

Corporate Parenting Committee

Wednesday 22 October 2025

2.00 pm

Ground floor meeting rooms GO2B and C, 160 Tooley Street, London
SE1 2QH

Supplemental Agenda No.1

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Contact

Paula Thornton on or email: paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk or
beverley.olamijulo@southwark.gov.uk

Webpage: <http://www.southwark.gov.uk>

Date: 15 October 2025

Meeting Name:	Corporate Parenting Committee
Date:	22 October 2025
Report title:	Fostering Annual Report 2024-25
Ward(s) or groups affected:	All
Classification:	Open
Reason for lateness (if applicable):	Contained within the report
From:	Director of Children's Services

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the corporate parenting committee notes the annual report of Southwark Fostering Service for 2024-25

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The purpose of the annual report 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.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

3. Southwark Fostering Service continues to provide good quality care for a significant proportion of children and young people in care to the council. The Fostering Annual Report for 2024-2025 sets out in the Appendix the key areas for consideration.

Policy framework implications

4. The Southwark 2030 Strategy sets out our aim to ensure that all children have a good start in life. In delivering on that shared ambition the Southwark Fostering Service is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children in the care of our foster carers who live in Southwark. To do this, we endeavour to provide help and support in the best ways possible to meet their needs; and to jointly deliver our vision to make sure that:
 "Children and young people in Southwark are kept safe from harm and abuse, supported in their recovery from harmful situations and to continually

improve services working with children through effective application of learning”

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

5. Southwark is committed to ensuring children looked after by its fostering service, from all parts of the community, are enabled to live close to their communities as far as possible and appropriate and with families able to meet most of their needs.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

6. Southwark foster carers are a diverse group in respect of ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality and disability. They are the heart of our services for children in care. The service is highly committed to challenging all forms of discrimination and seeking to uphold and have an action plan to address anti-racist practice and the commitment of Southwark stands together.

Health impact statement

7. There are no health impacts issues

Climate change implications

8. There are no climate change implications.

Resource implications

9. There are no resource implications.

Legal/Financial implications

10. There are no legal or finance implications.

Consultation

11. No consultation was undertaken in the preparation of the report.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Head of Procurement

12. A concurrent from the Head of Procurement is not applicable.

Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance

13. No supplementary advice is required.

Strategic Director, Resources

14. No supplementary advice is required.

Other officers

15. No further officer comment is required.

Reason for urgency and lateness

16. This report was submitted after the statutory publication deadline for committee papers as the content required finalisation to ensure accuracy and completeness. The Fostering Annual Report includes detailed performance data, service developments, and strategic updates which needed to be reviewed and amended prior to publication. The delay was necessary to ensure the report reflects the most current and correct information for consideration by the Corporate Parenting Committee.

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	David Quirke-Thornton Strategic Director of Children and Adult Services		
Report Author	Sophie James, Fostering Service Manager		
Version	Final		
Dated	14 October 2025		
Key Decision?	No		
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER			
Officer Title		Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance		No	No
Strategic Director, Resources		No	No
Cabinet Member		No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team			14 October 2025

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Fostering Annual Report 2024-25

Fostering Annual Report 2024/25



**"Fostering is not always easy.
But it is always worth it."**

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Purpose of the Annual Report

The purpose of this 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 the council's delivery of Fostering Services; how the council is compliant with key national minimum standards; the service offered to those seeking to foster and the outcomes of children in care who are fostered. This report details the work of Southwark Council Fostering Service from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and sets out plans for service development until 31 March 2026

Background

The Fostering Service operates within the regulatory framework provided by The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 made under the Children Act 1989 and Care Standards Act 2000; and the National Minimum Standards (2011) for Fostering Services. The service also takes account of other childcare legislation such as the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 that underpin our practice.

The Southwark 2030 strategy sets out our aim to ensure that all children have a good start in life. In delivering on that shared ambition the Southwark Fostering Service is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children in the care of our foster carers who live in Southwark. To do this, we endeavour to provide help and support in the best ways possible to meet their needs; and to jointly deliver our vision to make sure that:

“Children and young people in Southwark are kept safe from harm and abuse, supported in their recovery from harmful situations and to continually improve services working with children through effective application of learning”

Through our Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2022-24 we sought to increase placement choice and stability for children to ensure that we are able to offer individualised and reparatory care. We aim to recruit 15 extra carers per year and increase our in-house placement offer in or as close to Southwark as possible, reducing the need for external providers and residential settings. For our existing carers, we offer robust support and development from a dedicated supervising social worker offering support, reflection and challenge where needed to enable high quality care. Our extensive training offer provides a range of mandatory and specialised courses and workshops to develop carers through three distinct levels to become experienced carers providing therapeutic care. We

have a Senior Clinical Practitioner specifically dedicated to supporting the Fostering, Special Guardianship and Fostering Recruitment Team to directly and indirectly with placement stability. Our Fostering Panel provide review and quality assurance of our work, making recommendations to our Agency Decision Maker and remain our critical friend, providing feedback to support and develop practice.

The Fostering Service includes a Special Guardianship and Connected Carers Team. The Department for Education paper 'Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love', published in 2023 highlighted the need to support both children and families particularly in kinship care. Southwark has committed to this and continues to develop this team; the assessment and long-term support offer to children remaining within family and friend care.

The council's Sufficiency Strategy 2023–26 noted our Fostering Service generally has sufficient capacity to meet the needs of the children under 10 locally, but we need more capacity for older children, especially; unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children on the autistic spectrum, children who are vulnerable to exploitation and may present a risk to themselves or others, children who require placements in an emergency and sibling groups of more than 2 children, in addition to older children who require more complex care when coming into care and when stepping down from residential care settings. Furthermore, we need parent and child placements that can take couples, fathers and allow father's access.

Children in Foster Care

On a national level, as of 31 March 2024 there was a 0.5% decrease in children looked after from 2023 to 83,630 and a 0.5% decrease in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.¹ There were 33,745 approved fostering households, with a 5% decrease in LA approved foster carers, 2% decrease in IFA carers and an increase in Connected approved carers². 50% of newly approved foster carers were Family and Friends carers. The national crisis requiring more foster families to care for children remains.

On 31 March 2024, there were 387 children in Southwark's care; 91 children were placed in foster care placements, 71 placed with a friend or relative, 105 in IFAs and 120 in other settings, including; unregulated placements residential settings, foster to adopt placements, placement with parents, semi-independent provisions, as well as children on remand or in NHS settings.³

¹ Government Paper 'Children Looked After in England, November 2024' ([Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#))

² Government Paper, Fostering Statistics, 2024 ([Fostering in England 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 - GOV.UK](#))

³ Fostering Data Returns. Southwark. 2025

The below table shows the comparison between March 2023 and 2024 annual reports as at 31 March in each year:

	2024 ⁴	2025 ³
Children in Care	397	387
Children placed with foster carers (IFA + in-house)	272	267
In-house Foster Placements	107	91
Placed with Family and Friends	63	71
Independent Fostering Agencies	102	105
Long Term Matches for children	8	12

This shows a decrease in children in care, a decrease of placements with in-house foster carers and an increase in placements with Connected Carers. In 2024, in house foster placements nationally made up 44%, 21% were Connected and 35% IFAs.⁵ There is nationally a decrease in mainstream fostering placements and increase in Family and Friends arrangements. On 31 March 2024, Southwark had 39% in-house placements, 23% family and friends and 38% with IFAs⁴. On 31 March 2025, there was 34% in-house placements, 27% family and friends and 39% with IFAs.³ This shows that we are placing more children in IFAs than in-house placements, and a more significant number of children with connected carers. We are seeking to improve our retention and recruitment of foster carers in addition to the support offered to our current carers to improve in house sufficiency and capacity.

Long Term Matches:

Creating stability and permanency for children is a key priority for Children's Services, and 12 children were matched to carers this year, offering permanency to children in long term fostering arrangements, and a 33% increase in matches from last year³. The Fostering Service worked closely

⁴ Southwark Fostering Annual Report 2024

⁵ Government Statistics. Number of Fostering Households. [Fostering in England 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

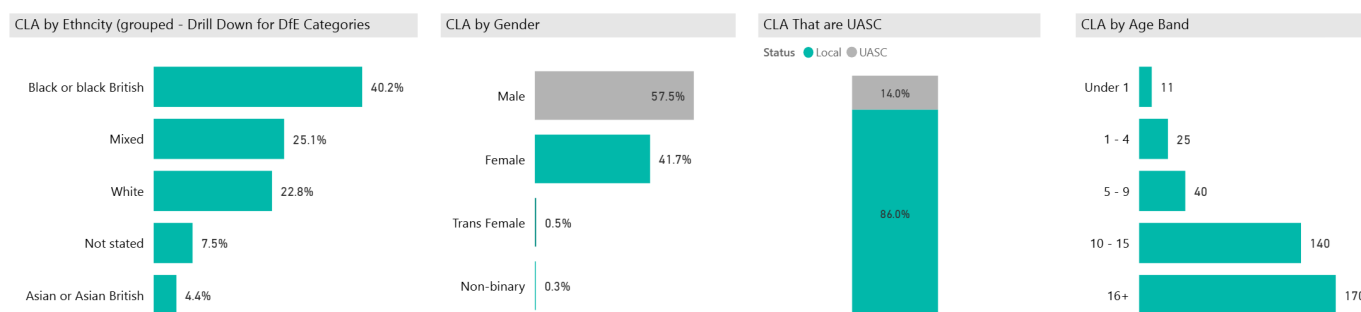
with the Safeguarding and Family Support, and Care Services, to complete matching reports that are presented to our Fostering Panel for quality assurance, scrutiny and recommendations before finally being presented for approval to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). Children over 14 years require a report and support plan to be completed which is presented directly to the ADM however do not need to attend panel. A new support plan has been developed to consider children's needs now and, in the future, which can be consistently reviewed to ensure adequate, relevant and timely support to avoid difficulties and breakdowns, and increase the likelihood of permanency and stability.

A Service Manager Permanence Lead role has been established to improve practice, ensuring greater permanency, stability and outcomes for children. It is expected we will continue to see a high number of long-term matches next year, alongside some carers adopting our children and more children leaving care via Special Guardianship

In the Fostering Service, the duty team works hard to consider matching at an early stage, with our dedicated in-house Fostering Placements Officer, alongside our Supervising Social Workers, we hope to increase our current placement capacity, stability and permanency for children and young people at an early stage.

Demographics of Children in Care:

As of 31st March 2025³



Southwark's Provision of Foster Carers

On 31 March 2025 Southwark had 164 fostering households (including family and friends carers and foster to adopt carers) with up to 287 placements available, this is a decrease in both areas since 2024³. There is an increase in permanent placements and foster to adopt however a decrease in non-permanent placements and short breaks for both children looked after and those not looked after. This shows a positive trend for stability and permanency for some children however a lack of availability for shorter term and emergency placements, which are required. We have increased our respite capacity however there is a need for placements for babies, complex needs, older children,

crisis intervention, siblings, and parent and child placements, as well as ensuring a supply of step-down placements for our residential children's homes. There was an increase in connected carers, from 25 last year to 37 this year, in line with the trend nationally. There was an increase in deregistrations (55), the majority of these were due to children ceasing being looked after and several due to the family taking out Special Guardianship Orders. 4 were due to carers adopting children, 13 due to carer's personal circumstances or retiring and 2 were deregistered by the service. Unfortunately, we were only able to approve 2 carers. This is not sufficient to support the needs of the children and young people in our care and therefore greater recruitment, and retention of carers is necessary. Significant preparatory work has gone into the marketing and recruitment of carers and there are 17 carers due for assessment currently, likely to vastly improve recruitment in 2025-6.

The 287-figure advising of placement availability assumes that all carers can take the maximum number of children in their approval range. This is not always possible as the approval may be contingent on the children being siblings or the carer may not be able to take a placement for a range of other reasons related to their personal or household circumstances, or the level of need of the child in their care (including places being unavailable due to young people in 'staying put' arrangements after they turn 18). Our return data shows we have 55 vacant spaces, which is a decrease from last year and 69 unavailable, which is a slight increase³. These include 9 spaces within the Family Link Team which is located with the All-Age Disabilities Service. These figures rely on social worker's accurately recording and consistently updating carers files. There has been significant work in ensuring these are accurately recorded this year and this will continue. Further analysis is required to consider capacity and sufficiency, and the training and development needed to ensure we have a fully functioning service responsive to the needs of our children and young people.

Below is a table showing changes in fostering households and placements 2022-2025:

Year	No of fostering households	No of places	No of new carers	No of deregistration's /resignations	Type of care offered					
					P	NP	F&F	F2A	SB	SB CLA
2022	206	375	5 in progress	57	32	91	49	10	4	17
			2 withdrawn							
			1 approved							
2023	186	337	3 in progress	52	26	84	52	8	4	12
			6 approved							
2024	167	304	6 in progress	49	19	82	44	5	5	12
			6 withdrawn							
			5 approved							
2025	164	287	5 in progress	55	27	71	49	7	3	7

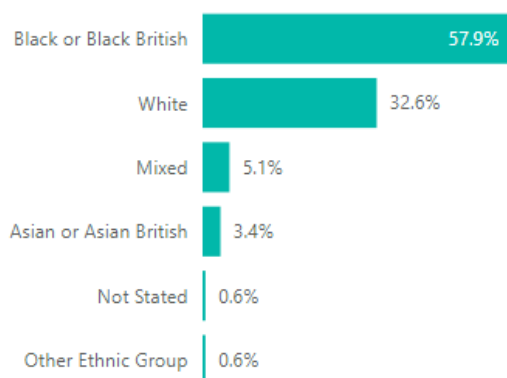
			6 withdrawn (5 applicant / 1 service)							
			2 approved							

Key:

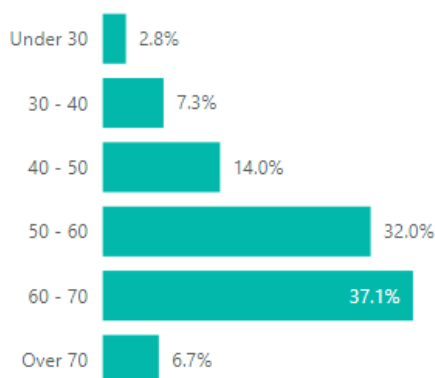
Type of care offered: P – Permanent, NP – Not permanent, F&F – Family and Friends, F2A – Foster to Adopt, SB CLA – Short Breaks - Children Looked After, SB – Short Breaks - Children not otherwise Looked A

Demographics of carers:

Foster Carers by Ethnicity (drill for DfE categories)



Foster Carers by Age Band



This highlights diversity in our carer group that largely reflect the demographic of White and Black or Black British children that need foster placements. It identifies a smaller number of mixed carers, however this is not a reflection of our capacity to match children of mixed heritage with a caring household with mixed ethnicity, as the data shows individual ethnicity of carers, rather than the household. It identifies less Asian and Asian British carers than the population of children in care, suggesting a need to recruit a greater number of Asian and Asian British carers.

Care is taken to meet the needs of children by matching them with foster carers of the same ethnicity or a household that is reflective of their cultural and ethnic heritage and does not overtly indicate their visible difference, however this is not always possible. The service trains all foster carers on equalities, diversity and supporting children around issues such as racism and discrimination, so they can effectively support and care for children who are of a different ethnicity. As a service, we are learning more about the impact of intersectionality and the compounding disadvantages that people experience, and we are aware of the need to consider this in the support we offer children and carers in our work and matching considerations.

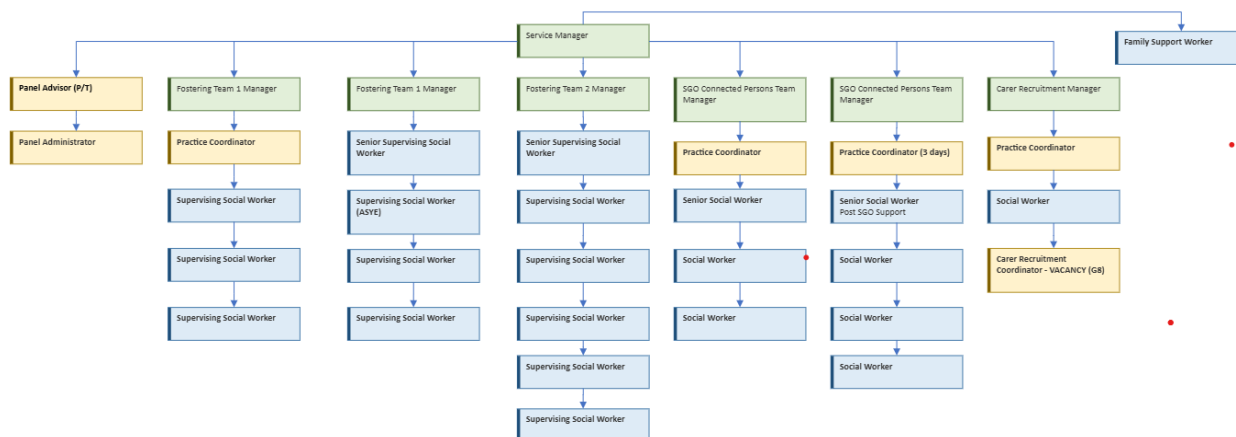
Southwark has an aging population of foster carers and many are choosing to end their fostering career following many years (and in some cases decades) of providing loving and supportive foster homes. At present approximately 44% of our in-house foster carers are 60 years old and over, and a target for carer recruitment is to recruit more carers from a younger demographic. This year we have partnered with the 'Weekenders' Recruitment Program with FosterNow who help to recruit carers offering weekend respite to children throughout their minority and maintain stable relationships despite changes in placement. These carers do tend to be on a younger demographic, and it is hoped that with experience, they may consider fostering on a longer-term basis.

Southwark's Special Guardianship and Connected Carers

The Fostering Services includes a dedicated Special Guardianship (SG) and Connected Carers (CC) assessment and supervisory support team. Wherever possible, this team will assess and support children to remain within their families, when they may not be able to remain with their birth parents. The team works alongside the children's social work teams, assessing wider family and connected persons and offering supervisory social work support to temporary Regulation 24 and approved Regulation 27 carers. The team also provide advice, guidance and support to case work teams with Regulation 24/Viability assessments.

We received 83 requests for assessment between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025³, a similar number to the previous year. An increase of 61 assessments were completed: 48 in house and 13 outsourced to Independent Social Workers, a 50% decrease from last year including several assessments being undertaken abroad. 22 assessments did not progress, either due to the applicant withdrawing, the assessment being negative or positive but the care plan for the child being with a different carer. There were 12 Special Guardianship Orders were made via care proceedings, more than in 2024 and 5 through private applications, a slight reduction. 6% of Looked After children ceased to be looked after due to carers receiving Special Guardianship Orders. This is an increase from 2024 however not in line with national averages of 11% and London averages of 9%. Our team managers and panel advisor met with our safeguarding and support team to discuss greater joint working and support through regulation 24 assessments and arrangements alongside the introduction of the new Form K. We sought 20 regulation 25 extensions and approved 21 Regulation 27 Connected Carers. This is an increase in both requests compared to last year. The increase in Connected Carers is in line with national trends, however we do need to work to prevent having as many extended assessments as possible and make more timely assessments.

Fostering Service Structure and Function



The Service is comprised of:

- Recruitment Team (1 Team Manager, 1 Social Worker and 1 PT Practice Coordinator, plus access to Form F ISW assessors),
- 2 Fostering Supervisory Support teams (2 Team Managers, 2 Senior Social Workers, 10 Social Workers, 1.5 Practice Coordinators and a Placements Officer)
- a Family Support Worker
- Special Guardian/Connected Carer team, including assessment, support and post SG support (1.5 Team Managers, 2 Senior Social Workers, 5 Social Workers).
- a Senior Clinical Practitioner
- The Panel Advisor and Panel Administrator support our Fostering Panel (see appendix 2)

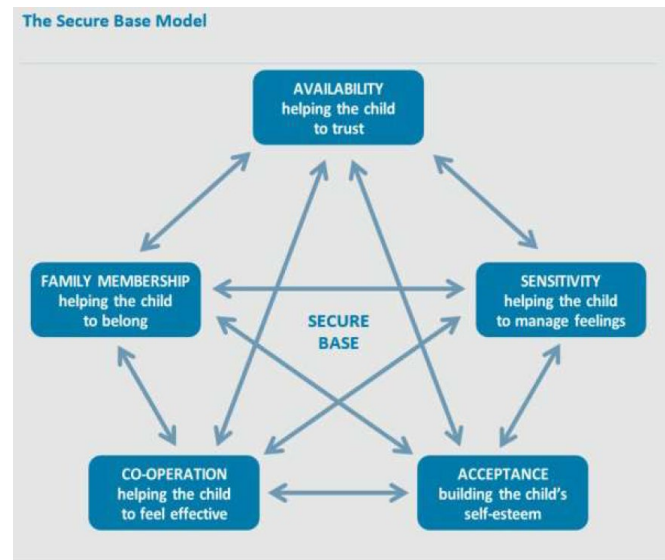
There is one secondment position in the Special Guardianship Team being covered by an agency staff member that we were unable to recruit to. We have an agency Marketing Officer that is co-managed across the Fostering and Communications Services to support our Marketing and Recruitment Strategy. We also have an agency Panel Advisor, due to the permanently recruited candidate pulling out of the process. Otherwise, the service is fully resourced by workers on permanent contracts.

The Fostering Service have contributed to the development of the council's children's residential provision and recruitment of staff. We continue a close working relationship with our Access to Resources Service sharing the aim of providing more local homes for Southwark children. It is

envisaged some children who spend time in residential care in Southwark will be linked with foster carers for respite and where children have plans to move from residential to a family setting.

Practice Framework

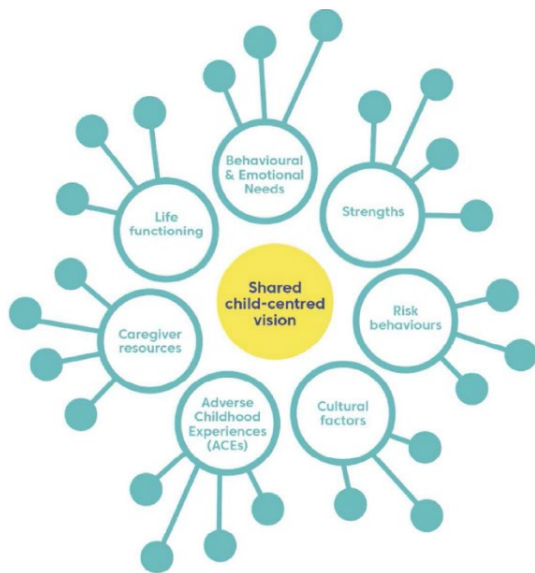
Southwark uses The Secure Base Model, developed by Professor Gillian Schofield and Dr Mary Beek that can be used with children, young people and carers with diverse needs, cultures and age groups. Gillian Schofield OBE is Emeritus Professor of Child and Family Social Work. She was an experienced Social Worker and Guardian ad Litem before joining UEA in 1990 and was appointed to a Chair in Child and Family Social Work in 2006. With Dr Mary Beek, she developed the Secure Base model, an attachment and resilience-based framework relevant to foster care, adoption, residential care, schools, professional teams and a range of other settings. The Secure Base model has been implemented widely in the UK and internationally.



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Many children coming into our care have had painful experiences of separation and loss, and as a result may feel insecure and find it hard to trust people, including their carers. The Secure Base Model help carers to offer individualised care and scaffolding, focusing on natural attachments, that may lead to a child's first experience of attachment to a care giver. There may be behaviours that carers and professionals worry about and require significant understanding and considered responses to promote a sense of security, trust, support and belonging within the family unit.

This runs alongside training on Emotional Behavioural Management and Trauma-Informed Care for both staff and foster carers to ensure supervision and support to upskill carers who can provide reparative care to children.



This year we started implementing the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment tool, developed by Dr John Lyons. The multi-purpose tool enables a comprehensive assessment of needs, risks and strengths within the household, considering the whole system and outcomes to be achieved to help decision making. Our staff and foster carers have been trained in the model and have detailed guidance in considering how the differing factors and agency of those in the network can share and develop the child-centred vision, to promote and achieve positive outcomes. We hope to fully embed this in 2025-26.

We will be looking to introduce Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) in 2025/26. This is a specific and tailored assessment and support plan collaboratively created with parent / carers aimed to improve the quality of life for Southwark children. This is not an intervention for all families, the primary focus is young people where neurodiverse or complex trauma behavioural presentations are a challenge. PBS uses observations, monitoring tools in addition to assessment to understand behaviours, teaching new skills and making positive environmental changes.

Southwark has additionally adopted the Caring Life app that supports an online portal for photos and memories that can support Life Story Work and a 'scrapbook' for children, especially if they have experienced placement moves and changes in workers. Our Family Support Worker is supporting to implement this and ensure all foster carers are set up and able to use the technology. Our Permanence Lead and Life Story Lead have also designed an 'All About Me' booklet for foster carers to complete with each child to ensure their life story book is updated each year, whatever transitions plans are in place.

We have continued to develop our LifeLong Links program, to support the networks of children in care and care leavers. Our Service Manager, Team Manager and a volunteer foster carer are part of the steering board to support its implementation.

Carer Recruitment

Our Carer Recruitment Team is responsible for the marketing, assessment, training and recruitment of foster carers and supported lodgings hosts. Supported Lodgings are a form of supported accommodation for young adults who are not ready to live independently for a variety of reasons. The scheme provides places for care leavers aged 18 to 25 years, they have their own room in a family home and are supported by the adult or adults in the home. They offer support and guidance to the young person where required and help them towards independence.

We recruited 2 foster carers this year, which is reduction from 6 in 2023/24 and not in line with our target of 15 carers per year⁶, therefore is a key priority for the service this coming year, the preparatory work is looking promising and is expected we will see a significant increase in 2025/26.

We have 4 available Supported Lodgings Host to support the opportunity for children to transition into adulthood and have independence with the greater support from a family setting and environment. We seek to increase our provision of supported lodgings hosts this year and have updated our policies and procedures, and recording systems to support, train and assess them.

	2024	2025
Number of Enquiries	123	631
Number of Initial Visits	27	27
Number of Applications	20 (3 SLH)	11 (2 SLH)
Number of Assessments	15	13
Number of approvals of foster carers	6	2
Number of approvals of supported lodgings hosts	2	0

We have significantly increased our referrals, largely through social media marketing. However, it has not made a significant impact on the number of initial visits, applications and assessments. 48% of initial visits progress to assessment, and 15% of those in assessment were approved as foster

⁶ Southwark's Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2022-24

carers. Some assessments are taking longer than the recommended 6-month timeframe, largely this has been due to carers having personal circumstances meaning they are unable to progress. However, we have reviewed our practice guidance for initial visits to be made within 5 days of enquiry, applications to commence within 10 working days of visits being undertaken where possible when information returned from applicant. Alongside checks and skills to foster training, depending on prior experience, we are reviewing early allocation of assessments early. The Recruitment Team Manager provides regular supervision with in-house staff and has regular check ins with our Independent Social Worker cohort to progress robust assessments within timescales, alongside ensuring Skills to Foster training is available every three months.

Reasons for assessments concluding without approval:

Reason	Ended	%
Change in circumstances	1	17%
Personal Health issues	1	17%
Other family member health issues	2	33%
Not ready to foster	1	17%
Immigration issues	1	17%
Total	6	

Further analysis of our data, recording, reporting and practice has been undertaken, with our data transformation and service development team and continues to ensure that we maximise conversions between enquiries, visits, assessments and approvals in the coming year. We receive enquiries via our website, Facebook, information meetings, from existing carers via word of mouth and follow attendance at community and council events. We run a generous incentive scheme for current carers and staff.

Our marketing strategy has three strands: the community, council staff and current cohort of carers. We have physical and social media marketing material, including films involving our current care leavers, carers and staff to accurately represent their voices, the service and support we provide.

For marketing in the community, we have used social media advertising across Facebook and Instagram using our Fostering and Southwark Council accounts. We have had many campaigns, one focussed campaign was to associated public services this year, who work in caring professions and may be interested in fostering: including ambulance, police, teachers to consider fostering as respite or long-term career aspirations. This generated the biggest number of enquiries however many did not progress to application and assessment stages. We additionally send out communication in Southwark Education schools bulletin and are due to attend the Headteachers forum to get marketing materials into staff rooms and discuss more widely with school staff.

Our reviewed physical marketing materials are now visible across the borough in Leisure Centres, Libraries, GP Surgeries, and Housing Estates. We have shared material and attended meetings with over 100 Faith Leaders across the borough. We included an advertisement in Millwall football club's magazine that has partnerships with businesses across the borough. We also had an advertisement in the Council tax bill that goes to all Southwark households, alongside two articles in Southwark Life Magazine. The introduction of QR codes to all physical marketing assets have enabled us to collect data on which are most successful.

For our second strand of the strategy is the marketing and recruitment of Southwark council staff. Southwark are a Fostering Friendly employer, offering increased leave to support with settling children and flexible working to attend meetings. We have put renewed physical and digital marketing throughout all council buildings, which also have QR codes to track accessibility. We send regular information to staff via a range of council bulletins and newsletters and share the foster carers quarterly newsletter with Children's Services staff. For the next six months, as part of fostering fortnight plans, we have doubled the staff referral incentive. We have negotiated a slot in the retirement training sessions to help those considering early retirement and alternative pathways to support children and young people.

Enabling and supporting our current cohort of carers is the third strand of our marketing strategy. We know that referrals through word of mouth are some of our most successful and have higher conversions to approved foster carers. We send regular information to foster carers via a quarterly newsletter and have also doubled the referral incentive for them over the next six months. Many of our foster carers are involved in marketing and recruitment events and we ensure we value and celebrate our carers by putting on events across the year.

Marketing material:

Millwall Magazine:



Articles in Southwark life

Need to know...

Spring is in the air at last, the weather is (slowly) improving and around Southwark there is lots going on. We've got lots of ways for you to get involved in how the council works, and we've got all the latest news – including updates on our Pride Fund and the borough's newest LGBT+ arts centre.

For news and events follow us on social media or find out more at [southwark.gov.uk/news](https://www.southwark.gov.uk/news)

Follow us on
Facebook
facebook.com/southwarkcouncil

Follow us on
Twitter
@lb_southwark

Follow us on
Instagram
Instagram.com/southwarkcouncil

To get regular news, including cost of living advice, you can sign up to our newsletter at www.southwark.gov.uk/followus

Discover the rewarding journey of fostering in Southwark

Find out how you can make a lasting difference in a child's life. Explore the flexible types of fostering, the financial support available, and the process of becoming a foster carer. Take the first step toward a life-changing experience and help provide a safe, loving home for children in need.

Find out more at [southwark.gov.uk/foster](https://www.southwark.gov.uk/foster)



Sign up for free cycle training

Spring is the perfect time to brush up on your cycling skills, gain confidence or learn to cycle. Through Streets for People, we offer a range of free cycle training for all ages and abilities, including cycling lessons for children, families, women and girls.

www.southwark.gov.uk/parking-streets-and-transport/travel/active-travel/cycling-southwark



Pull up Banners and Posters across the community:



Alongside our regular recruitment information sessions, we have attended a greater number of events to promote visibility and actively recruit carers within the council and local area. We have extended these to evenings and weekends including shopping centres, libraries, and community events.



Councillor Jasmine Ali spoke on radio on Mother's Day, celebrating the vital role of our foster carers



We had an extensive agenda for fostering fortnight, with the theme this year of a celebration of community and the power of relationships including wellbeing sessions for carers, a closing ceremony lunch and a walk around a local park. We had new t-shirts and provided wellbeing baskets whilst coming together to foster our community and inviting friends and family to come and consider becoming a carer. We also put on additional stalls throughout the borough and increased marketing across all communication platforms to raise awareness.



We hope to reach a larger number of prospective foster carers and grow our in-house fostering capacity and community this year.

Retention of Foster Carers and Support

Retention of foster carers is critical to the functioning of the Fostering Service. We acknowledge there will be an annual loss due to retirement, adoption, change of circumstances and de-registration.

Southwark provides a strong offer of support to carers including:

- Council Tax Relief to those living in Southwark
- Monthly visits and dedicated Social Worker support and supervision
- A range of relevant, specialist and mandatory training alongside support with learning and development plans
- Monthly coffee mornings and support groups including therapeutic massages and key speakers
- Family Support Worker to offer activities, emotional support, life story work or bitesize training reminders
- Coaching and peer support from experienced carers

- Training pathway for Foster Carers and Connected Carers to enhance professional development and quality of placements linked to the opportunity to develop through 3 Levels to become therapeutic foster carers with increased financial benefits
- Support packages for complex care needs including: respite, clinical and financial support
- Annual Ball and award ceremony
- Therapeutic intervention and support from a lead clinician, medical advisor, education, and Carelink service to support children in placements and the fostering household
- Regular communication and information sharing via emails and quarterly fostering newsletters

Our Foster Carers are kept up to date with changes and developments in the service and council and have been involved in development council-wide initiatives and most recently our marketing and recruitment campaigns.

We have plans in 2025/2026 to consult foster carers and offer support to re-establish Southwark Council's Fostering Association, run by foster carers to provide a forum for support, discussion and feedback.

The Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy will be updated this year, with Marketing, Recruitment and Retention as key priorities for 2025-26.

Carer Training and Development

The Recruitment Team offers a 3-day Skills to Foster initial training course for prospective foster carers with support from the Fostering Supervising Social Workers and Team Managers. Observations are shared for reflection and analysis within their assessments. The Fostering Service Manager attends on the final day to answer any questions and provide a welcome to the service. The course consistently receives excellent feedback, and our inclusion of current foster carers and care experienced people is especially appreciated. Many participants often cite these sessions as being the turning point in their decision to continue in the journey to become foster carers.

The Senior Social Worker who leads on and develops our training program (Appendix 1) additionally provides bespoke one-to-one training where required alongside post approval training to support new foster carers completing their Training and Development Standards portfolios. This support is striving to improve compliance and meet targets and responsibilities in this area which is highlighted as crucial for the coming year.

Our training programme continues to assist foster carers in developing the understanding and recognition of trauma informed practice. From Skills to Foster, Emotional Behavioural Management, Secure Base and Challenging Placements, we are able to provide a direct link to the bodies' and individual's need to recognise the effects of early childhood trauma. In addition to our core program, we run training on: Appropriate Adult Roles and Responsibilities, Caring for Unaccompanied Minors,

Restorative Practice, Transitions, and Transracial Placements and Trans and LGBTQ+ Placements. We continue to develop links with other services and can offer training with our LADO, providing a valuable addition to carers understanding of both process and standards required of them by Southwark.

In 2024, we extended our training, development and progression through Levels 1-3 to our Connected Carers, to recognise the care they provide and provide the support, training and financial rewards they need.

We continue to be an active member of the London Permanency Partners Consortium, sharing knowledge, strategies, training and development opportunities for all levels of staff and foster carers.

There continues to be a healthy learning culture in the Fostering Service incorporating and reaching both foster carers and social workers. Foster carers recognise that as professionals working with children they need to continuously reflect on their practice and update their knowledge and skills. The importance of building supportive, trusting and empowering relationships with foster carers is the responsibility of the supervising social worker and the service as a whole.

We plan to bring back the reflective group supervision sessions and listening circles that were previously held by invitation to enable foster carers to discuss a theme and learn from each other, with our clinical practitioner and team members facilitating.

This year we have developed our post order support to Special Guardians. We complete means tested financial reviews and offer a duty service to provide advice and guidance. For those facing significant challenges, we complete support plan reviews. We support applications to the Adoption Support Fund for those previously looked after and can support with signposting carers to community therapeutic services for all children under Special Guardianship Orders. We provide support groups and social events to bring the Special Guardianship community together and support one another through joint reflection and learning. There is a full rolling training program for carers during assessment and post order delivered by a clinician that includes Attachment and Secure Base, Trauma-informed Practice, Responding to Behaviours that Challenge and Life Story Work. We have good relationships with our colleagues in the virtual school and meet to review the educational support available to them. We are working on updating our records to capture all children and carers under Special Guardianship arrangements to consider the further reviews and support offered.

The Service published a Kinship Care Strategy April 2025 with our current offer however we are reviewing our post-Special Guardianship support offer to be published this year, following focus groups and using experiential feedback from Special Guardians alongside advice and guidance from the Government's Children's Wellbeing and Schools bill due to be implemented in 2025.

Southwark also support Foster Carers to apply for Special Guardianship Orders if appropriate to support greater permanency and stability for children with less intervention from the Local Authority. The Fostering and Special Guardianship teams are continuing to work together, alongside the children's social work teams to consider the long-term support plans required for children and carers in these circumstances.

Staying Put & Supported Lodgings

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, employment or training. This is a welcome development for young people many of whom are not ready 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. Southwark's Staying Put Policy and Procedures were updated in September 2021 providing increased financial support to Staying Put Carers as well as an excellent package of support so Carers can continue to provide emotional support in term time and staying support in holidays for children who go to university in term time. This offers a secure base to young adults so they can continue to benefit from full family membership and remain in a family setting until they are ready for independence. The Policy and Procedures are due to be updated in 2025.

Southwark introduced a Supported Lodgings Scheme in 2022-23 and the Carer Recruitment Team became responsible for assessing, training and approving Supported Lodging Hosts. From 2024, the service has assigned a dedicated Supervising Social Worker to review and support all Staying Put and Supported Lodgings hosts alongside the duty service. Whilst this sits alongside the Fostering Service, it does not fall under Fostering Regulations and the focus is to support young adults, who will have already been assessed to have a level of maturity and independent skills, to live independently with the support of a key adult, within a homely setting.

Throughout 2024-5 we had 78 children in Staying Put arrangements, a slight increase from 75 last year and 6 in Supported Lodgings arrangements, a slight decrease. We are attempting to recruit more supported lodgings carers and support more of these arrangements.

Performance and Quality Assurance

The Fostering Service has a Quality Assurance Framework, which is part of the overarching quality assurance and performance framework for Southwark Children's Services. The framework includes: effective Fostering Panel scrutiny; foster carer feedback through consultations, the annual review process and feedback on training and development; management oversight of casework and performance data and reviews including audit activity; as well as learning from complaints and placement breakdowns.

The Fostering Service use Power BI for reporting and oversight on frequency of; visits, unannounced visits, DBS, medicals, annual reviews and case supervisions for foster and connected carers. Performance in these areas are largely consistent to last year fluctuating between 80 – 90%. This is a 10% increase from last year and is a continued area for improvement over this year to meet the 95% expectations. Performance meetings are held on a monthly basis with team managers. The Fostering Service Manager provides reports for bimonthly 'Squares' meetings with Senior Management colleagues in Quality Assurance and Permanence Directorate and the data team for accountability and discussions for improvement of practice.

The reporting system additionally helps to identify vacancies and unavailable spaces, these are largely due to the greater number of staying put, the needs of children in placement or carers taking well-earned breaks, however further analysis is required to consider our vacancies and sufficiency of carers, and that plans are in place where any gaps remain to be confident in our carer cohorts capacity and availability. Additionally we are reporting on and developing our training and development plans and progress, as these remain a standard and requirement that need improving, similarly, to last year.

Completing reviews and getting them to panel in a timely manner is still a focus for the service however has improved. In 2024, Southwark introduced Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers in house to the Quality Assurance team to be critical friends, providing analysis and oversight to our practice, assessment and support of foster carers whilst maintaining independence from the service. This has worked well and reduced some of the delays in previously completing paperwork and getting to panel.

The Carer Recruitment, as well as the Special Guardianship and Connected Carers team managers complete monthly reports on performance, good practice and areas of development, which are reviewed within meetings with the Service Manager and shared with the Head of Service. We are in the process of both teams' workflows to be updated on our mosaic recording system in order to have Power BI reporting functions to better support oversight. Over the next year, the Carer Recruitment team are focusing on improving oversight and effectiveness in marketing and recruitment in order to recruit, assess, train and approve high quality foster carers. The Special Guardianship team are

ensuring that good quality timely assessments with relevant checks, are completed alongside relevant support plans.

Twice a year Southwark have a 'Learningfest' where audits are completed across Children's Services based on a theme, alongside a whole week of themed learning and training for staff to develop knowledge and practice. This approach has positive feedback and enables feedback and learning loops across services and the system. Audits have focused on how carers manage and support children who have experienced neglect, children with additional needs, alongside anti-racist practice. All audits look at the quality of assessments, visits, supervisions, reviews, quality of relationships, practice, communication and children's/carer's experiences. Specific cases requiring learning and review are requested by senior management.

Southwark's Fostering Panel

Fostering Services Regulations (2011) and National Minimum Standards (2011) require a Fostering Panel to be constituted, chaired by an independent person. Southwark's panel advisor offers quality assurance and scrutiny on papers prepared for panel and supports the feedback loop alongside the Service Manager. Panel members include representatives from Children's Social Care and independent members with a range of experience across education, health, legal and associated fields alongside members with experience of being in Care, a Foster Carer, Adopter or Special Guardian. The panel makes recommendations about the initial and continuing approval of foster carers, reviews Standards of Care, resignations and deregistrations and matches of children for long-term foster care. They additionally have oversight over Regulation 25 extensions. Final decisions, based on the panel's recommendations, are made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADMs), Assistant Director Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting. Our Head of Service for Care, Care Leavers and Fostering is a newly appointed ADM this year. A report detailing the activity of the Fostering Panel is included as Appendix 2.

Complaints

The Fostering Service reviews complaints received from foster carers and uses the learning to inform service improvement and development.

Year	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
<i>Number of complaints</i>	8	15	5	7

The service had 7 complaints this year and none progressed to Stage 2. The learning from these involved prompt reimbursement of finances and ensuring staff are aware of how to support carers with nursery applications. Ensuring allegation processes and policies are provided in writing was

highlighted, alongside facilitating carers being involved in the decision-making process and making sure actions are communicated, timescales provided and deadlines met.

The learning from complaints, as agreed with the complaints team, is always shared with those involved alongside managers to consider learning and development which is encouraged for discussion within group supervision settings. It is also shared with relevant services and senior management in quarterly performance meetings and annual reports to embed learning across Children and Families.

Review Service Priorities, progress through 2024/5 and plans for 2025/26

The current Service Manager is tasked with developing the service, alongside the team managers, social workers, family support worker, placement officer and practice coordinators.

<p><i>Service Priority 1</i></p>	<p>To ensure that the voice of children is threaded through all aspects of our work to improve their experiences of care.</p> <p>To ensure families and carers are heard, so that their views shape and improve our services to support a continuous learning journey.</p>
<p>Progress through 2024/25</p>	<p>Exit Interviews to be progressed by new Fostering Recruitment Team Manager and feedback shared with staff and panel for service development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Fostering Team Managers have completed feedback, with foster carers leaving due to age and capability, some wishing to move to independent agencies with higher pay rates and some due to going through standards of care processes.</i> <p>Service to continue to capture feedback, measure quality, progress and experience across multiple avenues including.</p> <p>For carers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Within visits, supervisions, reviews, and panels (by allocated workers, team managers and panel chair) - Independent feedback sought following panel (via microsoft teams form), exit interviews and audits (independent TM) - Learning and outcomes from complaints to be shared with the service - Feedback from training to be shared for service development

For children:

- Supervising social workers to evidence discussions with children in visits and alongside child's social worker seek feedback for annual reviews and panel, inviting children to attend where appropriate

Ongoing:

- *Children's feedback forms have been reviewed to be more child friendly and better capture their views, this includes foster carers own children. These are mandatory for reviews and panels, and supervising social workers are required to get feedback from all children that have been with carers throughout the review period.*
- *We had a team managers and panel meeting to share feedback and seek to do this again to support circular feedback and service delivery*

Foster carers to continue to support young people in their care to participate in Speakerbox (Children in Care Council) activities and campaigns, and these to be promoted in Fostering newsletter.

- *Ongoing, newsletter is shared on a 3 monthly basis to include communication about any changes, developments and activities.*

Southwark Foster Carers Association to be set up to support reflection, support networks and communication with the service.

- *This was attempted however there was not take up from foster carers to implement however some interest has been shown to attempt to progress this in 2025/2026.*

Southwark foster carers and care experienced young people to continue to be part of recruitment of staff members via experienced interview panels and considered in Skills to Foster training and support the assessment of foster carers.

- *Implemented*

Ensure learning from complaints, feedback and reviews actively inform service delivery and continued communication of service development via email and newsletters. Ensure placement referrals are relevant, timely support packages put in place, all carers have relevant policies and procedures in writing and plans and decisions are shared in writing in a timely manner.

- *Ongoing, written advice, guidance and support following allegations has been shared, alongside Standards of Care. Further policies are being updated.*

	<p>To continue developing audit processes and programs with Audit Lead to exploring practice standards, quality assurance, support feedback loops and ensure consistency across the service.</p> <p><i>Ongoing</i></p>
Plans for 2025/26	<p>A system of exit interviews to be put in place and progressed and feedback shared with staff and panel for service development. The new Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers have been asked to complete these for further independence.</p> <p>All ongoing plans to continue.</p>

<i>Service Priority 2</i>	<i>Maintain and further develop a stable and high-quality workforce.</i>
Progress through 2024/25	<p><u>For Staff:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review and update skills audit and training needs for the service, ensuring all new members have completed training in key practice areas - Learning, development and support plans reviewed via appraisals and monthly supervision - Continued offer of a range of training and development courses plus consideration of specialist training and support where relevant - Continued feedback sought from panel experiences - Panel Advisor to continue to offer preparation and debrief sessions where required - Panel Advisor to share learning and feedback for team managers and service manager within management meetings which are disseminated in group supervision settings <p><i>These are ongoing, staff have been offered specialist development sessions and coaching support alongside relevant training and development related to their roles. We now have a single clinician allocated to the entire service providing significant clinical support. We have had a change in Panel Advisor, who is meeting with social workers and team managers, it is hoped with a change in hours can attend more management meetings.</i></p> <p><u>For Panel Members:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual Appraisals to be completed and appropriate training identified - Feedback sought following panel and training

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint meetings with Team Managers to be introduced to share learning and expectations <p>All Staff and panel members to continue to have access to confidential counselling services and my learning source training opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing, a vice chair needs to be recruited and permanent panel advisor</i> <p>To embed our STAR adopted five pledges within the service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to promote an open and transparent culture where employees who experience/see racism or discrimination are able to raise it and expect the issue to be dealt with swiftly and fairly. • to listen to and amplify our diverse voices within our organisations on how we create an inclusive, fair and representative workplace at all levels • to work to address and prevent structural racial inequalities and structural racism within our organisation, the organisations we partner with and within the service we deliver • to champion organisations that address racial injustices and organisations that promote equality and diversity • to ensure that people of all backgrounds can rise to the top of the organisation. <p>To ensure anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice is at the heart of our practice and consider carers, children's and staff's experiences of intersectionality and any support required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing, the organisation rolled out 'Lets talk about Race' training to create spaces to discuss racism, reflect on practice and raise awareness</i> <p>Recruitment and development opportunities for staff to continue to be considered, alongside continued support and assessment of ASYEs throughout the service.</p>
Plans for 2025/26	<p>Recruitment of a vice chair and panel Advisor to take place</p> <p>All ongoing plans to continue</p>

Service Priority 3	<i>Improve placement stability of children both short and long term</i>
Progress through 2024/25	<p>Southwark's Long-Term Stability for children as at 31 March 2025 currently sits at approx. 73.8% and children with 3 or more placement moves is approx. 10.1%³. There is a positive increase in stability from 62% in 2024 and reduction of moves from 13%. National averages cited in 2024 were 68% and 10% respectively⁷, suggesting we are doing well regarding stability of placements and in line with statistics in regard to 3 or more moves.</p> <p>Recruitment of Placement Officer to support Fostering Duty and Placements Service, alongside ART, to promote consistency and scrutiny over placement referrals, matches and ensure creative support plans available were required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing, the placement officer role is showing impact to have a lead person considering placement matches and the support required</i> <p>Duty Placement Service to continue to record searches undertaken and reasons for unavailability or incapacity to support placements. Children in residential or independent placements that do not have a permanency plan to remain on fostering search list and reviewed by Fostering and Care Service Managers to support permanency planning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing, Permanency leads additionally have oversight and panels to ensure children have permanency plans in place</i> <p>Methods of data analysis to be set up to understand limits to capacity and support/training required to support matches alongside foster carers progressing through Levels 1-3.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing, there have been some further progressions of carers through levels however better training and support plans should support in this area.</i> <p>Further analysis and staff training is required in order to accurately reflect and record placement capacity and sufficiency; to consider discrepancies in reporting and any changes required in our current carer cohort and approvals to ensure we have a fully functioning service responsive to the needs of our children and young people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing, training has been provided to staff, and the data is more accurate however this remains a priority and audit/analysis required alongside improvement plan.</i>

⁷ Placement Stability Statistics, 2023. [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2023 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

	<p>Continue Placement Support Meetings, chaired by TM from Fostering or Children's Social Work teams, involving all relevant professionals and clinical support to consider expectations, challenges and support packages that are reviewed regularly to prevent breakdowns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing, there has been positive feedback about how these are being chaired and supported by fostering service</i>
Plans for 2025/26	<p>Ensuring adequate placement capacity and sufficiency is a priority for this year, ensuring carers have the right support and training to provide the care that our children need. More focus on accurate recording and ensuring high challenge/high support practice alongside clinical support will continue plus an analysis of these approaches.</p> <p>Training and Support plans for carers are a key focus for this year to ensure they are equipped and supported to meet the needs of our children and ensure they are continuously developing. These are mandatory for all reviews and panels.</p> <p>Service Managers to consider how services liaise about possible placement options for those children whose permanency is delayed and if further panels are needed.</p> <p>Service manager to complete audit/review of placement capacity and training to create improvement plan.</p>

<i>Service Priority 4</i>	<p>Improve permanence outcomes and practice, particularly through long-term foster care, placements with friends and families and life story work</p>
Progress through 2024/25	<p>Ensure that more children have their permanence confirmed and celebrated in long term fostering placements in order that they feel safe and secure and enjoy family life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>The 12 long term matches show greater permanency planning for children, and family membership is regularly discussed within supervision and supervisory visits.</i> <p>Fostering Service to work alongside Permanency Leads to ensure best practice and plans for permanency are identified and progressed in a timely way.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Regular permanency panels and tracking meetings are working well</i>

Matching Support Plans to be completed, alongside matching reports to be reviewed at permanency meetings and updated throughout the child's journey, considering care required and carer's capacity.

- *Matching support plans have been implemented and are now being requested to be reviewed alongside Looked After Reviews and Carers Annual Reviews*

Connected Carers to be provided the full training and support package available to progress through Levels 1-3 and be financially remunerated alongside this scheme.

- *This has been implemented, however there remains slow progress in supporting some carers to complete training and development plans*

Supervising Social Workers and Team Managers to regularly review matching considerations in visits and through supervision, considering children's current and future needs and carer's current and future capacity to provide reparative care, including any support required, and professionals reviews undertaken to put this in place.

- *Ongoing*

All foster carers to be signed up and using Caring Life App with every child to support photos, memories and life story work, alongside contributing to children's social worker's life story work.

- *Ongoing, our Family Support Worker leads on this area, attending coffee mornings and practice group supervisions to continue to promote the use of this app. All carers have log ins, and we have improved uploads from 25% - 33%. Further oversight and promotion is being completed to emphasise the importance of ensuring photos for children and that these go with them throughout any changes in circumstances. Life Story Work 'all about me' booklets have been created and shared with supervising social workers and carers to complete better life story work with children, that are updated annually and include all important information, following them if they do move to a new home. Information and training sessions to be set up to promote and support carers with this in Autumn 2025.*

Service Manager, Team Manager and volunteer foster carer to continue to be part of the steering board to support the implementation of Southwark's Life Long Links program to improve the support network for care leavers.

- *Ongoing*

Plans for 2025/26	<p>Matching Support plans to be added and reviewed at Looked After Reviews and Carers Annual Reviews to ensure ongoing needs are met and support in place, identifying any vulnerabilities early.</p> <p>Training, Development and Support plans for all carers to be specific, measurable, actionable, realistic and timely – co-created with supervising social workers to ensure continued progression and training needs identified and met. Training and Development Day to be set up between carers and supervising social workers in Autumn 2025.</p> <p>Foster Carers to be supported to create 'All About Me' life story work books with all children and greater emphasis on carers to use the caring life app more regularly to provide a photo journey for children s part of their life story work.</p> <p>All ongoing plans to continue</p>
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Service Priority 5	<p>Improve placement choice and sufficiency to reduce the number of children placed in residential and independent care, and those living more than 20 miles away by increasing the number of foster care placements available locally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To continue with recruitment and marketing strategy to recruit 15 additional foster carers annually and, alongside this, ensure attention is given to retention and incentives/barriers for carers to care for older children and those with more complex needs. • To grow our own fostering service to create the range and types of fostering placements required for children of all ages including; babies, complex needs, older children, crisis intervention, siblings, and parent and child placements, as well as ensuring a supply of step down placements for our residential provisions.
Progress through 2024/25	<p>Recruit more foster carers living within the borough or nearby to Southwark who are able to meet the needs of Southwark Children, by implementing recommendations from a review of the Southwark Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2022-24 and Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2026.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>We recruited 2 foster carers this year, which is a significant reduction from previous years</i>

- *We increased enquiries by over 200% and implemented a three pronged strategy to considerably increase visibility throughout the borough, on differing channels and news/social media platforms and within council staff forums, alongside attending more events with carers to share their experiences.*

Ensure creative and robust support plans enable more children and young people to experience family life in foster care, allowing them to move out of residential care.

- *Fostering duty continue to seek in house foster placements for children in residential homes*
- *Fostering are actively supporting Southwark's Residential fostering home and planning with children's social work teams appropriate referrals*

The Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy will be updated this year, with Marketing, Recruitment and Retention as key priorities for 2024-5.

- *This has not been updated and is planned for this year*

Continue to implement Marketing Strategy and analyse the impact of Recruitment and Marketing campaigns to evaluate whether the increase in enquiries are converting to an increase in initial visits, assessments and approvals.

- *Ongoing, the renewed marketing and recruitment strategy has increased enquiries, there are a similar number of home visits, applications and assessments ongoing. This requires ongoing analysis and strategic direction and support.*

Ensure marketing strategies focus on recruiting carers who can offer the range and types of placements required including targeted campaigns for the particular carer cohorts required and those that have the expertise required to meet the needs of our children and young people.

- *Ongoing, campaigns for respite increased enquiries. A focus is on capacity to recruit carers who can support babies, parent and child and children with more challenging needs or require short term support whilst support is provided in order for them to return home.*

Continue close liaison with Family Link services to support marketing, recruitment and development of training and practice standards.

- *Ongoing*

	<p>Streamline carer recruitment assessment process including implementing response timelines and better recording of information to improve reporting, oversight and applicant experiences in the recruitment process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing and support is in place from Service Development Team in 2025/2026.</i> <p>Ensure assessments are completed within the recommended 6-month timeframe, with high quality oversight, supervision, access to skills to foster training and panel dates adhered to, in order to approve more carers. Ensure delays are in exceptional circumstances. Continue monthly reports to analyse process and practice, and reasons of those concluding at Stage 1 & 2 to consider where support, training or development may be necessary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing</i> <p>Work with the Data Team to ensure workflows are on the recording system and produce a dashboard that accurately reports on recording, to understand, analyse and maximise conversions between enquiries, visits, assessments and approvals in the coming year, and help oversight and service development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing, this has begun and dashboard created.</i> <p>Increase our recruitment, assessment, training and provision of Supported Lodgings hosts and update our policies, procedures and practice framework to support them. Improve the support and review provided to Supported Lodging Hosts and Staying Put carers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing, policies and procedures are almost complete and cohort is fully recorded on the system in one place, with plans in place to progress practice and support alongside staying put carers</i> <p>Implementing Mockingbird to be further explored to increase support package and incentives/offers to carers and improve retention, alongside increased placement options for siblings and children coming out of residential care whilst building a culture of support and familial models within our carer cohort.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing, and consideration in 2025 of doing this with internal resources.</i>
Plans for 2025/26	<p>This area remains one of the highest priorities for Southwark. We need to increase foster carer recruitment, with better analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to our marketing and recruitment process, and galvanise partnerships across the borough to support recruitment to the community, within our staff cohort and through our current carer cohort.</p>

	<p>Partner with Weekenders charity to increase carers who can offer monthly respite support for allocated children and increase approvals of younger cohort of carers who may consider career changes in the future.</p> <p>All ongoing actions remain</p>
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<i>Service Priority 6</i>	Continue to embed the Secure Base model of therapeutic caregiving across children's services
Progress through 2024/25	<p>Evaluate the implementation of the Secure Base model and CANs framework by measuring the impact on children, YP and foster carers and seeking feedback, in consultation with clinical services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>This is still to progress through implementation of the CANs model with clinical services</i> <p>Ensure all supervising social workers have completed Secure Base training and program is developed for social workers across Children's Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Secure Base training and development is discussed within the fostering service and taught throughout our training to carers.</i> - <i>The Clinical team offer secure base training to staff throughout the organisation</i> <p>To continue our healthy learning culture in the Fostering Service incorporating and reaching both foster carers and social workers. Foster carers recognise that as professionals working with children they need to continuously reflect on their practice and update their knowledge and skills. The importance of building supportive, trusting and empowering relationships with foster carers is the responsibility of the supervising social worker and the service as a whole.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing</i>
Plans for 2025/26	<p>All plans are ongoing</p> <p>Consider the development of a therapeutic fostering hub to support current experienced carers to be able to respond and hold the needs of our children with significant therapeutic and worker support.</p>

Service Priority 7	<p>Develop high quality support for connected (Kinship) carers and SGO carers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To continue to build a strong family and friends fostering offer in order to maximise our opportunities for children and young people to remain within their networks.
Progress through 2023/24	<p>Team Managers and Service Manager to continue current tracking and reporting system alongside monthly reporting on performance, team capacity and functioning. Further work to be completed with Data Team to ensure workflows are on recording systems and dashboards accurate report on performance for greater oversight and service development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ongoing, development work almost complete</i> <p>Ensure robust tracking of timescales for all assessments to ensure Friends and Family assessments are undertaken within 16 weeks and the 8 week extension is only sought at Panel in exceptional circumstances.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Tracking system is in place to prepare and book panel at required dates however some extensions are still being requested alongside placements becoming unlawful with risk assessments completed.</i> <i>Timescales for Medicals and DBS checks often impact on requests for extensions</i> <i>Monthly meetings with Health established to consider delays in medicals</i> <i>Liaison with Police established to consider delays in DBS'</i> <p>Further oversight needed from Team Managers and Service Managers to track and ensure checks are completed at the initial stages of assessment to avoid delay and understand any other issues to reduce the need to request Regulation 25 extensions and ensure placements do not become unlawful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ongoing.</i> <p>Service Manager to continue to track, monitor and review with Health and Police Services progress with DBS and Medical checks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ongoing, changed medical policy to complete on all carers every 3 years. Met with health to attempt to improve delays and seek for one GP to complete all medicals – discussions ongoing.</i> <p>Service Manager and Team Managers to continue to meet with Legal and Safeguarding Services to review and support feedback loops to improve practice</p>

	<p>standards and timescales to ensure high quality assessments and support plans are presented to court.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing. Lawyer has attended group supervision to provide clarity on expectations and team managers reviewing.</i> <p>Ensure positive working between social work teams and special guardianship connected carer team on all assessments, support plans and regulation 24/ unregulated arrangements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Practice and communication has improved and greater communication across services, including attending management meetings</i> <p>Post SG Team alongside Development Team to complete focus groups with current SGO carers to consider support offer to Special Guardians, alongside annual financial review, ASF applications, duty line and support groups offered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Completed and ongoing</i> <p>Team Managers to develop alongside our clinical practitioners, a rolling training offer including; Emotional Behavioural Management, Attachment/Secure Base and Trauma-Informed Care, aimed at supporting and enhancing the assessments of Special Guardian's as well as offering support and training post order to avoid difficulties and breakdowns, and increase stability and permanency for children within their families. Ensure feedback is sought from support groups and training to evaluate service delivery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Completed and ongoing. Southwark completed a Kinship Care strategy 2025</i>
Plans for 2025/26	<p>We will be publishing a Kinship Care Strategy 2025 with our updated offer to Special guardians post-order in line with the Government's Wellbeing Bill, and to increase the multi-agency support available to carers and children on Special Guardianship Orders.</p> <p>Panel Advisor will provide review and monitoring via panel scheduling and quality assurance of requests for extensions and delays in checks in order to provide feedback to support practice, alongside the Service Manager.</p> <p>An audit of regulation 24 cases is being completed to consider further oversight, development and support/training needed to reduce timescales of assessments and avoid circumstances becoming unregulated.</p> <p>All ongoing plans remain</p>

Service Priority 8	<p>Develop a responsive and professional Foster Carer cohort in Southwark</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To build a resilient and expert foster care community able to support and care for the older cohort of young people
Progress through 2024/25	<p>Foster carers to return to panel every three years to ensure they continue to provide good care for Southwark children who are looked after.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Improved management reporting and oversight,</i> <i>Improved feedback from children in care and foster carers birth/other children within the household</i> <i>Improved feedback from children's Independent Reviewing Officers</i> <i>Improved attendance from Children's social workers at panel and feedback provided however needs to be routine</i> <i>Standards of Care process and timelines reviewed with the service to improve timeliness of review</i> <p><i>Ongoing</i></p> <p>Carers to ensure they are completing their Training Support and Development standards (TSDs). Supervising Social Workers to continue to review in visits and Team Managers within supervision, alongside signposting to specific training sessions offered. Clear expectations of Training and Learning and Development are detailed with dates to attend for the Annual Review and Panel paperwork, and Team Managers to quality assure this paperwork to ensure standards are upheld or plans in place to address them. If lack of compliance impacts on Standards of Care then procedures to be followed. All new carers have separate training records to more accurately record training completed by primary and secondary carers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ongoing – service to create policies for training of back up carers and partners, and continue to review reasons for not completing training and development plans.</i> <p>Continued performance meetings and learning sessions with Team Managers and Social Workers to ensure that carers are visited and supported in line with expectations, social workers are adequately supervised, DBS and Medicals are completed in a timely manner, high quality reports are provided, with feedback from all relevant professionals, carers and children for timely reviews and panel papers</p>

	<p>quality assured to provide overviews of the work undertaken and recommendations for approval, including learning, training and development plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing</i> <p>Service Manager to track and monitor Standards of Care processes and timeliness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing – training was put in place and greater oversight leading to improvements in this area</i> <p>Service Manager to continue to track, monitor and review any challenges with Health and Police Services and across the Directorate, to ensure importance of feedback is shared and provided to review placements and carers approvals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing</i> <p>Service Manager to work alongside Panel Advisor, Chair and Administrator to review functioning of panel to increase timely panel capacity and running order. Learning and review meetings set up between panel members and team managers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Completed & Ongoing</i> <p>Southwark to consider bringing Independent Reviewing Officers in house to the Quality Assurance team to support timeliness of reviews, improved practice and service development whilst maintaining independence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Completed</i> <p>Senior Social Worker to continue to provide sessions to support completion of TSDs, including prospective connected carers in assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Completed and ongoing</i> <p>Supervising Social Workers to review the importance and capacity of carers to provide electronic logs, and Family Support Worker or local resources to be sought to improve access to technology and completion of logs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Completed and ongoing</i> <p>Service to review Training Offer to consider training outside of working hours to support carers in employment alongside any additional training required to meet the needs of carers and our children and young people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Completed and ongoing</i> <p>Carers to be offered support and training in English courses specific to fostering requirements.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing</i> <p>For out of borough foster carers, requests to be made to local provisions to consider training on offer and methods/agreements to attend and provide feedback/assessment of engagement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Completed and working well</i> <p>Develop further clinical support and possible specialist training that is needed to support carers to take on more challenging placements at edge of care, or residential including step down from residential.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ongoing, 121 clinical support is in place however need to review specialist support available and linked to plan for therapeutic hub.</i> <p>Reflective practice group meetings and listening circles for carers to be set up with a Clinical Practitioner and workers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>This has not been progressed</i>
Plans for 2025/26	<p>Reflective practice group meetings and listening circles for carers to be set up with a Clinical Practitioner and workers.</p> <p>Carers to be offered support and training in English courses specific to fostering requirements.</p> <p>Quarterly Training reviews have been implemented with reporting, to consider feedback, courses offered, gaps and what needs to be commissioned. These include the training lead, training manager and family support worker.</p> <p>Back up carer and partner expectations and minimum training policy and expectations agreement to be implemented.</p> <p>Oversight and review of reasons for not completing learning and development plans and training to continue to be collated by Service Manager, Team Managers, Panel Advisor, Social Workers and data teams to improve this area of practice.</p>

Appendix 1 – Southwark’s Training Program

Our Core training is to be undertaken every 3 years:

- Safeguarding
- Placement Stability
- Attachment, Child Development and Secure Base
- Diversity

LEVEL ONE: Post-Approval Training in the First Year or 18 months if you are a Connected Carer (covers TSD Induction Standards)

This training will be repeated twice yearly.

1. Working with the Department: your role as a foster carer
2. Child Protection and Safer Caring - accessed online via KCA training associates
3. Attachment - accessed online via KCA training associates.
4. Child Development - accessed online via KCA training associates
5. Secure Base
6. Managing Behaviour
7. Supporting your child with Education and PEP's
8. The Role of the LADO and Allegations
9. Promoting the Health of Looked After Children
10. Emotional, Physical Well-Being for Foster Carers
11. TSD Workshops

LEVEL TWO

1. Life Story Work
2. Resilience
3. Self-harming behaviour - accessed online via KCA training associates.
4. Suicide Prevention
5. Mental Health and Well-Being
6. Gangs Awareness
7. Substance Misuse
8. R.A.C.E.R training

LEVEL TWO (Parent & Child)

1. Working with Parents to Assess Attachment
2. Child Observation
3. Advanced Safeguarding
4. Legal Process & Report Writing
5. Roles & Responsibilities
- 6.

LEVEL TWO (Teenagers)

1. Preparing for Independence & Transitions
2. Appropriate Adult
3. Restorative Justice
4. Sexual Health & Relationships

LEVEL THREE (Specialist Therapeutic Carers)

Therapeutic carers will complete Empathic Behaviour Management training, Advanced Safeguarding and Mentoring training and provide written evidence with their practice observed by the SSW to demonstrate that they are practicing at an advanced level. They will continue to develop their skills, e.g. through specialist training and other learning - courses, e-learning, attending conferences, self-directed learning, reading etc. and assist with training and support of other carers.

Fostering Panel

Independent Chair's Report

1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

1. Introduction

This report provides details of the Fostering Panel's activity over a twelve month period between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. The primary functions of the Fostering Panel are to:

- consider the approval of prospective foster carers including the terms of their approval, i.e. the type of foster care they can provide and age range.
- consider the continued approval of foster carers after their first and third annual reviews, or following complaints or allegations made about the quality of care provided.
- provide a quality assurance role.

The Fostering Panel make recommendations that the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) considers before making a decision.

2. Panel meetings

Panels continue to be held virtually on the first and third Wednesday of each month. Virtual panels work well for those attending, particularly foster carers who find them convenient as they can remain at home with supervising social workers present to support them. Supervising Social Workers use their own laptops to join the meeting, which has resolved the technical issues foster carers have previously faced. Panel members use the reflective period at the end of each panel to discuss any issues raised during the panel.

3. Fostering Panel Central List Membership

In an effort to reflect, as far as possible, the diversity of the local community the central list includes members of different ages, genders, sexualities and ethnic backgrounds. Every effort is made to ensure that each panel meeting has a diverse membership with a good representation of skills, backgrounds, and experience. Each panel consists of six members, including the chair, vice-chair, a social worker and three independent panel members.

There have been some changes to the central list as a panel member has stepped down due to work commitments, an agency panel member is on maternity leave, and the vice chair took an extended break for personal reasons. Recruitment efforts have proved successful in increasing membership diversity and experience to include kinship carers, care-experienced adults, and social workers.

There are currently 21 Panel Members on the central list consisting of the following:

- 1 independent panel chair
- 1 independent vice Chair
- 7 agency social workers (including social workers, a team manager, care proceedings case manager and a personal Advisor)
- 2 agency clinical practitioners
- 10 independent members (4 of whom have fostering or adoption experience, two care experienced and one former kinship carer now Special Guardian)

4. Panel Advisor and Panel Administrator

Panel members greatly appreciate the support they receive from the panel advisor, particularly their quality assurance role, which helps to ensure that reports are fit for purpose. When reports contain gaps they are returned to the authors for additional information before being shared with panel members.

There have been two changes in panel advisors over the course of the year. The first had been in the role for over a year, leaving to pursue another key role in the local authority, and the second was only in post for a short period as found the hours conflicted with another position. The panel thanks both for their contribution. The current panel advisor is highly experienced and has been well received and panel has found her contribution very helpful.

The panel administrator plays a key role in the effective functioning of the panel. The role includes the scheduling of meetings, setting the agenda managing the virtual waiting room, minuting and maintaining records. The current panel administrator has proven to be extremely well organized and efficient. She has ensured the panel functions well and meetings run smoothly.

5. Panel Members' Appraisals

Panel appraisals were completed in December 2024 and January 2025. All panel members stated they continue to enjoy their roles and expressed a wish to continue. Panel members identified future training needs to improve their knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ+ and transgender issues. The need arose from cases where some young people in foster care were receiving good advice and support, while others were in need of more. As a result panel members felt this training should also be made available to foster carers and social workers.

6. Panel training

Panel members attended training in July 2024, that focused on Fostering regulations and legislation. Learning material including articles continues to be shared with and among panel members as part of their ongoing development.

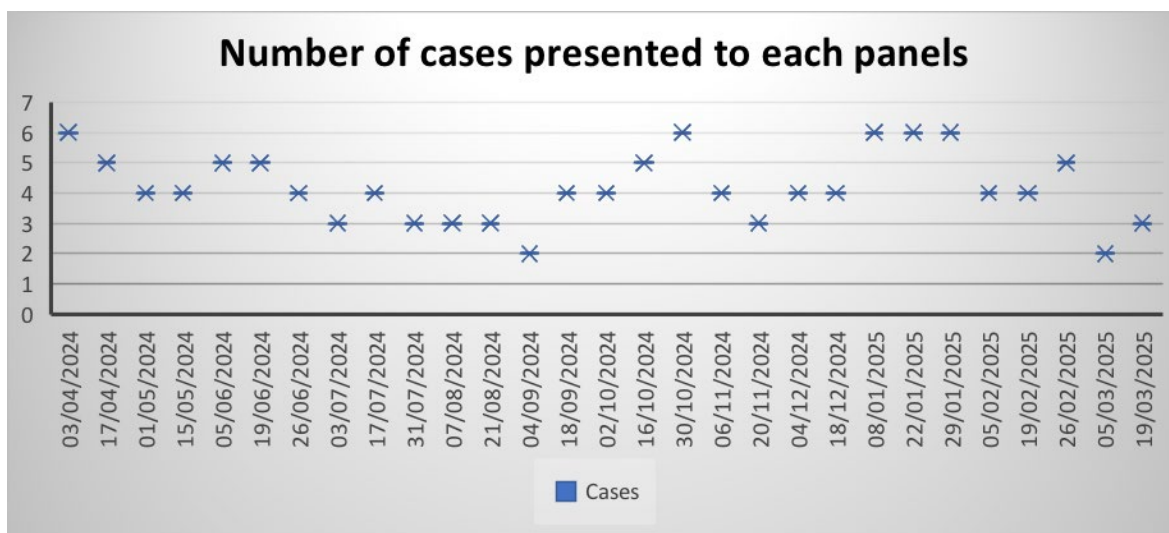
7. Panel activity throughout the year

Between April 2024 and March 2025, the Fostering Panel met on 29 occasions, 6 more than the usual 23 meetings. The additional panels were organised to approve kinship carers and continued approvals of foster carers returning to panel following annual reviews. There were no cancelled panels during the course of the year.

The number of cases presented to each panel varied depending on their complexity. During this reporting period, the panel heard a total of 121 cases, an increase of 34 cases compared to the previous year. The table below shows the increase in panel activity over the last three years.

Panel activity

Between April 2024 and March 2025, the Fostering Panel met on 29 occasions with an average of 4 cases presented to each panel.



Number and type of cases presented to panel

TYPE OF CASE	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
General Foster Carer Household Approval	6	6	2
Family Link Approval	1	0	0
1st Year Annual Review	15	15	10
Three Yearly Annual Review	6	19	27
Fostering Match	2	7	8
Reg 25 Extension	16	12	20
Reg 27 Kinship Approval	17	8	21
Deregistration		1	10
Resignation	0	8	9
Change of approval	0	0	2
Variation + Reg 24 extension	0	0	1
Return to Panel following an Allegation	0	1	0
Review following Standard of Care	5	9	9
Return to Panel at Panel's request	7	1	2
Total	75	87	121

During the period covered by this report the Fostering Panel considered the following cases:

Fostering Approvals

Fostering Approvals	2023-2024	2024-2025
General Fostering Households	6	2
Kinship Carer Households	8	21
Family Link Short Break Carers	0	0

General Fostering Households

Panel recommended approval: 2

ADM ratified recommendation: 2

Kinship Carer Households recommendations

Panel recommended **approval**: 17

ADM ratified recommendation: 16

ADM did not ratify recommendation: 1 (*SGO granted the day after panel*)

Panel recommended **deferment**: 4

Panel deferment shared with ADM: 1 (*resulting in ratification*)

The two general fostering household applications presented to the panel represented a decrease of four compared with the previous year. There was, by contrast a marked increase in kinship carer household approvals, with twenty one presented to panel, representing an increase of 13 households compared with the previous year. The number of children in kinship care has increased nationally as more children are enter care through kinship care arrangements and remain in kinship foster care or on route to Special Guardianship Orders. This should be regarded as a positive arrangement as children fare better when cared for by family or friends as it helps preserve their relationships and sense of identity.

There have been no Family Link assessments, or reviews presented to panel over the last two years, which may suggest a change in policy in relation to such approvals. However, panel has not been formally notified of this.

All recommended approvals were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker apart from one, where ratification was unnecessary as a Special Guardianship Order was granted the day after panel. Panel deferred 3 recommendations for more information. 1 case was presented to the ADM due to its second deferment and received a positive ratification.

Fostering Matches

Fostering Matches	2023-2024	2024-2025
Total number of children matched with foster carers	8	12
Number of children matched as part of a sibling group	2	7
Children matched with Southwark foster carers	2	5
Children matched with Independent Fostering Agency foster carers	6	3

Panel recommended matches : 12

ADM ratified recommendation: 12

Achieving permanency for all children who will not be returning to their parents care is a key goal for all local authorities. This is achieved through placements with kinship carers, foster carers, Special Guardians or adoption. As IROs are responsible for helping to develop and oversee children's care plans, permanency planning should be discussed during children's Looked After Reviews and considered for inclusion in their care plans by their second review.

In Southwark young people over fourteen have the opportunity to be matched with their carers via their Statutory Review process, however, matches for younger children are presented to the fostering panel for consideration.

It is positive to note that 12 children were recommended to be matched with their foster carers. This represents an increase of 4 children. It is also the highest number of children matched since 2020/2021 when 13 children were matched with their foster carers. It is also positive to note that 7 children matched were part of sibling groups, one of which were 3 children. The majority of children matched (5 households) were with Southwark foster carers making it easier for them to remain in contact with family members, friends and attend the same schools.

All recommended matches were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.

1st Year Fostering Reviews

1 Year Fostering Reviews	2023-2024	2024-2025
General fostering households	15	10
Family Link short break carers	1	0

Panel recommended continued approval: 10

ADM ratified recommendation: 10

It is a regulatory requirement that all foster and kinship carers' 1st Annual Reviews are presented to a fostering panel that considers their continued approval based on their first year of practice.

There were 14 new fostering and kinship carer approvals in 2024, however only 10 of these returned to panel following their first year reviews in 2024 - 2025. There has either been a delay in returning the remaining 4 to panel, they have resigned, or in the case of kinship carers they have obtained

Special Guardianship Orders. Panel recommended continued approval for the 10 carers returning to panel, all which were ratified by the ADM.

Panel members review and provide feedback on the quality of annual review reports including the recommendations made regarding foster carers' approval number, age range and ability to meet the National Minimum Standards (NMS).

Southwark has recently transitioned to using in-house Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers (FIROs). While still very early in the process the quality of reviews presented to date has been very good, with detailed minutes and clear action plans. However, Learning and Development Plans and feedback forms from children's social workers are not consistently included in annual review paperwork sent to FIROs, even though both are shared with panel. This leads to potential gaps in information about children's care and the training needs of foster carers.

Although record-keeping is discussed with carers, an action plan with timescales to ensure records are provided and support for transitioning to the online record-keeping template would be helpful.

Three Yearly Fostering Reviews

3 Yearly Fostering Reviews	2023-2024	2024-2025
Return to Panel Following Three Yearly Annual Review	19	27

Panel recommended continued approval: 27

ADM ratified recommendation: 27

While not a regulatory requirement it is considered good practice for fostering panels to have continued oversight of foster carers practice every three years. The three year review should be a more in-depth review that not only assesses the carers continued suitability to foster, but also the experience and development gained through training and practice over the three years. It provides panel with an opportunity to praise good practice and address any shortcomings, while ensuring carers are being supported by the local authority to meet the NMS.

There were 27 three yearly reviews presented to panel during 2024 - 2025, an increase of 8 cases compared with the same period the previous year. It has been positive to note the many committed and experienced carers who are not only providing warm and nurturing care for children but also advocating for them at every opportunity. It has been disappointing to note that some carers have not attended regular training and others continue to struggle to complete regular records. In these cases supervising social workers have reported a plan to address these gaps in practice.

Panel recommended the continued approval of 27 cases, which have been ratified by the ADM.

Reg 24/ 25 Kinship Extensions

Reg 24/ 25 Kinship Extensions	2023-2024	2024-2025
Kinship Carer Extension	12	20

Panel recommended 8 weeks extension: 20

ADM ratified recommendation: 20

Kinship Carer assessments must be completed and ratified within 16 weeks. However, a request for an additional 8 weeks to complete the assessment can be made to the fostering panel under Regulation 25 of the Care Planning & Placement Review (2010).

Although these requests should only be made in exceptional circumstances, they are typically made when there has been a delay in the return of a Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check or medical report due to late submissions. It is notable that there has been a 67% increase in such requests, rising from 12 in 2024 to 20 in 2025. It was hoped that involving the fostering service at an earlier stage would prevent such delays, unfortunately, this has not been the case. Applicants have not always submitted their paperwork when requested or errors have led to forms being returned for new applications to be made. There has also been instances where late allocation to an assessing social worker has led to delays.

Medical reports are also not being completed or returned by GPs until payment has been made, which has proved frustrating for all concerned.

Despite these issues, the quality of Regulation 25 reports are generally good, with clear information on carers' capacity to meet the child's basic needs and safeguard their welfare.

All recommendation were ratified by the ADM.

Change of approval

Change of approval	2023-2024	2024-2025
Change of approval	0	2

Panel recommended change of approval: 2

ADM ratified recommendation: 2

Change of approval requests are made when a carer wishes to increase, reduce or make changes to the age range of a child in their care. There were 2 such requests made during this period; the first to increase the number of children from one to two and the other to increase the age range of children from primary school aged children to adolescents.

All recommended change of approvals were ratified by the ADM.

Return to panel following Standards of Care, Allegations, and Panel Requests

Return to Panel following Standards of Care, Allegations and Panel Request	2023-2024	2024-2025
Standards of Care	9	11
Allegations	1	0
Panel Requested Return to Panel	1	2

Panel recommended continued approval following SoC: 9

Panel recommended termination of approval following SoC: 2

Panel recommended continued approval following return to panel: 2

ADM ratified recommendation: 13

There were 11 carers returned to panel following Standards of Care investigations, the same as 2023 – 2024. These included delays in notifying the local authority in good time of various incidents including a parent shouting at the carer in front of the children, an adult child living in the home without a DBS, delay in reporting a young person missing and in reporting a young person with a dangerous knife in their bedroom. All cases were thoroughly investigated and the carers were able to reflect on the concerns. As a result the LA recommended additional training, support, and closer monitoring.

Panel recommended continued approval of 9 carers presented under Standards of Care and the termination and deregistration of 2 carers. The first due to concerns about the lack of care and monitoring of an unaccompanied minor. The second, involved anonymous allegations about substance use and drug dealing. Although the investigation was ultimately found to be unsubstantiated, additional concerns involving a failure to work in partnership with the local authority led to a deregistration recommendation.

Panel had requested 2 carers return to panel as their medicals and other required checks had not been returned. The approval of both carers were later recommended.

All recommendations were ratified by the ADM.

Termination of Approval

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Termination of approval	0	8

Panel recommended termination of approval: 7

Panel recommended deferment: 1

ADM ratified recommendation: 7

Panel recommended the termination of approval of 7 carers during 2024 – 2025. These involved 7 kinship carers where children in their care had reached majority or returned to their parents' care following assessments.

Panel deferred making a recommendation concerning a LA recommended termination of approval of a third carer due to a missing report.

7 recommendations were ratified by the ADM.

Resignations

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Resignations	8	9

Panel acknowledged resignation: 9

ADM ratified recommendation: 9

Panel acknowledged 9 resignations due to retirement during this reporting period and thanked the carers for their many years of service and commitment to children.

8. Fostering Panel's role in Quality Assurance

Assessments: Panel recommendations are based on the quality of the assessments and other paperwork. Assessments should identify their strengths, any vulnerabilities, including areas for development. It should also provide a clear analysis and reason for the recommendation being made. This process also applies to Reviews for continued approval and long-term matches.

The fostering and kinship assessments during this period were generally of a good standard with detailed and relevant information. Direct feedback from children or other adults within households as well as referees helped provide a clear picture of the strengths the prospective carers would bring to their role as carers.

Feedback from children's social workers: Children's social workers have not routinely provided written feedback for foster carers' annual reviews, though have provided very good feedback for panel meetings. It is unclear why feedback is not always provided reviews as supervising social workers appear to request this information in good time. The child social worker is best placed to provide feedback on the child's needs and whether they are being met by the carer. It is therefore

important that this information be made available for the carers annual review to enable the FIRO to discuss any concerns or gaps in care with the carer. This has been raised within the department, and continues to be an area for development.

There has been a huge increase in feedback from children placed with carers as well as carers children and household members. On the few occasions where children placed have not provided feedback it has generally been as a result of their refusal to do so, however feedback is usually provided by child social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO). Indeed, panel has found it extremely helpful to receive feedback from IROs, particularly if there has been a change of social worker.

Standards of Care investigations: Standards of Care concerns are thoroughly investigated; however, there is often some delay in returning such cases to panel, which can frustrate foster carers. Although foster carers are promptly notified that a Standards of Care concern, complaint or allegation has been made, they have often complained about the delay in providing the details. This appears to be a national issue according to a '*State of the Nation's Foster Care 2021 Thematic Report 2 Allegations*' survey. There is often further delay in returning carers to panel following the investigations. Panel have requested carers should be returned within eight weeks of the outcome of the investigation or review following the investigation.

Fostering matches: Permanency matching reports are generally of good quality, outlining a child's full history and care journey. The foster carers own fostering history is also provided together with their ability to meet the child's needs to majority. It is good to see that support plans are now being provided, which is welcomed by panel.

Training: It is positive to note that a dedicated supervising social worker has been delivering workshops to support the completion of Training, Support, and Development Standards, leading to many being completed, though not always in the first year of approval.

Disappointingly there are a number of foster carers' who do not attend the required amount of training each year, despite a variety of online and face to face training courses. This is an area that will require close monitoring by supervising social workers after helping carers identify relevant courses. Personal Development Plans are also not routinely completed and when they are it is not always easy to identify whether courses were attended and any learning outcomes.

Recording: A number of Carers continue to use their own methods of recording, usually in diaries, that they share with supervising social workers during visits, or send photographs of the completed logs. While this works well for them it is not helpful and may cause issues of confidentiality.

The daily logs are there to protect both the carer and the child in mitigating against allegations. The logs are an important record of the child's time with the foster carer, a record of their lived experience, which the child may want to later refer to as a young person or adult.

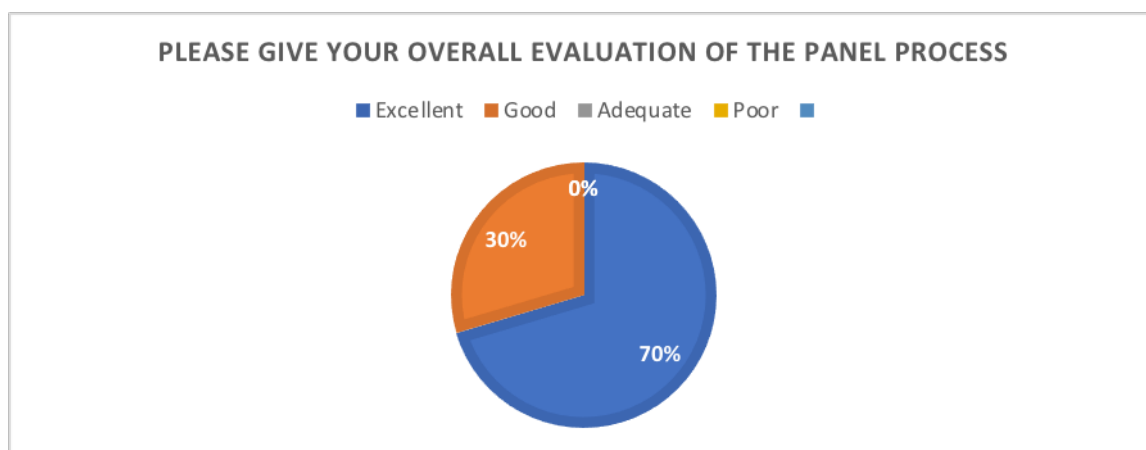
9. Quality Assurance Meetings

Quarterly Quality Assurance meetings are attended by the Agency Decision Maker, Fostering Head of Service, the Service Manager, Panel Advisor, Administrator and Panel Chair. The meeting provides the opportunity to discuss quality assurance issues including panel feedback and carers and social workers feedback on their experience attending panel. These meetings are generally very helpful and productive with follow-up action assigned and reviewed at the next meeting.

10. Foster Carers and social workers feedback on the Panel process

Response received: 27

All foster carers and social workers participating in the panel are asked to provide written feedback regarding their experiences. It is noteworthy that out of the 121 cases presented to panel, only 27 feedback forms were returned by foster carers and 9 by social workers. This is extremely disappointing, particularly when considering that out of 84 cases presented during the 2023-2024 period, 67 feedback forms were returned.



It was encouraging to note that of the 27 foster carers attending panel 19 (70%) described their overall evaluation of the panel process as '**Excellent**', and 8 (30%) described it as '**Good**'. 23 (85%) felt the panel chair managed the process **very well** while 4 (15%) felt the chair manage the process **well**.

All 27 (100%) foster carers felt they '**were treated with courtesy and respect**', '**asked appropriate questions**' and '**felt listened to**'. 23 (85%) felt the panel process was '**very well managed by the chair**' and the remaining 4 (15%) felt it was '**well managed by the chair**'.

Only 19 (70%) foster carers felt '**difference and diversity**' were '**very well managed**', while 7 (26%) felt it was '**well managed**' and 1 (4%) felt it was '**not well managed**'. Unfortunately the latter did not provide any additional information to explain this view.

Foster carers additional comments in their feedback about the panel process and suggested for changes includes:

- *I felt very relaxed. Panel chair put me very much at ease*
- *In person, more time*
- *Reduce the number of members on panel*
- *Panel were very nice, all their questions were clear and I felt confident in how to respond, it was good to have the CSW and SSW input and support.*
- *Everything is good*
- *The panel chair highlighted areas of strength, encourages me to want to carry on. I felt comfortable to state some of my weak areas and how I can make the necessary improvements.*
- *I had a very good experience not sure how that could be improved.*
- *We were not sure what to expect, the panel came across friendly, welcoming and professional.*
- *Less panel members.*
- *I was made to feel very comfortable. Very happy how it with it.*
- *They made me feel relaxed.*
- *Keep up the good work panel 👍*

While only a small sample of those attending panel provided feedback it is encouraging that the vast majority found panel a positive process and that 24 felt '**appropriately prepared**' (by their supervising social worker) and 3 felt '**somewhat prepared**'. It is clear that foster carers are being well prepared for panel and an increasing number of supervising social workers are present in their homes during the meeting. The panel chair also explains the process following introductions.

Two foster carers felt there should be fewer panel members, signalling the possibility that it may have been a somewhat overwhelming experience to see so many faces. There are 6 panel members, a panel advisor and administrator, however depending on the type of case there may also be a child social worker and their manager as well as a supervising social worker.

11. Social workers feedback on the panel process

Response received: 9

Although there were a very small number of returns 8 described the overall evaluation of the panel process as '**excellent**' and 1 as '**good**'. All 9 (100%) social workers felt they were '**treated with courtesy and respect**' and '**were listened to**'. 7 social workers felt the panel chair managed the process '**very well**' and 2 '**well**.'

8 social workers felt they were '**asked appropriate questions**' while 1 responded '**not particularly**' to this question. The social worker provided some helpful additional information to explain their answer, stating:

'Further questions could have been asked to explore the carer's motivation for fostering and their understanding of the children's needs. Additionally, their availability for fostering could have been explored in more depth.'

Panel members generally ask questions if information is unclear or there are gaps in assessments or reports. If they are satisfied with the information provided they are less likely to ask additional questions. As the social worker felt further questions could have been asked it is likely that they felt additional questions were needed, which is helpful feedback.

In the opinion of all 9 (100%) social workers their foster carers were '**treated with respect**' and 5 felt the foster carers experience of the panel process was '**excellent**' while 4 described it as '**good**'

12. Conclusion

The fostering panel continues to function well largely due to the efforts of the new panel administrator and advisor who have worked hard to ensure panel members receive quality assured paperwork within the correct timescale. Feedback from those attending panel describe panel members as welcoming and feel they are asked appropriate questions.

Panel has been pleased note the efforts made to ensure the voice of children in care is clearly presented in feedback forms, or directly during matches. Feedback from the children of foster and kinship carers, either living in, or supporting the fostering household is also routinely submitted, providing helpful information about household relationships.

The quality of reports presented to panel are of a good standard and addendums are provided to update panel if there has been a delay. It is, however, more important to ensure that carers are returned to panel within two months of annual reviews or Standards of Care meetings.

Although there have been some changes in supervising social workers during the course of the year, carers continue to report that they feel well supported by their supervising social workers.

The minutes of foster and kinship carers annual reviews have proved to be of a high standard, though more information on the reason for gaps in training and recording is needed. The panel will also need to consider action to ensure compliance in these areas, including requesting carers return to panel within 3 or 6 months.

Panel has been pleased to note the increased number of matches presented this year, together with the growing numbers of support plans. The IRO's role in ensuring the adherence to permanency planning and timescales continues to be important.

Areas for service development:

- Every effort should be made to ensure kinship carers assessments are presented to panel within the 16-week timescale, and extensions sought in exceptional circumstances only. To prevent delay the necessary paperwork for DBS and other checks should be discussed during viability assessments to ensure availability. The checks should be initiated immediately after viability assessments are signed off.
- Foster and kinship carers' medicals are required to ensure they are physically and mentally fit to foster, however some GPs will only release medicals once payment is received. As this leads to delays in the approval or continued approval of carers, it would be helpful if funding agreements could be made to prevent these delays.
- More in depth discussion should take place during annual reviews about the reasons for gaps in training and recording. Clear timescales should be set for those where there has been ongoing difficulties and a request that these carers are returned to panel if timescales are not met.
- All Personal Development Plans should be fully completed and presented with paperwork for foster carers' annual reviews.
- Although there has been an increase in foster carers Personal Development Plans presented to panel, many lack sufficient detail about courses attended and learning outcomes, therefore it is unclear how the learning has improved carers' practice.
- It is positive to note the increase in TSDS, due to the provision of additional training and support. Every effort should continue to be made to ensure they are completed within 12 months of foster carers approval and 18 months of kinship carers approvals.
- Foster and kinship carers should return to panel within eight weeks of their first annual review, which should be held within 12 months of their approval.
- Matching reports should include information on foster carers' ability to prepare a young person for independence. Any additional support that may be required to achieve this, either now or later should also be included in support plans.
- Information from children during and after they have left foster placements can provide vital information about the care received. Children's social workers are expected to provide written feedback for all foster carers' annual reviews, while a child is in placement and after they have moved. It would be helpful if a process could be put in place where children's social

workers complete a feedback form about the child's experience within a month of moving. This can be held on foster carers files and be made available for the foster carers next review.

- Foster carers currently using diaries or other methods to record information about children in their care should be supported to move to the online system within a given timescale.

Areas for Panel development:

- The panel will ensure it asks relevant questions about foster carers' ability to meet a child's cultural and identity needs unless this is evidenced in the paperwork.
- There have been fewer occasions when cases have overrun, however, on the occasions when the occurs panel administrator has ensured attendees are notified of any delay. This will continue to remain an area of development.
- Carers with a history of failing to keep appropriate records or attend training will be given an action plan and asked to return to panel within 3 or 6 months to ensure compliance.

Shirley Walker
Independent Fostering Panel Chair

29th May 2025

Appendix

Foster Carers feedback on the Panel process

Response received: 27

Please give your overall evaluation of the panel process	
Excellent	19
Good	8
Adequate	0
Poor	0
Total	27

Did you feel appropriately prepared in advance of attending panel?	
Yes	24
Somewhat	3
No	0
Did you feel you were treated with courtesy and respect by panel members?	
Yes	27
Somewhat	0
No	0
Did you feel panel members listened to your contributions?	
Yes	27
Somewhat	0
No	0

Do you consider that you were asked appropriate questions by the panel?	
Yes	27
Somewhat	0
No	0

In your experience how did the panel chair manage the process?	
Very well	23
Well	4
Not well	0
Total	27

How do you think the panel addressed issues of diversity and difference?	
Very well	19
Well	7
Not well	1
Total	27

Social workers feedback on the panel process

Response received: 9

Do you consider that you were asked appropriate questions by the Panel?

Yes	8
No	0
Not particularly	1*

**Comments: 'Further questions could have been asked to explore the carer's motivation for fostering and their understanding of the children's needs. Additionally, their availability for fostering could have been explored in more depth.'*

Did you feel you were treated with courtesy and respect by panel members?	
Yes	9
No	0
Not particularly	0
Did you feel panel members listened to your contributions?	
Yes	9
Somewhat	0
No	1

In your experience how did the panel chair manage the process?	
Very well	7
Well	2
Not well	0
Not at all	0
In your opinion, how was the experience for the foster carers?	
Excellent	5

Good	3
Adequate	0
Poor	0
N/A	1
In your opinion, do you think the foster carers were treated with respect?	
Yes	8
No	0
N/A	1
Please give your overall evaluation of the panel process	
Excellent	8
Good	1
Adequate	0
Poor	0

CORPORATE PARENTING DISTRIBUTION LIST (OPEN)**MUNICIPAL YEAR 2025-26**

NOTE: Original held by Constitutional Team; all amendments/queries to
Paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk; Beverley.olamijulo@southwark.gov.uk

Name	No of copies	Name	No of copies
Membership		Paula Thornton/Beverley Olamijulo	5
Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)	1		
Councillor Natasha Ennin	1	Total:	9
Councillor Mohammed Deen	1		
Councillor Maria Linforth-Hall	1	Dated: 14 October 2025	
Councillor Emily Hickson	1		
Councillor Charlie Smith	1		
Electronic versions (No hard copy)			
Councillor Sarah King			
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Councillor Sabina Emmanuel			
Councillor Sunil Chopra			
Councillor Bethan Roberts			
Councillor Irina Von Wiese			
Councillor Sunny Lambe			
Councillor Kath Whittam			
Co-opted members			
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Rosamond Marshall (email)			
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Alasdair Smith			
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