Carelink (Southwark CAMHS) who is funded to attend from the Practice Improvement Fund for the next year until April 2019. Southwark run a bi-monthly steering group for Early Permanence leads across the South London Consortium to share good practice and develop strong links. Southwark and Coram ran another staff training in May 2018 for social workers and managers on "Assessing and Supporting Dually Approved carers" – this was well attended and we plan to run this again in November 2018 and open up to staff across London as most of the South London Adoption and Permanence Consortium have now attended.

Southwark led a Conference across the South London Permanence Consortium at Goldsmiths University in March 2018. This was very successful and involved professionals across 8 Local Authorities as well as Voluntary Adoption Agencies. A further event is planned for November 2018 in Southwark (including contact workers, social workers, managers and lawyers) to attend to raise awareness of the challenges and positives of these placements for children and adopters and staff involved. Also to help raise awareness about these placements and for professionals across the service to develop their understanding of what children Early Permanence may be suitable for and how to plan and support these placements as well as sharing a film featuring the experiences of Southwark early permanence carers.

The DfE provided funding under regionalisation for Southwark to develop a mentoring and leadership programme for leads from other Local Authorities to develop an action plan to develop early permanence within their Local Authority.

Relinquished babies

The Southwark Adoption Service provides a service for birth parents that wish to voluntarily relinquish their babies for adoption and this includes Southwark offering funding for these parents to access a session of independent legal advice. These assessments require intensive support by social workers including highly skilled counselling. The Adoption Service supported 1 relinquished baby during 2017/18.

Children waiting for adoption

Number of children waiting as at the 31 st March for each year:							
2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
35	44	48	45	18	7	9	9

The Adoption Service and in particular the Achieving Permanence Practice Group (APPG) carefully track children now working closely with colleagues in both Assessment and Intervention, as well as Safeguarding and Family Support Services, using a permanence consultation approach. The aim is working together and achieving the right permanence for every child. The numbers for individual children can have a very statistically high impact for both A1 and A2 figures. As a service as well as looking at averages we have detailed management oversight of the journey for individual children and we want to be ambitious to find permanent stable families for more children who cannot return to their live in their birth families. Proactively exploring adoption for a greater number of older children and those with complex needs is a desired outcome to reduce the numbers of children in care and to open up this possibility for more children. It is however very likely to achieve adoption for more children then the impact could be skewing timescales so that averages increase and the this will reflect on the Adoption Scorecard.

At the end of 2017/18 there were 9 children waiting for adoption with Placement Orders. This included one sibling group of two. The together and apart group for this sibling group indicated that they would each benefit from separate adoptive families but ongoing contact. Two of the children waiting were already linked to adoptive families and awaiting the match at Panel. One child the Care Plan was very likely to change from adoption due to relatives coming forward. Two of the children waiting for adoption have been waiting for over a year and both are aged over four and in light of their needs despite extensive searching and interest the right adoptive family for them has not yet been identified. Two children were placed with foster carers who were seeking to offer permanence either via becoming adopters or in one case it was more likely the Placement Order would be reverted and the Care Plan would be long term fostering. The number of children waiting remains at nine which is the same number as on 31st March 2017 but the service would acknowledge that 2017/2018 feels like it has been a much more challenging year where the numbers of available families nationally is not sufficient to ensure each child can find the right adoptive family.

The Adoption Service continues to extensively use all means possible to find adopters for children including Link Maker, the Adoption Register, advertising in 'Be my Parent', exchange days and activity days. All resources possible are used including DVDs and iPads to be able to show prospective adopters the most recent picture of children. Creative support packages that have been designed around the needs of the child in the adoptive family have enabled children with a higher level of needs to be adopted.

Siblings

The Adoption Service is highly committed that whenever possible siblings should be placed together and where this is not possible it is crucial that placements are found that enable brothers and sisters to stay in touch. Sometimes the needs of each sibling are too great for one carer to be able to meet them all. Siblings are considered harder to place because of their greater needs and the smaller pool of adopters who wish to care for them. All sibling groups for whom there is a plan of adoption are assessed using the Together or Apart Assessment Model (BAAF 2008) and work is often jointly undertaken with Carelink the CAMHS service for children looked after.

Of the 14 children adopted during 2017/18 there were no sibling groups placed at the same time but one child was placed with his two older siblings who had already been adopted, these are Southwark approved adopters who adopted a sibling group of 3 Southwark children. One child adopted in 2017/18 was placed foster to adopt and was adopted at aged under 6 months old. The age range of children adopted ranged from under 6 months to the oldest child being aged 7. 79% of the children adopted in 2017/18 were from a BME background.

WHAT WE DID – ADOPTERS

Recruitment of adopters

Activity Overview - adopters	2017/18	2016/17	2015/26	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Adopters approved	9	10	21	25	29	19
Percentage approved within Government Minimum Timescales	100	100	21	16	n/k	n/k
Adoption inquiries	233	319	264	262	341	217
Adoption breakdowns prior to Adoption Order	1	0	0	2	0	1

Numbers of adopters approved in 2017/18 was 9 which was a reduction from 10 in the previous year. There were 10 full assessments completed but one household withdrew due to following the assessment being completed due to their own personal family reasons. Recruitment continued to be focussed on assessing adopters who are able to meet the needs of Southwark children waiting for adoption, and in particular to meet the needs of older children, children in sibling groups and children who need early permanence placements. The service became really aware that assessing more adopters but adopters who were clear they only wished to care for children under two, meant in 2013-14, 2014-2015 there was a high number of adopters who waited a very long time to be matched which then required a high level of support to them waiting to be matched for children.

There have been 233 adoption enquiries in the last year. This was a decrease on the previous year. The Carer Recruitment Manager noted the reduction was in their view down to less national media attention focussed on adoption and also more adopter choice and research happening online so people are more prepared when they make an enquiry. Positively the conversion rate of those coming forward who then have an initial visit has increased.

Adopter assessment timeliness

In 2017/2018 100% of adoptive households were assessed within the National Minimum Standards of six months. This performance has now been maintained for two years and is embedded through the Service ensuring:

- Efficient allocation of cases to Social Workers
- Contingency arrangements to cover periods of staff absence to ensure assessment continuity
- Efficient panel processes and referee visits
- More in-depth analysis of couple complexities
- DBS completed at earlier stage

In 2017/18 10 adoptive households were fully assessed but one withdrew so only 9 households were approved at Panel. All 9 households were couples and there were no single applicants in this year. The adopters were from a range of backgrounds and included same sex and heterosexual couples but within 2017/18 there was significantly less BME families approved and in six out of nine couples were both people were White British and only two approved adopters were from a BME background. 5 out of 9 households were approved under the Early Permanence Scheme as both foster carers and adopters.

The aim over the next 12 months will be to continue to try to maintain all assessments being completed to an excellent standard within the required timescale while increasing pace in a new more robust framework to ensure the target of 15 adopter assessments are completed. This was the aim for 2017/2018 and was not achieved one factor that impacted performance was that two workers in the service were unexpectedly off work sick for an extended period, and while adopters were offered an alternative social worker to complete their assessment a couple of families opted themselves to take a break from assessment between stages one and two to await their assessing social worker returning to work.

Approval to matched performance

The pace of matching adopters approved in 2017/18 to children remains good. 4 out of 9 approved households were matched to a child / children within 3 months. For those not matched within 3 months the reasons are well understood on each case and include: in one case being just days over 3 months, in one case being an adopter decision to have a three month break before considering matching and in three cases being due to exploring links with children from other Local Authorities. What is positive is that in the three cases of adopters approved by Southwark being matched with children from Southwark the match happened within 3 months of the adopter being approved.

In addition to work with families approved in 2017/18 the Adoption Assessment team worked with some approved adopters approved in previous years including some who were waiting a long time for a match. Adopters who tend to wait longer are those with children (birth or adopted) already in their family where the matching is critical not just with the parents but to the whole family. In 2017/2018 Southwark supported 12 adoptive families to be matched with children outside of Southwark with other Local Authorities. Out of these 12 matches 3 of these 4 of those were with Local Authorities in South London within the South London Adoption and Permanence Consortium. Two households were matched with sibling groups and in both cases these were sibling groups of two. Three adoptive families approved by Southwark were matched with Southwark children. In total prior to the children being adopted over the course of 2017/2018 Southwark Adoption Service provided 31 families with ongoing support and supervision.

Adoption Support (Private applications and International Applications)

In addition to the assessment of adopters for children Looked After with a plan of adoption Southwark Adoption Service have worked with four private adoption cases and one international adoption case.

Adoption disruptions

During 2017-18 there was very sadly one placement disruption for a Southwark child that happened very soon after a child was placed for adoption. An independently chaired disruption meeting was undertaken with all involved including the adopters and Agency who approved them. Learning from previous disruptions has been embedded into matching practice. The service aim is to continue to be ambitious in trying to find adoptive families for older children, those in sibling groups and children with additional needs. In placing older children and those who have experienced high levels of harm prior to placement, a robust support plan is crucial, but it is also recognised that there is increased risk in adoption disruption in particular for children aged 4 or above at the time of placement.

Seven adoption placements have disrupted prior to Adoption Order in the 12 years 2006 to 2018. Three were placements with voluntary adoption agencies, three with Southwark and one with another local authority. This highlights a disruption rate of below 2%. From national research the estimated rate of post-order disruption is 3.2%. There is no data on pre-order disruption rates.

ADOPTION SUPPORT

The need for adoption support has continued to grow as more children have been placed for adoption and adopted. It is very much recognised that adoption now is not a one-off event, but something that evolves over a lifetime involving the child, birth parents and family and the adoptive family (the adoption triangle). It is a complicated and often a mix of joy and loss. Bespoke support is needed over time to support all involved in adoption and this will be required to varying degrees with some families never needing statutory support and others requiring an ongoing package of support and most requiring some time limited support at critical points.

Adoption support plans are bespoke and tailored to the individual needs of the child and their adoptive family, and are prepared prior to cases being presented to the Adoption and Fostering Panel for a match. There is a good range of effective pre and post adoption support provided by the in-house workers and commissioned services that are spot purchased as needed. The nature of support provided varies considerably, from advice on strategies for integrating children into families, telling difficult life story information, Theraplay support to promote attachment, in addition to specialist commissioned support with attachment difficulties.

A real strength in the Post permanence team is that a Psychotherapist from the Carelink CAMHS Service attends fortnightly group supervision and provides expert guidance and support to social workers and sometimes directly to adoptive families and accessing the right types of therapeutic support. In addition, the team is able to offer therapeutically informed support as all of the social work qualified staff are trained in Theraplay Level 1.

On 31st March 2018 there were 150 financial support packages for adopters. The adoption team are creative in utilising support packages for adopters to enable more children to be adopted and to ensure the finances of prospective adopters is not a barrier to a child achieving permanence. It remains the case that the majority of adoptions are made without an ongoing package of financial support.

Support groups

The Adoption Service has worked closely with Southwark We Are Family (WAF) to support and promote a number of groups within the area to meet the needs of adoptive families. The service greatly values the relationship with WAF which is an adopter led support and advocacy charity, established by Southwark adopters.

WAF convenes a weekly support group which alternates between a morning play group one week and an evening adopter support group the next. These groups have both a support and social function and meet in Southwark. In addition, WAF holds monthly family meetings at the weekend to include working adoptive families. WAF also run a monthly support group for adopters who are waiting for children to be placed and have invited social workers from Southwark's post adoption service to share information at their group as well as speakers from the Virtual School and other interesting speakers.

Southwark run a group to provide help, advice and support to Adopters waiting across the South London Consortium. Southwark have also started a bi-monthly group for single adopters across the South London Consortium and this is also reported by adopters to be helpful and was attended by a mix of adopters from across the consortium.

Southwark set up a South London Adoption and Permanence Consortium support group for all early permanence carers. This group runs on the last Friday of each month and has a varied programme which has included baby massage training and learning about Theraplay techniques.

Training

A rolling programme of training and workshops is provided for adoptive parents directly by the Southwark Adoption Service as well as training available through the South London Adoption and Permanence Consortium and training events run by the Adopter led group 'We are Family (WAF)'. In 2017/2018 this included a rolling parenting course "*The Great Behaviour Breakdown*" and rolling Saturday workshops. The topics for the Saturday workshops have included:

- "Exploring Identity and Difference in Transracial Placements"
- "An introduction to Adoption for Family and Friends" –
- "Managing the challenges of Adolescence"
- "Building attachment"
- "Making sense of adoption"
- "Moving into placement"
- "Supporting your child's education"

Southwark runs preparation training for adoption in partnership with Lambeth and Wandsworth and these groups run regularly at weekends and are facilitated by social worker and managers across the consortium.

The parenting course the 'Great Behaviour Breakdown' continues to receive fantastic feedback from adoptive parents and Special Guardians who have attended the course with some describing the impact of this course as 'life changing'. Based on feedback from adoptive families we have added a 4th day to the 'Great Behaviour Breakdown' course to enable the participants to meet with the facilitators and group members later to discuss how they are using the techniques used and further embed what they have learnt and how is working on a day to day basis. Southwark have been able to recoup some of the costs of running this course and paying the facilitators via applications to the Adoption Support Fund.

In 2017/2018 Southwark were a lead agency in South London Adoption and Permanence Consortium (SLAPC) setting up a Conference at Goldsmiths University on Early Permanence entitled 'Working Together To Promote Early Attachments' which took place in March 2018 and received very positive feedback from adopters and social worker who attended. For 2018/2019 the Saturday workshops which Southwark have run over several years are all being updated and will be funded jointly by SLAPC as are utilised by adoptive families across the region. This collaboration creates some financial savings but also models the collective arrangements that would exist within the South London Regional Adoption Agency.

Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund has been in operation since 1st May 2015 with 19.3 million available for agencies to apply for on behalf of their adoptive families for the provision of therapeutic services. The fund has been set up to reduce the gap between adoptive families needing therapeutic services and receiving them. In October 2016 the government has made an additional £2m available for the fund with a fair access limit of £5k per child for the duration of 2016 and which has continued since it was implemented. In total since the fund came into existence Southwark have made claims for a total of £429,711.48.

In 2017 to 2018 Southwark made 25 applications to support children and their adoptive families with therapeutic support. This includes some group applications and applications for some children to attend residential camps together with other adopted children.

Post adoption contact

The Adoption Service managed approximately 200 letterbox contacts during 2017/19 as well as in the region of 10 face to face contacts between adopted children and their birth families. The nature of this contact will vary from an annual meeting to very complex arrangements involving a number of birth family members (siblings, grandparents and parents).

The impact of social networking on adoption is far reaching and extremely difficult to support effectively. There can be safeguarding concerns as young people do not recognise the issues that necessitated the plan for adoption. It can also undermine the stability of the adoptive placement. The South London Adoption and Permanence Consortium held a training session on social media in 2016/17 and these are planned to be refreshed and repeated in 2018/19. This is an area which is ever changing with new software enabling the use of social media using face recognition technology. It is identified as an area for ongoing updating training needed for Social Work staff and even more crucially for up to date information and training to be available to adoptive families when they need this on a continual ongoing basis. In July 2018 a workshop for staff and for adopters is being planned facilitated by Julie Young at the University of East Anglia on Contact After Adoption - Planning and supporting contact for children in adoption: Implications of research for practice.

Work with birth families

The Adoption Service has a contract with South London Adoption Counselling and Consultation Service to provide independent counselling for birth parents. The take up of this service has been increasing over the last few years. During 2015/6 there were seven referrals of birth parents/family to the service: four were birth mothers, two were birth fathers and one was a birth grandmother. Of those referred the two Birth fathers and two of the birth mothers engaged in counselling sessions.

In 2016/17 there was an increase to 13 referrals for birth parents/ family to the service: 10 were birth mothers, 2 were birth fathers and one was a birth grandmother. Of those referred in this year 8 of the birth mothers; 2 birth fathers; and one birth grandmother engaged with counselling.

In 2017/2018 there was a further increase to 17 referrals: 8 were with birth parents, 3 with birth fathers, 2 with special guardians and 4 referrals were extended family members including a birth great grandmother. It is thought this increase in birth family accessing support is directly linked to establishing PAUSE in Southwark who offer key support to birth mothers who have children removed from their care.

Mums supportive

Southwark's birth mother's support group 'Mums Supportive' which launched in 2015 continued during 2017/18 to offer support and a safe space for women who have been separated from their children as a result of care proceedings. In the last year the group has designed a logo as part of several creative workshops one of which was facilitated by the South London Gallery. The logo is now used on all publicity relating to the group. The groups' facilitators along with Sharron Jennings of Goldsmith University and a mum who attends the group were also invited to speak at the 2017 Community Care Live, this was a real highlight for the group and the mum who spoke was really able to bring to life what the group means to her. Mums Supportive continues to attract new members and offers exciting, fun as well as challenging experiences for the mums who attend it.

Birth records counselling

The Council has a legal responsibility to provide a birth record counselling service to adult adoptees. Some of these requests are completed by the post permanence team social workers working directly with adult adoptees providing both counselling and a summary of the information on the file.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Adoption Service has a Quality Assurance Framework. This includes: effective adoption panel scrutiny; comprehensive adopter feedback; management oversight and review including audit activity; as well as learning from complaints, learning from and sharing good practice as well as looking at learning on all cases where children are not matched within 91 days.

Adoption Panel and Fostering Panel

The Panel has been fully integrated as an Adoption and Fostering Panel since January 2017. The rationale for the joint Panel has been to ensure excellent standards across Adoption and Fostering. The joining of the panel functions creates administrative efficiencies and some financial savings. The strengths of this new panel approach becoming increasingly 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 are quarterly reviews of the function of the joint panel to ensure it maintains a high standard in its service delivery and these are chaired by the Head of Permanence and the Director for Children and Families is invited to attend twice annually.

Adoption Panels recommend prospective adopters for approval as adopters; matches of approved adopters with specific Southwark children; and the suitability of relinquished children for adoption. The final decision, in all of these cases, based on the panel's recommendation is made by the Agency Decision Maker, the Director of Children and Families or the Head of Service for Permanence. The panel is able to approve early permanence carers as both foster carers and adopters under both Adoption and Fostering Regulations,

Southwark's Adoption and Fostering Panel meets twice a month. There is also flexibility to organise additional Panels to ensure that panel dates do not ever delay permanence for children. In the lives of children days and weeks matter and there would be no hesitation to hold an extra panel if this made a difference for an individual child being able to move to their adoptive family in the timescale that is right for them. In 2017-18 three additional panels were held.

All Adoption and Fostering panels are independently chaired. The chair writes an Annual report on the activity of the adoption service. The last report up to the end of March 2018 identifies all of the APRS, CPRs in the year 2017/18 have been rated by the Panel as excellent or good. Out of 12 PARs where feedback was given 8 were rated as excellent, 2 were good and the 2 rated as adequate relate to Inter-Agency matches where the PAR was written by another agency being matched with a Southwark child. The Annual Report by the Chair for 2017-2018 is included as an **Appendix 1** to this report. Overall the Chair comments that: *"The standard of the adoption reports being presented to the Panel overall are of an excellent quality. They provide Panel with detailed and robust analysis of prospective adopters' strengths and areas of vulnerability. CPR's presented to the Panel make the child come to life and detail the area of need. The reports to the Panel are prepared correctly and are actively quality assured."* The adoption service needs to continue to use the quality assurance system established and critical reflection to ensure the reports remain consistently at an excellent standard.

Adopter feedback

Adopter's views on the adoption service are gained as part of the assessment process but also routinely by questionnaire following approval, and when they have adopted their child or children.

Adopters work collaboratively with assessing Social Workers and they have an opportunity to write in and contribute their comments on the final PAR written by the assessing Social Worker to be presented to the Adoption Panel. In addition, at Panel adopters are asked by the Panel chair about their experience of being assessed and also post Panel have an opportunity to feedback on their experience of the Adoption and Fostering Panel.

In 2017/18 we received feedback from 7 approved adopter households out of 9 approved households. 6 out of 7 said their experience of Southwark's adoption service from first point of contact until they made their application to adopt was excellent and 1 said it was good. 6 out of 7 rated the service they received from Southwark from first enquiry to approval as an adopter 5 out of 5 and 1 rated it 4 out of five. 6 said Southwark helped them to have a basic understanding of the assessment process and the backgrounds of the children needing adoptive families before Stage 1 very well and 1 said Southwark did this well. 4 said the assessment process during Stage 2 was done at a good pace and 3 said it was about right for them. 7 said their assessing social worker enabled them to share and discuss information of a personal nature very well. All 7 said their assessing social worker enabled them to appreciate the relevance of information sought/discussed in relation to the task of becoming adoptive parents very well. 5 said Southwark kept them informed/responded to any concerns during the assessment process very well and 2 said they did this well. 6 said there were no unnecessary delays caused by Southwark during the assessment process and 1 said there were.

In respect of attending Panel 5 said they received written information about the panel in advance

2 said they didn't. 3 said their experience of attending the adoption panel was excellent, 3 said it was good and 1 said it was OK.

Some of the comments from adopters included:

"All of the social workers we have worked with, or met, have been highly supportive. The approval process was explained well. It was balanced support and we knew the amount of work and commitment required to get through. Training sessions were well run, engaging and thought provoking. It was good to interact with other would be adopters. As we move from 'assessment' to 'matching' the challenges are very different. Again, support from social workers has been good."

One adoptive family wrote about their Social Worker:

"She is an excellent experienced social worker; she made me feel comfortable and well prepared. I thoroughly enjoyed the process, it was smooth and quick, nice and steady and it all fell into place. Our experience of Southwark was very good. We had a few questions for the child's social worker and they were answered quickly and fully. Panel were very warm and welcoming. We had already done all the hard work with the assessing Social Worker. I came out feeling really happy."

Complaints

Learning from complaints is a crucial aspect of our Quality Assurance Framework, which ensures continuous improvement in the Adoption Service. During 2017/17 the service received one complaint and this related to historic case where the adopter was not happy with the quality of the Life Story Book and did not have a Later in Life Letter. This complaint was upheld and a worker in the post permanence team was allocated to improve the Life Story Book working with the Adoptive Parent and to ensure a high quality Later in Life Letter was written. The learning from this complaint was how vital high quality Life Story Books and Later in Life letters are for adopted children and their families, and while these are now provided for all children adopted the service still will need to provide post adoption support to provide these on historic cases where this was not completed to a standard the adoptive family are happy with.

REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT PLANS DURING 2017/18

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

We will continue to ensure that children move to their adoptive families quicker and without delay. We will always strive to achieve the right timescale for each child understanding their needs and individual journeys and remaining ambitious to achieve adoption for all children where this is the most appropriate care plan. We will carefully measure Southwark Performance using the Adoption Scorecard.

The Achieving permanence team continues to ensure that children with a plan of adoption move in a timescale that is right of them and doing everything possible to avoid delay. The Scorecard measures for A1 and A2 continued to show improvement in 2017/18. However within this year there have been several children aged over 4 with high needs where families were found in a much longer timescale or where sadly we have not yet identified families. This means that during 2018/19 we would anticipate performance and the scorecard will show longer timescales and poorer performance however this is also likely to positively reflect that we have placed and had adopted older children with higher needs.

We will maintain high quality adopter assessments being all undertaken within the national minimum standards. We will increase the pace of assessments being undertaken while maintaining the quality with the aim that in 2017-18 that the target of 15 adoptive households are approved.

In 2017/18 positively all assessments continued as in the previous year to be undertaken 100% within the national minimum standards and all have been judged by the Adoption and Fostering Panel to be excellent (7 out of 9) or good (2 out of 9). The number of assessments did not increase and fell from 10 in 2016/7 to 9 in 2017/18. The number approved by Panel was 9, as one household due to personal reasons withdrew after their assessment was completed.

We will develop theLife Story Work Works campaign to build upon the work undertaken in 2016-2017 and to have an ongoing dynamic approach that co-ordinates Life Story Work across Children's Services that works with social workers, birth family members and all carers in an ongoing and dynamic way.

Life Story Work and the campaign on this starting as early as possible remains ongoing, and there needs to continue to be ongoing work across the whole of Children's Services about the importance of this work for all children Looked After and children who are placed for Adoption. Work continued in 2017/18 and will be completed in 2018/19 for a steering group including representatives from Speakerbox to work with a Designer to develop a template that can be used and adapted by Social Workers in all different services working with Children Looked After including those children whose plan is adoption.

We will further develop the Early Permanence Scheme to include approving adoptive carers who can meet the needs of older children initially under a fostering arrangement but with the approval to go on and adopt if that is the right care plan for the child. For Southwark to continue to consider the suitability of Early Permanence for all children where adoption is a possible care plan. We will continue to lead practice across the South London Permanence Consortium and to increase the scope of this work if successful in application to the Practice Innovation Fund with Coram in 2017-2018.

Southwark were successful in their application to the Practice Innovation Fund in 2017-2018. As set out on pages 7-8 of this report Southwark have now placed 15 children with Early Permanence carers approved by Southwark. In 2017-2018 5 out of 9 households approved were approved as Early Permanence Carers. Southwark continues to innovate and be very proud of the work they have done to support children to be placed with Early Permanence Carers. The grant from the Practice Improvement Fund and funding from the DfE for regionalisation has enabled Southwark to share this practice with other South London Authorities to help them develop this practice within their own Local Authorities.

We will improve the quality of our transitions to ensure children have the best possible transitions when moving from foster care to adoption. In 2017-2018 we are participating in a research study with the University of East Anglia looking at how introductions happen in practice and how children move from foster care to adoption. The study will look at materials to support the best transition and how the introductions can be done in the most child centred way at the pace of the child. In addition, the study aims to promote foster carers retaining ongoing contact with children post adoption as adopted children and adults have spoken of the benefits of these continuing relationships. We would seek to use the learning from this research and the materials to support children who are moving not only to adoption but for children moving between foster placements.

Southwark took part in this study and they considered 8 cases during 2017/18 of children moving from foster care into their adoptive families. The full research findings will be published by Dr Mary Beek, Dr Beth Neil and colleagues from the University of East Anglia. The project leads in Southwark have been the Team Manager for the Achieving Permanence Team in Adoption and a Team Manager from the Fostering Service. The findings to date have been:

- *More open-minded approach from both social workers and foster carers generally (moving away from a one size fits all approach).*
- *Increased use of secure base checklist with foster-carers as a tool for prospective adopters and to aid a smooth transition.*
- *Increasing 'softer' and longer beginning and end to introductions meaning that the intense part is shorter and less severe and that relationships with foster carers can continue for longer where possible.*
- *Introduction of some intentional meetings between prospective adopters and foster-carers without social workers. This has worked brilliantly in some cases in terms of building relationships but not so well in others. Needs a lot of thought and not appropriate in each case but worth thinking about.*
- *Increased use of technology where appropriate (Facetime / Skype etc.).*

We will work proactively with regionalisation to ensure any changes to our services positively impact our children and adopters. We are committed to working to continually improving the offer for children, adopters and birth families. Southwark managers and practitioners want to be at the centre of discussions about regionalisation ensuring changes have a positive impact and that we are able to promote and expand the areas of good practice where Southwark have lead service development for SLAPC.

In 2017/18 Southwark agreed to be the host for the London South region. The appointment of a London South Project Manager and a Board now chaired by the Director for Children in Families in Southwark has significantly increased progress in working together across Local Authorities and preparing for regionalisation. The development work on forming a London South Regional Adoption Agency is gaining significant pace. It is anticipated that this work will continue at even greater intensity during 2018 and 2019 and will be the largest aspect of development plans in 2018/2019.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT PLANS DURING 2018 /2019

We will continue to ensure that children move to their adoptive families quicker and without delay. We will always strive to achieve the right timescale for each child understanding their needs and individual journeys and remaining ambitious to achieve permanence via adoption for all children where this is the most appropriate care plan. We will carefully measure Southwark Performance using the Adoption Scorecard.

We will maintain high quality adopter assessments being all undertaken within the national minimum standards and increase our pool of adopters available for children. We will increase the pace of assessments being undertaken while maintaining the quality with the aim that in 2018 – 2019 we increase the number of adoptive households that are approved which will contribute to increasing the Sufficiency of families available for children.

We will further develop and embed theLife Story Work Works approach that co-ordinates Life Story Work across Children's Services that works with social workers, birth family members and all carers in an ongoing and dynamic way. In 2018 -2019 a key area of learning and audit will be practitioners and managers looking together at current life story work for children and using this as a learning space on what we are doing well currently and what needs further development.

We will have a focus on Contact Plans after Adoption holding a Conference in Southwark in July 2018 presenting the outcomes of academic research from the University of East Anglia in discussion with the lived experiences of adoptive families and of practitioners. This conference will launch a look at how we are making decisions about post adoption contact arrangements and an opportunity to think about future developments and what we can do differently.

We will work proactively with regionalisation to ensure any proposed changes to our services positively impact outcomes for our children, adopters and birth families. We are committed to working to continually improving the offer for children, adopters and birth families. Southwark managers and practitioners want to be at the centre of discussions about regionalisation ensuring changes have a positive impact and that we are able to promote and expand the areas of good practice where Southwark have lead service development for SLAPC and learn from best practice in other areas to achieve the best possible outcomes for children.

Appendix 1

Adoption & Fostering Panel Chair's Report

01/04 /2017 - 31/03/2018

Jane Fearon, Independent Chair Adoption Panel

Date: 16th May 2018

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

Adoption Panel

The Panel is constituted in line with the:

- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 & Adoption Agencies and Independent Review Determinations (Amendments) Regulation 2011
- Adoption Agencies (Panel & Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012 & (Miscellaneous Amendments) 2013
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review & Fostering Service (Miscellaneous Amendments)
- Regulations 2013
- National Minimum Standards for Adoption & Revised Statutory Adoption Guidance 2014

All Adoption Agencies have to set up an Adoption/Fostering Panel. The Agency has to create a 'Central List' of people who have experience, expertise and knowledge about adoption and fostering matters who will make up the Adoption Panel. The main functions of the Adoption Panel is to make recommendations to the agency about the suitability of potential adopters, to recommend the placement of a child with specific adopters, to recommend an adoption plan for a relinquished child and also to make a recommendation of potential adopters to be approved as short-term foster carers for the purposes of Southwark's concurrency scheme/ early permanence. The central list is designed to minimise the risk of the delay through postponement of Panels due to lack of quorum (minimum of five members one of whom is a qualified social worker with a minimum of three years post-qualifying experience).

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.

Adopters Data	
Panel Meetings	24
Number of Additional Meetings	3
Suitability Recommendations	9
Recommendations for Concurrent Carers	5
Brief Reports	1
Single Applicants for Approval	0
Applicants for Matches	11
Single Applicants for Matches	2
Adopters approved within NMS - 6 months	9 couples
<i>Applicant's Ethnicity</i>	
Number of White British Applicants	15
Number of Black Caribbean Applicants	1
Number of Mixed Heritage Applicants	1
Number of White Other Applicants	1

<i>Applicants' Sexuality</i>	
Number of Same Sex Applicants	4
Number of Heterosexual Applicants	14

There were 9 prospective adopter households approved as suitable to adopt. These were all couples in this period.

Children's Data			
Number of Children Matched		12	
Number of Disruptions		1	
Number of Relinquished Children		1	
Number of Sibling Groups		1 (2 children)	
<i>Ages of Children at the time of Adoption Match</i>			
Number of Children Matched Aged 0-1 years		5	
Number of Children Matched Aged 1-3 years		4	
Number of Children Matched Aged 4-5 years		2	
Number of Children Matched Aged 6-7 years			
Number of Children Matched Aged 8-9 years		1	
<i>Ethnicity of Children Matched</i>			
Number of White British Children		5	
Number of Black/Black British/Black African Children		2	
Number of Black/Black British/Black Caribbean Children		1	
Number of Black/Black British/Any Other Black Background Children		1	
Number of Mixed/Mixed Ethnic Groups/White and Black Caribbean Children		2	
Number of Mixed/Mixed Ethnic Groups/White and Black African Children		1	
<i>Ethnicity of Matches</i>			
Carer 1 Ethnicity	Carer 2 Ethnicity	Child 1 Ethnicity	Child 2 Ethnicity
WB	WB	WB	WB
WB	WB	WB	
B/BB/BC	W/AOW	M/MEG/W&BC	
W/AOWB	WB	WB	
WB		M/MEG/W&BA	
M/MEG/WBC		B/BB/BA	
WB	WB	M/MEG/W&BC	
WB	WB	B/BB/AOB	
BB/BA	BB/BA	B/BB/BA	
WB	WB	WB	
B/BB/AOB	B/BB/AOB	B/BB/BC	

Panel Feedback

Adopters

The standard of reports being presented to the Panel overall are of an excellent quality. They provide Panel with detailed and robust analysis of prospective adopters' strengths and areas of vulnerability. Child Permanence Reports (CPR) presented to the Panel make the child come to life and detail the area of need. The reports to the Panel are prepared correctly and are actively quality assured.

Adopters - Panel Feedback on the Quality of PARs Presented	
Excellent	8
Good	2
Adequate	2

Adopters - Panel Feedback on the Quality of APRs Presented	
Excellent	4
Good	5
Adequate	0

Children - Panel Feedback on the Quality of CPR's Presented	
Excellent	6
Good	5
Adequate	0

Feedback was received on nine Adoption Placement Reports (APRs): Strengths to note: the majority of APRs provided good or excellent evidence of the child's current needs, and evidence that the adopters were able to meet the child's needs. Areas for improvement - one APR could have detailed more on the cultural needs of the child and how they could be met. One child's family history and potential needs were not properly covered.

The standard of the adoption reports being presented to the Panel overall are of an excellent quality. They provide Panel with detailed and robust analysis of prospective adopters' strengths and areas of vulnerability. CPR's presented to the Panel make the child come to life and detail the area of need. The reports to the Panel are prepared correctly and are actively quality assured.

Currently, the agency has one couple approved and waiting as potential adopters.

National Minimum Timescales

The Adoption Panel has to measure some aspects of the work against the Adoption National Minimum Standards to see how far the standards are met. The National Standard for the assessment and approval of adopters is six months.

National Minimum Timescales – Approval of Adopter’s	
Number of couples approved	9
Number of couples approved within timescales	9

The National Standard for the placement of children with adopters is 91 days from the date of the decision that the plan is adoption for the child to the date when the decision to match the child with a new family is made.

National Minimum Timescales – Placement of Children	
Number of Children Placed	11
Number of Children Placed within timescales	6
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.

6. Prospective Adopter and social worker feedback

It is essential that the service and the Adoption and Fostering Panel receive feedback in order to make improvements where necessary. Feedback forms are given to all applicants, adopters and foster carers attending Panel, the return (as can be seen from the previous statistic table) is good, giving a comprehensive overview of their experience at Panel. Feedback forms are discussed at the Quality Assurance meeting held every quarter with the intention to improve service where it is necessary to do so. The feedback forms that have been received have been positive regarding applicants and social workers experience of attending Panel; however it is acknowledged in the feedback that the process can be daunting for adopters and foster carers entering a room with such a large group of people. The current practice is for the Panel Chair to meet the applicants prior to coming into Panel in order to outline the process. From those attendees, relatively few have experienced delay; as the Panel Chair I ensure that the discussion and questions are focused and relevant to the functioning of Panel. As a Panel we have seen an increase in long-term fostering matches being presented to the joint Panel, where it has been appropriate young people subject to the fostering match have attended Panel, Panel have endeavoured to ensure that this is a relevant and positive experience.

Eleven prospective adopters gave feedback on their experience of attending the panel, six who were matched with children and five who were being approved as adopters. All of them said their overall evaluation of the panel process was excellent. Comments included: 'We felt the panel were very engaged and supportive; their questions were relevant and we felt valued. 'We were made to feel very relaxed and welcome, which made the panel much easier.' Feed back on the panel from social workers attending to present cases was received and nine social workers fed back on their evaluation of the panel. Four said it was excellent, four good, and one poor. This last comment arose from a case that was deferred by the panel.

When asked by panel to comment on their experience of the assessment many adopters comment favourably on their experience. The adopters value the commitment and professional relationship they have received from their assessing social worker. Many consider they have been well prepared to be adopters.

There have been no complaints regarding the function of Panel.

Panel Feedback and Evaluation

Adopter Feedback

"We thought the process was great. The Panel were informative – a positive experience." - Adopter

"The Panel made us feel very at ease." - Adopter

"The Panel made us feel very welcome." - Adopter

"Questions were quite in-depth but Panel gave us time to explain and get to the point, they didn't chip in or interrupt. You could see that the Panel were actually listening to what we were saying and that they had read the reports because their questions were concise and allowed us to give more thoughtful answers." - Adopter

"We were made to feel at ease by the Panel Chair and Panel members. The process was explained to us and our expectations managed. All questions were relevant and we were given plenty of time and space to fully formulate our answers." - Adopter

"All questions were relevant and we were made to feel very welcomed and reassured that our comments would be given proper consideration." - Adopter

"Very smiley faces helped us to feel relaxed! - Very nice Panel." – Adopter

"Chairman of the Panel was very welcoming and members were all smiley and warm. Questions were asked in a friendly way and we were listened to and heard. It was all in all an excellent experience for us and a memorable one as well. Thank you very much." – Adopter

Adoption Social Worker Feedback

"Very positive Panel, warm and friendly." Student social worker - Adoption

"Panel were polite and friendly. Appropriate questions which were relevant." Social worker – Adoption

"Friendly and personable Panel – sensitively worded questions. Very welcoming. Really positive experience – and running on time – v. rare!!" Social worker – Adoption

"The Panel Chair asked relevant questions with sensitivity. The Panel were fair and challenging where needed. Very good experience for (the adopters). They felt reassured and safe within the process." Social worker – Adoption

"This was a stressful Panel due to dilemmas around the match. However this was handled in a professional way by the Panel." Social worker – Adoption

"I was pleased that Panel had taken time to Review all the reports carefully and that was clear by the questioning and feedback." Social worker – Adoption

"Given the tight timescales I feel Panel has been very accommodating and supportive." Social worker – Adoption

"Questions were well thought out and appropriate." Social worker – Adoption

"All questions were anticipated and logical. Really smooth experience for adopters." Social worker – Adoption

"This was my first time at Panel and I found the set up very formal although appropriate questions were asked. Is there any way to make the setting more relaxed so that prospective adopters are more at ease?" Social worker – Adoption

"Very thoughtful, approachable Panel." Social worker – Adoption

"I found Panel warm and welcoming. The members show a real insight into the adopters' love and embracing of (child) and felt they were in a position to meet all her needs. Panel took into consideration answers and questions from all parties involved." Social worker – Adoption

"The adopters have had a very good experience of Panel today. The Panel is robust whilst being friendly so there is a good balance!" Social worker – Adoption

"I was very pleased with how it went today and felt the adopters understood why they were going through this." Social worker – Adoption

"Really empathetic, thoughtful Panel." Social worker – Adoption

7. 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.

8. 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.

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.