

## Corporate Parenting Committee

Wednesday 2 November 2022

2.00 pm

Ground floor meeting room, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

### Membership

Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)  
Councillor Naima Ali  
Councillor Rachel Bentley  
Councillor Esme Dobson  
Councillor Natasha Ennin  
Councillor Darren Merrill  
Councillor Charlie Smith (Vice-chair)

### Reserves

Councillor Portia Mwangangye  
Councillor Sunny Lambe  
Councillor Kimberly McIntosh  
Councillor Joseph Vambe  
Councillor Irina Von Wiese

### Non-voting co-opted members

Dr Mark Kerr and Rosamond Marshall

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### Contact

[paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk) or [beverley.olamijulo@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:beverley.olamijulo@southwark.gov.uk)

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Members of the committee are summoned to attend this meeting

**Althea Loderick**

Chief Executive

Date: 25 October 2022



# Corporate Parenting Committee

Wednesday 2 November 2022

2.00 pm

Ground floor meeting room, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

## Order of Business

Item No.	Title	Page No.
	<b>MOBILE PHONES</b>	
	Mobile phones should be turned off or put on silent during the course of the meeting.	
	<b>PART A - OPEN BUSINESS</b>	
1.	<b>APOLOGIES</b>	
	To receive any apologies for absence.	
2.	<b>CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS</b>	
	A representative of each political group will confirm the voting members of the committee.	
3.	<b>NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT</b>	
	In special circumstances, an item of business may be added to an agenda within five clear days of the meeting.	
4.	<b>DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</b>	
	Members to declare any interests and dispensations in respect of any item of business to be considered at this meeting.	
5.	<b>MINUTES</b>	1 - 13
	To approve as a correct record the minutes of the open section of the meeting held on 6 July 2022.	

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
<b><i>FIRST PART OF THE MEETING</i></b>		
6.	<b>FOSTERING WORKSHOP (2.00PM TO 3.00PM)</b>	-
<b><i>SECOND PART OF THE MEETING</i></b>		
7.	<b>FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22 (3.00PM TO 3.15PM)</b>	14 - 56
8.	<b>SPEAKERBOX VERBAL UPDATE (3.15PM 3.30PM)</b>	-
9.	<b>CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVER SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2023-2026 (3.30PM TO 3.50PM)</b>	To follow
10.	<b>INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22 (3.50PM TO 4.05PM)</b>	57 - 87
11.	<b>CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2022-23 (4.05PM TO 4.10PM)</b>	88 - 94
<b>ANY OTHER OPEN BUSINESS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING AND ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR AS URGENT</b>		

Date: 25 October 2022



## Corporate Parenting Committee

MINUTES of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on Wednesday 6 July 2022 at 2.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)  
Councillor Naima Ali  
Councillor Natasha Ennin  
Councillor Charlie Smith  
Councillor Irina Von Wiese

**NON-VOTING  
CO-OPTED  
MEMBERS**

Dr Mark Kerr (subject matter expert)

**OFFICER  
SUPPORT:**

Alasdair Smith, Director of Children and Families  
Andrew Fowler, Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers  
Steve Chaplin, Service Manager, Children's and Adults' Services  
Tina Francis, Team Manager Care Leaver, Children's and Adults' Services  
Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director – Safeguarding and Care  
Usha Singh, Headteacher - Looked after and Previously looked after Children, virtual school Children's and Adults' Services  
Steve Liddicott, Head of Quality Assurance and Practice Development  
Dr Jenny Taylor, Head of Clinical Service, Children's and Adults' Services  
Dechaun Malcolm, Children's Rights Officer  
Paula Thornton and Beverley Olamijulo, Constitutional Team

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Darren Merrill, Rachel Bentley and Esme Dobson.

Dr Stacy John-Legere.

**2. CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS**

The members listed as present were confirmed as the voting members for the meeting.

**3. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE 2022-23**

It was moved, seconded and

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Charlie Smith be elected as vice-chair for the Corporate Parenting Committee for the ensuing year 2022-2023.

**4. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT**

There were none.

**5. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

None were disclosed.

**6. MINUTES****RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2022 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the chair.

**7. WORKSHOP - CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORK CARE: EXTENSION TO 25**

The chair introduced the theme for the meeting. Steve Chaplin, 16+ Service

Manager, (Children's and Adults' Services) presented the item with power point slides.

### **Summary**

Steve referred to The Children and Social Care Act 2017 concerning looked after children and the seven principles, outlined below:

#### **Local offer for care leavers**

A local authority in England must publish information about:

- Services which the local authority offers for care leavers as a result of its functions under the Children Act 1989
- The other services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living.

#### **Extending personal adviser support to all care leavers to age 25**

- The Children & Social Work Act 2017 introduced a new duty on local authorities, to provide personal adviser (PA) support to all care leavers up to age 25, if they want this support.
- Under previous legislation, local authorities were required to provide care leavers with support from a PA until they reached 21. With that support continuing up to age 25 if a care leaver was engaged in education or training. However, this support was not available to care leavers aged over 21 who were not in education, training or employment.

The committee noted the corporate parenting **principles** which local authorities are required to do:

1. Act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people.
2. Encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
3. Take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
4. Help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
5. Promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.

6. Support children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
7. Prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

**Southwark's local offer for Care Leavers:**

- Their own Pathway plan
- Being heard
- Support with identity
- Support with housing
- Support with education
- Support to find employment or training
- Support with mental and physical health
- Support if in custody
- Support with relationships

Link to Southwark Careleavers information: <https://southwarkcareleavers.co.uk>

- Council tax exemption up to the age of 25
- Pre-tenancy accommodation offer
- Priority bidding for Southwark tenancies
- Southwark leisure pass

Data – nature of support requested:

- Enquiries regarding childcare – 10%
- Housing /bidding – 34%
- Payment of leaving care grant – 14%
- Support required with ID documents – 14%
- Risk of homelessness – 14%
- Council tax enquiries – 14%

Care Leaver Independence Hub:

- There is no limit to the number of times a young person can approach for support
- Short term, focused work
- Support for care leavers up to and over 25 (corporate parent for life) Pathway plan completed when required
- A reach out drop in

- Allocated to a full time personal advisor in mainstream teams if longer work is required
- Meet the team' sessions
- Support from experienced practitioners.

**Southwark's leaving care independence hub:**

- PA allocated for long term involvement
- Agreed tasks are carried out as agreed
- A pathway plan (or parts thereof) is completed if necessary
- An initial consultation takes place to discuss needs
- Young person contacts the service for support.

Tina Francis, 16+ Service Manager outlined information about the care leaver independence hub:

- A personal advisor allocated to a young person who then works with them for up to 12 weeks.
- Support includes short-term focus work / pathway plan
- The council use outside agencies and partners to reach experience workers that provide advice to young people
- A breakdown of data (1 April 2022) was provided – it showed previous involvement of young people that worked with advocates and did partnership work
- Reach out/ drop-in provision and support
- Most referrals relate to housing or support for housing
- Link to housing and issue around homelessness, or if a young person (YP) has arrears, also deal with care leavers from other local authorities.
- Noted that 10% of enquiries related to corporate children – which involved childcare options.
- The age of YP return back - was 22 years, the officer stated care leavers support should not end at 21 years.
- Reach out drop in offer – ensure that YP get a wide range of advice or specialist advice, which include weekly drop-ins - (job, training and support) also involvement of charities in the community.



- Nurse drop-in for YP to refer themselves if it relates to their health.
- Emotional well-being
- Future Men Drop in – Support and advocacy for young men/fathers
- Gym sessions available on a Friday
- Sessions come together to combat loneliness

### **Case studies:**

Name: Mary

Age: 23

Gender: Female

Reason for returning for support: Housing condition issues, rent arrears and pregnancy

Support provided included:

- Referred to specialist housing support for consultation with experienced practitioner for housing
- Provided details of discretionary rent payment scheme to assist with rent arrears
- Referred to the family nurse partnership/early help for support with pregnancy planning
- Advised re resolution procedure with housing due to concerns with property maintenance
- Referred to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) drop in for advice on claim

### **Outcome**

- Successfully accessed benefits advice
- Successfully accessed advice from early help around healthy pregnancy.
- Intervention from independence hub had escalated the housing concerns and compensation offered via the housing association.
- Was in regular contact with personal advisor to support with ongoing housing issues.

Name: Jack

Age: 23

Gender: Male

Reason for returning for support: Support required for EET advice, gym pass

Support provided included:

- Appointment made to discuss employment, education and training (EET) options
- Gym pass renewed and given to Jack
- Provided Jack with independence hub information, reach out drop in sessions, and local offer link

### **Outcome**

- Experienced practitioner for EET continues to offer open-ended support to Jack around identifying courses that could help him train as a plumber
- Renewed Jack's leisure pass to keep himself healthy.

Name: John

Age: 29

Gender: Male

Reason for returning for support: Access to records, disability, housing, finance, external agency support

Support provided included:

- Contacted information governance team and supported 'access to files' request
- Personal advisor supported John initially with reviewing his files in sensitive manner
- Signposted John to advocacy services for the blind as he suffers with his sight
- Liaised with housing association regarding a planned move
- Found Southwark bidding number to progress housing
- Referred to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) drop in to ensure he was accessing all entitlements.

Support/action:

- Contacted information governance team and supported 'access to files' request
- Personal advisor supported John initially with reviewing his files in a sensitive manner
- Signposted John to advocacy services for the blind as he suffers with his sight
- Liaised with housing association regarding a planned move
- Found Southwark bidding number to progress housing
- Referred to DWP drop in to ensure he had access to all entitlements

### **Outcome**

- Southwark (dormant) bidding number found, and John would soon be bidding for a Southwark tenancy
- PIP application processed to provide extra financial support

- A specialist worker provided to help progress support to John
- Remains in regular contact with the independence hub team.

After the presentations the following was highlighted:

- The council acknowledged concerns regarding housing for young people and were actively working on the issue
- Provide training for job interviews
- The ethnicity of young people and contact with their own families and providing extra support particularly when they have a criminal record
- The response was young people that came out of custody were allocated a personal advisor and all specialised skills were available to support them
- All the necessary data on a young person's ethnicity and background would be on the system. Arrangements would be made to ensure they were connected to their families, local community or special guardian and carer
- Dechaun Malcolm (children rights officer) advised he would show a film at a future committee about the work involved in connecting young people to their families and identifying those that had no family connection
- GP access and health – the difficulties a young person had to see a GP
- Care leaver should have extended time with GP
- Officers agreed to use appropriate wording for special/extra support given to care leavers via GP access
- Employment: Apprenticeships, training and job opportunities – officers felt more support needed to be given to care leavers, so they have an opportunity to join large organisations. The government should be releasing guidance on this, so that care leavers are shortlisted or ring fenced for jobs.
- The above issue on employment was raised at the scrutiny sub-committee responsible for employment

The committee suggested inviting Southwark's chief executive to a future corporate parenting committee meeting.

## **8. SOUTHWARK ADOPTION PERFORMANCE IN 2021 - 2022**

Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Care presented information on the Southwark Adoption Performance in 2021 – 2022.

## Summary

- During 2021-22 - 10 children were matched with adoptive families a similar number in 2020-21 and a significant increase from previous years.
- Southwark children in care with a permanence plan for adoption have progressed during 2021-22.
- Permanence is the long-term plan for how a child would be cared for which lasts throughout their childhood.
- 2021-22 four children were placed in early permanence placements and out of the nine adopted this year – three had been placed in early permanence placements.
- The connection rate with young people’s families had been successful.
- Length of court proceedings had gone up and are much longer due to the young person’s needs being complex or to match adopted children with families with a similar cultural background.
- Of the ten children that were matched at panel in 2020-21, four were white British, three have black Caribbean heritage, one has black African heritage and two are of mixed heritage.
- Issues concerning trans racial and inter racial adoption/fostering – it’s careful matching process; identified needs based on cultural /racial background.

## RESOLVED:

1. That the progress of the children with a care plan of adoption during 2021-2022 be noted.
2. That the activity of the local authority working in partnership with Adopt London South (ALS) during 2021-22 be noted.
3. That the Adopt London South Performance report for the council (Appendix 1) from April 2021 to March 2022 be noted.

## 9. ANNUAL VIRTUAL HEADTEACHER'S REPORT

Usha Singh, headteacher for Virtual School for Looked After Children presented the annual virtual headteacher's report.

### **Summary**

- The latest exam results would be released in September 2022
- Some students in Year 10 and Year 11 were disengaged with education – steps were taken to ensure all children were provided with tuition to keep them engaged
- Topics on attendance, exclusions and finding ways to reduce exclusions were highlighted
- Referred to the virtual school charter and academies with their own admissions policy
- Special Educational Needs (SEN) – provide further support to deal with challenging behaviour in schools
- Reference to persistent absentee list
- Gave an update on the virtual headteachers conference.

### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Virtual Headteacher's report for Southwark looked after children.
2. That the comments made by the committee be noted.

## **10. REPORT BACK TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE ON SEMI-INDEPENDENT LIVING**

Andrew Fowler, Head of service children in care and care leavers (sixteen plus) presented the item.

### **Summary**

- Visitors – provision to identify who they are before entering the property
- Works and accommodation cost
- Housing allocation; a young person would need to complete their own application and sort verification and proof to ensure the criteria was met
- Pets in social housing; puts young people at a disadvantage but due to cultural/religious work it would not be ideal to keep pets
- Privacy – concerns young people had about privacy; views should be taken into account.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the Corporate Parenting Committee note the contents of this report.

## 11. CARE REVIEW BRIEFING

Steve Liddicott, Head of quality assurance and practice development presented the Care Review briefing to the meeting.

A summary of the presentation highlighted the following:

- Child Protection
- Families Network
- Transforming Care
- Work force
- Focus on Children and Families

### Families Network

- Addressing the role of family group decision-making - making it a mandatory requirement, along the proposal of the family network plan.
- Special guardianship arrangements and kinship carers – provides support in those circumstances.
- Care review – does not fully address adoption with birth parents and adoptive parents; need to ensure there is always contact.
- The introduction of special guardianships.

### Transforming care

- Mainly focused on the framework, setting new care standards for children's homes, and residential care to ensure there was a simpler understanding of this.
- The creation of a new fostering and care provision. Profits made in the private sector and the creation of regional care operatives should address:
  - Price capping
  - Profit margins
  - Windfall tax
- Proposals relating to the foster campaign to recruit foster carers – did not see many carers apply through this channel.
- Foster carers – delegated authority: How many decisions are given to a child that were being looked after – principles of mocking bird scheme.
- To abolish the independent looked after children care review and replace it with

an independent advocacy.

- Many of the review cases were processed on time
- Information about the care experience – recommendations
- CPC - responsibilities should hold different departments to account
- Introduction care experience (a protected characteristic).

Introduction Social Care Framework

- National Children's Social Care Framework
- Virtual School heads should be held accountable for school attainment

Care experience

- Care leavers – more training opportunities
- Addressed bursary fee for those aged 25 years old
- Strengthening options for housing for care leavers, and to combat homelessness in this group
- Addressed mental health and physical health support for those care leavers and those leaving care
- Statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for care leavers
- Costings for care leavers and guardianship system where some would get support and others might not get the support
- Addressed the number of care leavers who lost their jobs during covid.

Dechaun Malcolm, children's rights and participation officer spoke about the following:

- Care leaver celebration in October 2022 – to celebrate all children's achievements
- Campaign running summer activities - performing and arts
- A photography workshop
- Art forms – to sell at auction, to fund raise for a Speakerbox website.

The committee agreed (as suggested by Dechaun), that Speakerbox would be included as a standard item on the agenda for all meeting.

## **12. CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE - WORKPLAN 2022 - 2023 - DRAFT**

### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the work plan for 2022-23 be noted and the following draft agenda for November 2022 corporate parenting committee as follows:

**2 November 2022***Children in care*

- Independent Review Officers (IRO) Annual report
- Sufficiency Strategy update
- Annual Fostering report 2021-22.

*Care Leavers*

Workshop theme: Fostering Caring (tbc).

**Action:**

2. To request Councillor Darren Merrill, cabinet member for Council Homes and Homelessness, to discuss his role, to the committee (particularly to the newly elected members).
3. Agreed there should be standard CPC agenda item for Speakerbox at the meetings.

The meeting ended at 4.45 pm

**CHAIR:**

**DATED:**



# Agenda Item 7

<b>Item No.</b> 7.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 2 November 2022	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Fostering Service Annual Report 2021-22	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Care	

## RECOMMENDATION

1. That the corporate parenting committee note the 2021-22 Annual Report of Southwark Fostering Service.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The purpose of the annual report 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 covers: performance and developments in the council'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.
3. The pandemic added significant pressure to the fostering service and as set out in the 2020-21 annual report this included the very tragic deaths of a foster carer and a fostering team manager due to COVID-19 in 2021. The annual report for 2021-22 outlines the activity of the fostering service over that year and while there is progress and achievements it is fair to say the service are on a recovery journey from the impact of COVID-19 on the service and the fostering community it supports. In Q1 of 2022-23 there will be a new service manager joining the fostering service and progress will at that stage be further accelerated and developed with the managers and supervising social workers in the service.

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

4. 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 2021-22 sets out the key areas for consideration.

## **Policy framework implications**

5. The Borough Plan has a commitment to a great start in life for all children and young people in the borough. This particularly has in mind those who are in care, for whom Southwark foster carers are a key part of ensuring the Borough Plan commitment is met.

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

### **Community impact statement**

6. 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. Southwark are committed throughout the sufficiency strategy to promoting local homes for Southwark children.

### **Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement**

7. 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 commitments of Southwark stands together.
8. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, lays out the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.
9. The council's approach to equality commits the council to ensuring that equality is an integral part of our day-to-day business. The council's children and families directorate involves working closely with all relevant stakeholders and partners across the sector and collectively we are committed to upholding the responsibilities towards advocating the Public Sector Equality Duty and complying with the Equalities Act 2010.
10. The PSED enables public bodies to consider the diverse needs of groups and have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Due regard is about considering the different needs of protected characteristics in relation to the three parts of the duty.
11. The Equalities Act 2010 define the following as protected characteristics; age; disability, gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual

orientation.

### Health impact statement

12. Not applicable.

### Climate change implications

13. Southwark fostering service are committed to local homes for Southwark children. More Southwark foster carers are located in or near to the borough when compared to IFA carers and residential children's homes. Supporting Southwark children to live locally will reduce travel and reduce the carbon footprint impact of supporting children living far from Southwark.

### Resource implications

14. Not applicable.

### Legal implications

15. Not applicable.

### Financial implications

16. Not applicable.

### Consultation

17. Not applicable

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Southwark's Approach to Equality	Safeguarding and Care, Children and Families Directorate, Children's and Adults' Services 4 Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Helen Woolgar 0207 525 1973
<b>Web link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/equality-and-diversity/equality-objectives">https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/equality-and-diversity/equality-objectives</a>		

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Southwark's Approach to Equality	Safeguarding and Care, Children and Families Directorate, Children's and Adults' Services 4 Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Helen Woolgar 0207 525 1973
<b>Web link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://www.southwark.gov.uk/news/2022/mar/southwark-s-progress-against-its-borough-plan">https://www.southwark.gov.uk/news/2022/mar/southwark-s-progress-against-its-borough-plan</a>		

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Annual Report – Southwark Fostering Service 2021- 2022

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Officer</b>	David Quirke-Thornton, Strategic Director of Children's and Adults' Services	
<b>Report Author</b>	Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director - Safeguarding and Care	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	17 October 2022	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Director of Law and Governance	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>		24 October 2022

# Fostering

makes an extraordinary difference

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2021/2022

# Fostering Annual Report



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## **KEY MESSAGES**

In 2021/22 the Fostering Service continued to be impacted by the Covid- 19 pandemic which had a huge impact on foster carers and staff. The service, and in particular the managers and supervising social workers, remain ambitious for children but in this year it was a time of recovery and rebuilding and so some of the ambitions from the last year are carried forward to 2022/23.

The long-term health impact of the pandemic led to increased absence in the workforce leading to greater reliance on agency staff to provide cover. A key priority for 2022/23 will be returning to the previous position where the Fostering Service is fully staffed with a permanent workforce.

Positives for the Fostering Service are that despite many challenges there has been continued good use of Southwark foster carers for Southwark children, compared to those from independent fostering agencies (IFAs). Positively data shows 21% of children are placed more than 20 miles from Southwark as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 a reduction from 23% from the same time last year. An analysis of placements made from May 2021 and October 2021 showed children placed with Southwark carers resided on average 5.6 miles from their home address, where as those children placed with an IFA carer were on average 23 miles from home. Placing children closer to the communities they were raised in often reduces social isolation and increases future life chances.

Southwark Fostering Service are members of the South London Consortium. The Consortium was formed from the former South London Adoption and Permanence Consortium. Currently there are five members - Bromley, Southwark, Lambeth, Royal Borough of Greenwich and Waltham Forest. The aim of the consortium is to share ideas and working practices so there is a joined up approach to service provision. The consortium consists of sub groups for Special Guardians and Fostering, so that discussions are specific to the distinct areas. The Consortium has offered joint training for its members, often commissioning specialist training that would be too expensive for an individual local authority to run.

### **Purpose of 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; and the service offered to those seeking to foster and those children in care who are fostered. This report details the work of Southwark Council Fostering Service from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

When a child enters care, it is one of the most important and significant changes in their life and it is crucial that the families who look after these most vulnerable children through foster care provision are the best they can be. As part of its wider agenda to create a fairer future for the most vulnerable children and families, The Council wants every child to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. For those children who cannot remain with or return safely to their birth families, good quality foster care offers the best opportunity for them to experience a warm and loving family environment while the most appropriate plans are made for their future.

The Fostering Service is a service for children in care. It is committed to supporting stable placements for children and young people where foster care is the identified plan. The service is a key element in the council's drive to place more children and young people with Southwark foster carers in or near the borough where possible. It is a fundamental part of our sufficiency strategy to develop enough in-borough placements with the range and capacity to meet the needs of Southwark's children who cannot live at home for whatever reason. Southwark Fostering Service remains the largest in inner London borough in respect of the total number of children placed with in house foster carers. In comparing with outer London boroughs only Croydon offers more local authority foster placements<sup>1</sup>.

The aim of the Fostering Service is to provide high-quality care for children and young people in safe, secure and nurturing families. We aim to develop highly skilled foster carers, supported by reflective, challenging and enabling social workers. Our overarching aim is to give children and young people the best possible childhood, to help them become valued members of society and to maximise their life opportunities.

### **The National Fostering Context**

- 57,380 children were living with foster families on 31 March 2021.
- This is 71 per cent of the 80,850 children in care looked after away from home.
- There are around 45,370 foster families in England.
- Every year thousands of new foster families are needed in England.

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1. [Ofsted annual fostering data collection - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ofsted-annual-fostering-data-collection)



## CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE IN SOUTHWARK

Data at snapshot date of 31<sup>st</sup> March

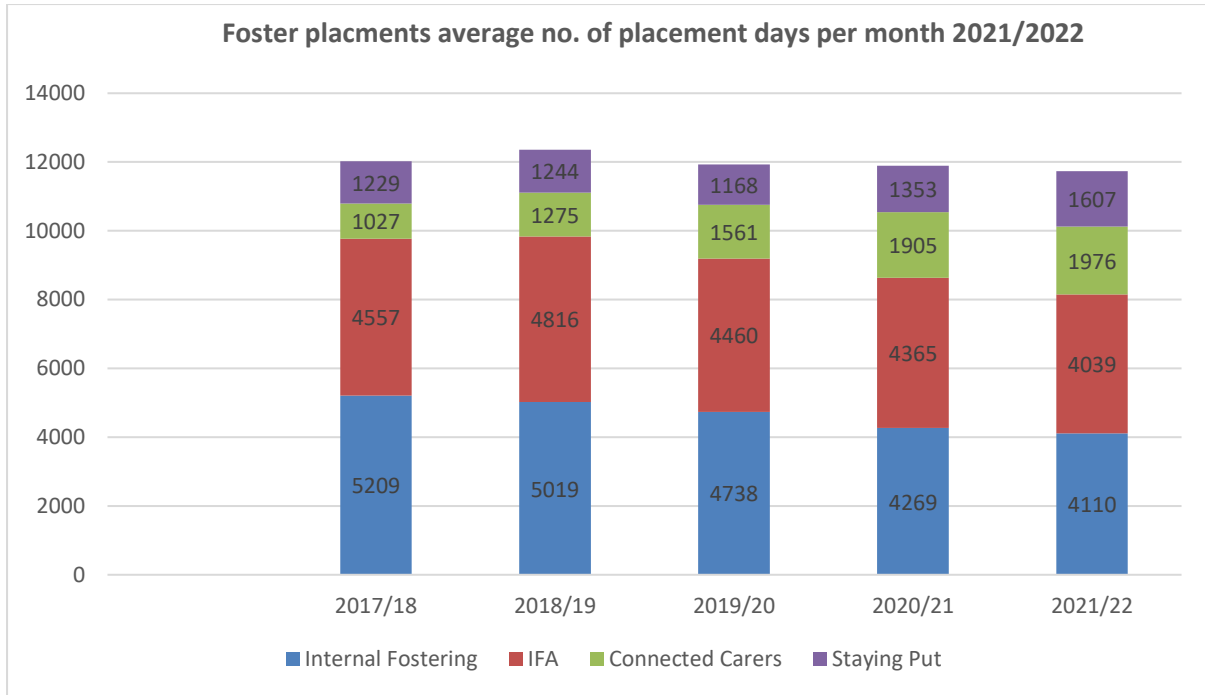
<b>Activity Overview - children</b>	<b>March 31<sup>st</sup> 2017</b>	<b>March 31<sup>st</sup> 2018</b>	<b>March 31<sup>st</sup> 2019</b>	<b>March 31<sup>st</sup> 2020</b>	<b>March 31<sup>st</sup> 2021</b>	<b>March 31<sup>st</sup> 2022</b>
<b>Children in care</b>	498	491	459	458	449	457
<b>Children in foster care</b>	381 (77%)	381 (78%)	385 (84%)	356 (78%)	343 (76%)	327 (72%)
<b>Children with Southwark registered foster carers</b>	231	204	178	156	133	135
<b>Number of Children with Connected Carers (Regulation 24 and Regulation 27 Carers.)</b>	41	39	47	57	69	65
<b>Total number of children in Southwark foster placements (Registered carers including Reg 24 and 27)</b>	272	243	225	213	199	200
<b>Children with Independent Fostering Agency carers</b>	109	138	159	144	139	127
<b>Matches for Long Term Foster Care during the year</b>	3	15	16	22	41*	19*

\*Matches 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 - 26 Matches were via Fostering Panel and 15 were via the 14 plus IRO recommendation and agreed by the ADM.

\* Matches 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 – 6 Matches were via Fostering Panel and 13 were via the 14 plus IRO recommendation and agreed by the ADM

## Use of Foster Care - Bed Nights for children

Placement Type	Average Bed nights per month 2017/2018 <i>Average numbers of children in care type monthly</i>	Average Bed nights per month 2018/2019 <i>Average numbers of children in care type monthly</i>	Average Bed nights per month 2019/2020 <i>Average numbers of children in care type monthly</i>	Average Bed nights per month 2020/2021 <i>Average numbers of children in care type monthly</i>	Average Bed nights per month 2021/2022 <i>Average numbers of children in care type monthly</i>
<b>Internal Fostering</b>	5209 <i>173</i>	5019 <i>165</i>	4738 <i>156</i>	4269 <i>141</i>	4110 <i>134</i>
<b>Connected Carers (Regulation 24 and 27)</b>	1027 <i>34</i>	1275 <i>42</i>	1561 <i>51</i>	1905 <i>62</i>	1976 <i>65</i>
<b>IFA Carers</b>	5031 <i>149</i>	4816 <i>158</i>	4460 <i>147</i>	4365 <i>144</i>	4039 <i>133</i>
<b>Staying Put</b>	1229 <i>40</i>	1244 <i>40</i>	1168 <i>38</i>	1353 <i>44</i>	1607 <i>52</i>



### Changing Age Profile

The chart below shows how the age profile of children and young people in care has changed year on year, with an increase in the number of young people aged 16 and over. The chart below shows the council has a significantly higher rate of children 16 plus entering care and this has increased as a percentage in the last year. For 2021/22 it is significant that 74% of those entering care are 10 and above and that 40% are 16 and over. The rate of children in care is now at 68 per 10,000. The rate of children entering care is significantly higher than statistical neighbour comparisons due to the influx of unaccompanied asylum seeking children following the Home Office opening three initial accommodation centres at hotels in the borough from June 2021.

	England	SNs	London	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/ 22
<b>Under 1</b>	19%	12%	12%	13%	15%	12%	8%
<b>1 to 4</b>	17%	11%	11%	13%	10%	13%	8%
<b>5 to 9</b>	16%	13%	12%	14%	10%	10%	10%
<b>10 to 15</b>	27%	31%	31%	28%	31%	28%	34%
<b>16 and over</b>	20%	33%	34%	31%	33%	37%	40%

### Ethnicity of children in foster care and ethnicity of foster carers

The table below shows the ethnicity of children in foster care, including those placed with connected carers, and the ethnicity of our foster carers. Whilst care is taken to meet the needs of children by matching them with foster carers of the same ethnicity, this is not always possible. We train foster all carers on equalities, diversity and supporting children around issues such as racism and discrimination, so they are able to effectively support and care for children who are of a different ethnicity.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Foster Carers at March 2021</b>	<b>Foster Carers at March 2022</b>	<b>Children with Southwark Foster Carers at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021</b>	<b>Children with Southwark Foster Carers at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022</b>
Any Other Ethnicity	3	4	8	16
Asian Bangladeshi	5	7	0	2
Asian Indian	0	0	1	1
Asian Other	1	2	10	6
Asian Pakistani	1	2	2	1
Black African	52	57	48	48
Black Caribbean	87	89	30	23
Black Other	7	7	15	18
Chinese	0	0	1	0
Mixed Other	2	7	25	23
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	3	3	15	12
Mixed White & Black African	2	2	4	4
Mixed White & Asian	0	0	3	1
White British	78	84	35	35
White Irish	6	6	0	0
White Other	9	12	4	9
Unknown/Not Stated	0	1	0	0

## **FOSTER CARERS**

Overall there is gradual trend of a reducing number of children from the local population needing to be in care. The number of children placed with Southwark foster carers has been variable this year and changes on a daily basis. The analysis of bed night's shows that a parallel trend of reducing numbers of children with Southwark foster carers and an even greater reduction in the number of children in IFA placements. The key reasons for this appear to be: a reduction in the number of children from the local population entering care; a consistent and sustained increase in children being placed with friends and family foster carers; and also the increasing age profile of children entering care. This last factor means more children 16 plus are entering care and foster carers are struggling to feel they can offer the placements needed and meet the needs of these children.

### **Placements and stability**

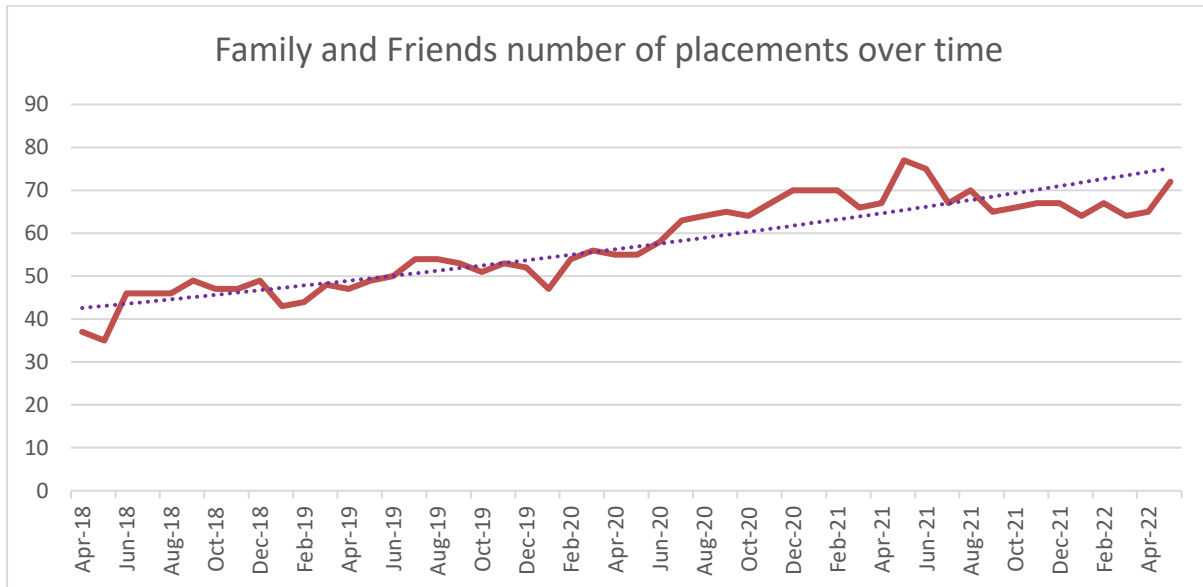
The Access to Resources Team (ART) works closely with the Fostering Service and continues to strive to unify and strengthen the placement finding process, increasing the shared focus on improving placement stability and getting the right placement for children as soon as possible. The joint collaboration and decision making between ART and fostering colleagues improves placement stability primarily by getting the best possible matched placement for each child while in parallel seeking to maximise use of our own internal fostering provision where the placement choice is right for the child. The sufficiency of placements for all types across London and nationally is very challenging. For some children requiring residential care where this could not be found Southwark foster carers have provide interim respite support with assistance from support workers to support children in care with very complex needs.

Long-term placement stability rose significantly during 2020/21 and has sustained during 2021/22 and was at 76% as at this 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. This measures children who have been in care at least 2.5 years who have been living in their current placement for at least 2 years. Short-term stability measures children looked after with 3 or more placements for 2020/21 this was 10 % and positively by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 this had reduced to 8.5%.

Finding placements for teenagers with challenging behaviour, gang affiliation, those at risk of child exploitation and those at risk of or stepping down from residential care remains the most significant challenge to placement sufficiency. The Fostering Service continues to work closely with the Access to Resources Team and Clinical Service to develop more and better quality placement choice. In 2021/22 the Clinical Service continued to attend placement stability meetings, and consulted with foster carers about strategies to better support the children in their care and provided some intensive support including out of hours to placements.

## Connected (sometimes called Friends and Family) Foster Carers

Analysis of the use of shows Southwark's Fostering Service has maintained its strong performance but the balance of support has shifted towards friends and family foster care. The number of children in care placed with family compared to the overall care population rose from 7 % to 15 % over the last 3 years. The number of friends and family carers varies weekly but as a proportion of children in care the proportion has broadly doubled over the last 3 years.



The Special Guardianship and Connected Persons team has a focus on assessing and supporting Special Guardians, as well as assessing friends and family foster carers and presenting them to fostering panel to consider recommending their approval as foster carers. Wherever possible - when the children cannot be rehabilitated to the care of their parents and where there is a positive assessment - the local authority would support them applying for a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) to secure permanence for the child/ children outside of the public care system. There were 116 referrals received in the team by March 31<sup>st</sup> 2021, with 97 assessments started and 19 withdrawals before the assessments began. There were 20 Special Guardianship Orders granted in Care Proceedings, enabling those children to leave care.

## Recruitment of foster carers

Activity Overview	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
Foster Carers (general) recommended by panel for approval by Agency Decision Maker (ADM)	8 *14 ADM decisions were made due to delays in 2020/21	15 <i>*only 8 of the 15 had an ADM decision in 2020/2021 due to delays with medicals.</i>	10	12	12
Foster carers ceased approval*	57	44	36	21	16
Connected carers approved by Panel (Regulation 27)	16	21	12	9	5
Family Link carers approved	1	1	1	3	3

*\*The number ceasing approval includes friends and family carers who may care for a short period before children return to parents or may cease as foster carers when they become SGO Carers. It includes retirement, deregistration via panel, foster to adopt carers who go on to adopt children.*

Year	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
<b>Total enquiries</b>	113	173	201	123
<b>Assessments to Panel</b>	8	15	10	12
<b>ADM made</b>	12	10	8	14

In 2021/22 the number of non-friends and family foster carers presented at panel and recommended by the panel for approval was 8 and this was a reduction from 15 the previous year. Delays with medicals being reviewed by the Agency Medical Advisor which caused a delay in some approval decisions being made in 2020/21 so 6 carers approved at panel in 2020/21 were approved by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) in 2021/22. One carer presented in 2020/21 withdrew as they decided during the Covid pandemic to leave the UK.

The Recruitment team advertise ZOOM recruitment events on the council website where prospective carers can hear more about from council staff and most critically hear directly from an experienced Southwark foster carer. The team have also attended community events to promote fostering for the council. It is recognised that new publicity materials are needed in 2022/2023 and a greater investment in both physical in borough advertising and having a modern approach to maximise online advertising and use of social media. The recruitment strategy has been refreshed and will be a key priority in 2022/23.

### **Retention of Foster Carers**

The retention of foster carers is critical to the functioning of the Fostering Service. The Fostering Network reported in 2017 that on average a service will lose 10% of carers annually through, retirement, adopting, changing career and de-registration.

The Fostering Service recognise the importance of support in retaining carers, based on a combination of regular social work support, increased support packages considered for those placements that are complex and may require extra provision, professional packages of relevant training, opportunities for contact with other carers and adequate remuneration.

The Fostering Service responds promptly and efficiently to issues and concerns raised by foster carers. Communication includes newsletters and e-mails and phone calls about community events and opportunities. Fostering supervising social workers visit carers monthly to support carers in their role, assessing the support needed prior to each new placement which contributes to increasing carers' confidence and capabilities in taking children with high needs. There is a monthly support group and coffee morning which varies between face-to-face and virtual, with regular attendance from staff in the Fostering Service as well as foster carers. The support group often have guests on topics such as Welfare Benefits and new initiatives for children in care. At the carers request every 3 months there continues to be a therapist available to offer therapeutic massages to carers to help them relax. During this year due to covid restrictions the coffee morning adapted and became a Zoom meeting.

### **Matches for Long Term Foster Care**

The Fostering Service has continued to work closely with the Safeguarding and Care Services to ensure that children in long-term placements have their placement formally matched at the Fostering Panel. Attending panel is a day of celebration for children and carers, and we have introduced a matching certificate and send out letters tailored to children. For children aged 14 and over, the decision for long-term fostering may be recommended outside of the Fostering Panel by the IRO at a child's Looked after Review and then referred for a decision by the Agency Decision Maker. This enables



independent scrutiny to ensure the match is the best possible for the child and to provide optimum support. In 2018/19 the number of children matched was 16; In 2019/2020 the number increased to 22 children matched at panel; in 2020/21 there were 26 approved at panel and 15 via the 14 plus matching process and agreed by the Agency Decision Maker. In 2021/22 a further 19 matches were made. The reduction was impacted by the previous 2 years addressing historic delays, an increase in connected carers where matching happens at the same time as approval and some delays due to high staff sickness in care and fostering in 2021/22 which is actively being addressed in permanence planning and tracking panels.

## **TRAINING AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

The Recruitment Team lead on the Skills to Foster initial training for Fostering. The Fostering Team Managers attend on the final day to answer any questions and provide a welcome to the service. The three day course consistently receives excellent feedback, and our inclusion of current foster carers 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 training provides bi- monthly post approval training to support new foster carers completing their Training and Development Standards portfolios. This support is striving to improve compliance and meet its targets and responsibilities in this area. Reflective Group supervision sessions are held by invitation to enable foster carers to discuss a theme and learn from each other, with Supervising Social Worker facilitating.

The Fostering service have contributed to focus groups around the development of residential provision in Southwark, and are committed to work closely as this develops. This close working is as both have the shared 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. Previous work to develop a more intensive fostering hub with the Clinical Service stalled in 2021/22 due to changes in the leadership team and completing priorities but there are plans to resume this work in Q3 of 2022/23.

We have also run training on: Appropriate Adult Roles and Responsibilities, Caring for Unaccompanied Minors, Restorative Practice, Transitions, and Transracial placements, alongside our existing courses.

During Covid periods training adapted to being delivered virtually. This provided some benefits in terms of greater accessibility to foster carers. The Service have decided based on foster carer feedback to continue a hybrid training programme where some training is virtual and some is face to face. The move to more face to face training has been happening incrementally.

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. In order to provide the children and young people with the opportunity to experience safe, caring family life we have continued to embed the Secure Base Model for therapeutic parenting and Empathic Behavioural Management (EBM) across the service. Secure Base as a concept underpins all in-house training, therefore reaching all the carers that attend training. As a Fostering Service we deliver the Secure Base Model to all ASYE social workers and have provided training across Children's Services for our more experienced colleagues and managers.

We aim to encourage new and experienced carers to continue to develop their skills and knowledge. As we move towards a greater understanding of how trauma impacts on a child's development and can continue to do so over the course of their lives, we are challenged to anticipate difficulties and strive to understand better the internal world of the child.

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.

Our training programme continues to assist foster carers in developing the understanding and recognition of trauma informed practice. From Skills to Foster, EBM, Secure Base, Caring for Unaccompanied Minors and Challenging Placements, we are able to provide a direct link to the body's and individual's need to recognise the effects of early childhood trauma.

We have continued to develop links with differing sections of the service which has seen training run by our LADO and a team manager, providing a valuable addition to carers understanding of both process and standards required of them by Southwark. The Training and Development Coordinator provide post-approval training for carers on a bi-monthly basis to ensure they are able to submit their Training and Development Standards portfolios.

#### **Shared training through the South London Consortium**

We continue to be an active member of the South London Partnership consortium. Agreement has been reached with regards to sharing of spaces on Skills to Foster courses, and we continue to advise and share good practice on the development of Level 3 foster carers.

Southwark has initiated work with Brook Advisory service to provide Traffic Light Training across the consortium during 2022.

## TAYING PUTUPPORT FOR FOSTER CARERS

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

Support for foster carers encompasses the following:

- Allocation and support of a dedicated supervising social worker during the working week and access to dedicated out-of-hours support 7 days a week.
- Foster carer induction for all newly approved households.
- A comprehensive post approval training programme that incorporates the therapeutic care giving model. The aim of this approach is to help foster carers feel confident and equip them with the right skills and techniques to help children experience safe and secure care.
- A more advanced approach to caring – Empathic Behaviour Management training and ongoing workshops to enable carers to improve their therapeutic parenting skills.
- Training pathway for foster carers to enhance professional development and quality of placements linked to a clear payment approach.
- Therapeutic intervention and support from a lead clinician, medical advisor, education, and Carelink service to support children in placements and the fostering household.
- Regular foster carer support groups accessible for all foster caring households run by the Fostering Service.
- Regular communication and information sharing is maintained via emails, quarterly fostering newsletters and coffee mornings.
- A Foster Carer run support group has also been set up and continues to meet and offer peer support to all foster carers.
- An annual foster carers ball is held to thank carers for their commitment to improving the lives of looked after children and young people in Southwark. This has not happened in the Covid period but a Winter Ball is planned for the winter of 2022.

- Membership of The Fostering Network for all Southwark foster carers, which offer independent advice and support with allegations.
- A Wellness programme that includes yoga classes, Zumba, meditation and mindfulness, and the opportunity to get access to Southwark leisure centers for free.
- Virtual supervisory visits remained in place and the frequency of visits was increased. The teams also offered face-to-face visits at times of crisis and/or when this was requested.
- Information disseminated from LAC health team in regards to COVID-19
- Zoom Zumba and Zoom Yoga

## **STAYING PUT**

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 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and potentially up to the age of 21 years if they are in education. 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.

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 there were 56 young people in staying put arrangements, this is an increase from 45 on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. Supporting Staying Put arrangements is a key part of offering a secure base to young people so they are able to benefit from continued full family membership; a key aspect of this is being able to remain in a family setting until they are ready for independence.. The analysis of bed nights shows young people stayed put more in 2021/22 than in any previous year and it is thought this is due a real focus on achieving permanence and stability in foster care.

The Staying Put guidance and the Staying Put policy is has been updated, with input from foster carers, young people and staff from the Care Leavers and Fostering Service. The renewed policy and guidance was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021. The new policy offers 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.

## **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 audit programme in 2021/22 remained focused on monthly audits of children's case files undertaken by team managers and service managers. This activity is coordinated by a central audit team, who also ensure that a selection of audits are moderated to enable consistency and quality.

In 2022/2023 Fostering Managers will focus on auditing fostering files and work as opposed to monthly participation in the audits of children's files.

Other quality assurance activities have included conducting themed audits, a focus on improving staff performance, Mosaic improvement, the facilitation of focus groups with staff and carers.

## **FOSTERING PANEL**

Fostering Services Regulations (2011) and National Minimum Standards (2011) require a Fostering Panel to be constituted, chaired by an independent person. Panel members include representatives from Children's Social Care and independent members with a range of experience. The panel makes recommendations about the approval of foster carers, matches of children for long-term foster care and in certain circumstances reviewing the approval of foster carer. Final decisions, based on the panel's recommendations, are made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADMs), Assistant Director Safeguarding and Care and the Director for Children and Families.

A report detailing the activity of the Fostering Panel is included as Appendix 1.

## **Complaints**

The Fostering Service reviews complaints received from foster carers, and uses the learning from these to inform service improvement on what we need to do better. In 2019/20 there were four complaints relating to fostering. In 2020/21 there were 10 complaints made about the Fostering and SGO Service. In 2021/22 there were 8 complaints made about the Fostering and SGO Service.

The learning from complaints, as agreed with the complaints team, is always shared with the fostering teams and the managers are encouraged to use this as a discussion

in group supervision. Learning from complaints is shared with senior management in a quarterly and annual report to embed learning across Children and Families.



## REVIEW OF FOSTERING SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021/2022

This section reviews the commitments to improvement within the service stated in the Annual Report 2020/21 and reflects on the progress made during 2021/22. The Service Priorities from 2021/22 will continue into 2022/23 as all remain relevant. A new Service Manager is due to join the Fostering Service in Q1 of 2022/23 and will have the lead role in developing and driving the plan together with the team managers and supervising social workers and foster carers in the Service.

### Service Priorities:

1. Ensure that the voice of **children, families and carers is heard**, so that their views shape and improve our services and all parts of the service are on a continuous learning journey.

**Bright Spots Survey** (Jan-April 2020) an in-depth study of subjective wellbeing of Southwark children in care reported: 100% of children aged 8-11yrs; and 98% of young people (11-18yrs) trusted their carers. All children 4-7 years old trusted their carers.

Undertake a peer and management review on the quality of Annual Reviews for foster carers (including the contribution of foster carers to their own review)

*This work has begun in 2021/22 but needs to be consolidated and changes made in 2022/23.*

Exit interviews to be introduced for all foster carers upon resignation.

*Exit interviews have been undertaken and in one instance led to a carer seeking to change their mind, requiring an updated assessment and return to panel. Further work is needed so the exit interviews are systematically undertaken and the learning from these is analysed by the Fostering Service Manager to inform service improvement.*

Undertake regular feedback questionnaires with foster carers to ensure continuous improvement.

*This did not happen in 2021/22 but has been undertaken Q2 of 2022/23.*

Foster carers to support the young people in their care to participate in Speakerbox (Children in Care Council) activities and campaigns.

*Foster carers continue to encourage children in their care to participate in the fantastic activities offered by Speakerbox. These activities are also advertised in the monthly magazine to all foster carers.*

2. Maintain and further develop a **stable and high-quality workforce across the Permanence Service.**

Ensure all staff receive regular one-to-one management support, have a work plan, a learning and development plan and have an annual appraisal.

*This work has started but instability and staff absence has met this is not fully embedded for every staff member. This will continue in 2022/23.*

Give all social workers the opportunity to attend fortnightly group supervision sessions led by the team manager.

*Feedback from the workforce supports the benefits of group supervision and how highly this support is valued by Practitioners.*

Implement the new supervision policy to ensure 1-1 and group supervision promotes self-reflection, staff development and improved outcomes for children and young people.

*The new policy is embedded.*

A skills audit of all staff in fostering is to be completed by December 2021.

*The skills audit was completed and is informing the development of the Fostering Service in 2022/23.*

3. Improve **placement stability of children in the Care Service** both short and long term

**Long term placement stability** (high is good) is at 76% in the DfE 901 provisional data return for 2021/2022 compared to national and comparator averages of 70% and 72% respectively. This is an improvement from the 2020/2021 figure of 71%.

*The number of children with **3 or more placements** (low is good) is at 8.5% (2021/22 DfE 901) down from 10% in 2020/21. In line with national and comparator averages of 9%*

Foster carers to have access to specialist training, which will equip them to meet the demands of children who have complex needs. Strengthen foster carers knowledge base to improve their resilience.

*The Fostering Service continue to offer a responsive high quality training offer with a lead team manager and dedicated Senior Social Worker.*

Development of Fostering Therapeutic Hub.

*This was not achieved in 2021/22. This will be continued in 2022/23.*

Ensure that children attend all required health appointments (health, assessment, dental, optical and immunisation appointments) by working closely with the designated doctor.

*This continues to be closely monitored, areas needing ongoing approvals are dental checks post pandemic and ensuring Initial Health Assessments are done as quickly as possible.*

4. Improve **permanence outcomes and practice**, particularly through long-term foster care, placements with friends and families and life story work

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.

Continue to develop the Permanency Planning Policy and adhere to the Long-term Fostering Policy, ensuring that children are tracked through permanency tracking panel.

Collaborative working with ART, Care and the dedicated Family finder.

*An area of improvement for 2022/23 will be to ensure permanence tracking includes tracking life story work and to ensure even more robust challenge on ensuring all children achieve permanence in the timescale that is right for them.*

5. Improve **placement choice and sufficiency** as set out in the Sufficiency Strategy and to reduce the percentage of children looked after who are living **20 miles or more from the borough**

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 by The Fostering Network.

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.

*The data shows 21% of children were living 20 miles or more from Southwark as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 and improvement from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.*

*In March 2021 there were 36 children (excluding those in All Age Disability) in residential care and as at the 31<sup>st</sup> March there were 33 children in residential care.*

6. Continue to embed **the Secure Base model of therapeutic caregiving** across children's services

Evaluate the implementation of the Secure Base model by measuring the impact on children, YP and foster carers

Foster carers to continue to be involved in the Secure Base training of social workers across children's social care.

*This will continue throughout 2022/2023.*

7. Develop high quality support for **connected (Kinship) carers and SGO carers.**

Continue to develop SG team in their remit of assessing and supporting SGO Carers and friends and family carers

Ensure there are a robust quality assurance mechanism in place for all special guardian and connected person (Kinship) fostering assessments.

Ensure Safeguarding and Connected Persons teams are supported to work more closely together in respect of Regulation 24 assessments.

*This work began with joint work on viability assessments in 2021/22. Due to a high number of staffing changes in the Connected Person's Team including a change of Team Manager further work is needed to develop in 2022/23.*

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.

*There continues to be too many assessments where the 8 week extension is sought. Further work is needed in 2022/2023 to track and ensure checks are done early and assessments are completed and presented to panel within 16 weeks.*

Ongoing work with Kinship to develop greater support networks for all kinship carers local to carers and organized and run by carers.

*This continued throughout 2021/22 providing dedicated support work to kinship carers.*

8. Develop a **responsive and professional Foster Carer cohort** in Southwark

Develop the Fostering Therapeutic hub to ensure the Level 2 and 3 carers have the support and training they need in order to take challenging placements, and understand our expectations of what a specialist carer is.

*This work needs to continue in 2022/23.*

Develop a clear framework for foster carers that details what they need to do in order to progress from Level 2 to Level 3

*This framework is set out in the Payments to Carers Policy.*

Foster carers to return to panel every three years to ensure they continue to provide good care for Southwark children who are looked after.

*This has happened for a small number of carers and been seen as really helpful. Much greater management oversight is needed to ensure that first reviews and returning to panel every 3 years is embedded and consistently happening.*

Ensure carers complete their Training Support and Development standards (TSDs)

*Oversight from Panel shows a high proportion of carers are not completing their Training Support and Development standards in the required timescale of 12 or 18 months. The Service are addressing with sessions led by a Senior Social Worker and the training lead to support completion. An audit is being undertaken by Q3 of 2022/23 to ensure all foster carers have a plan in place to complete their TSDs and understand the reasons for delays and proactively address these going forward.*

## **Appendix 1**

### **Southwark Fostering Panel Annual Report**

**April 2021 – March 2022**

#### **Introduction**

Southwark's Fostering Panel functions under Regulations 25 of the Fostering Service Regulations (England) 2011. This report covers the year from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022, providing details of the Fostering Panel activity and range of assessments on which Panel were asked to make a recommendation over the twelve month period. The Fostering Panel provides a quality assurance role concerning practice and the quality of reports presented to panel. It has the ability to challenge practice that falls short of the National Minimum Standards (NMS) or is not in the interest of children.

#### **The Panel**

Following the successful implementation of virtual panels introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Panels have continued to be held virtually and are likely to be so for the foreseeable future. Occasional connection problems continue to lead to delays when applicants are joining but the undoubted logistical and cost savings benefits are clear. There is a noted reduction in anxiety for the majority of applicants able to join from their homes, as well as greater flexibility for Panel Members and Social Workers who are able to access the meeting from their home, or office in a more convenient and time efficient way. As Supervising Social Workers are regular visitors to Foster Carers homes, a few have chosen to join Panel from the Foster Carers homes to help with connection and support their Foster Carers during the Panel process.

The concerns about reduced opportunities for social interaction between Panel Members have lessened over time as they have become used to meeting virtually. Panel Members have taken the opportunity to have informal discussions before Panel begins and in between cases. A brief period for discussion and reflection is now built into the end of the agenda.

Panel Members remain diligent in their task of holding Southwark children in mind when considering the suitability of those wishing to care for them as unrelated foster or Kinship Carers.

#### **Panel meetings and membership**

Fostering Panels are held twice a month, on the first and third Wednesday of the month with the possibility of adding or cancelling Panels if required. Panel Members are

notified of their Panel dates well in advance so any changes can be made well before Panel dates. There were 21 Panels held over the reporting period out of a potential 24, as there were 3 occasions when no meetings were held.

Panel lost 5 members from the central list during this reporting period. Four resigned as one moved abroad, while another accepted a post in the Southwark's Fostering Service. One of the two agency LAC specialist nurses retired and her colleague took up a new post in another local authority. We also lost one of our newer independent members who sadly died.

Two new Panel Members were recruited during November and at the time of writing a further 5 new Panel Members have been recruited, ensuring the level of diversity, skills and knowledge is maintained.

While Panel has always maintained quoracy, there have been times where it has been a challenge due to difficulties securing Agency Social Work representation for the central list because of their workload. Those already on the central list are only able to commit to a few Panels each year. While Supervising Social Workers have often been willing to sit on Panel, conflict of interest can arise due to their involvement with Foster Carers, thereby limiting their ability to sit when needed. It was necessary for the Panel Advisor to act as the Agency Social Worker representative on two occasions to prevent cancellation of the Panel and placements becoming unregulated.

### **Fostering Panel Central List**

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 require the agency to maintain a "central list" of Panel Members with a range of relevant skills, knowledge and experience, from which the membership of any Panel meeting can be drawn. The quorum for Panel is a minimum of 5 central list members, however 6 members sit on each Panel to ensure Panels remain quorate if a Panel Member cannot attend on the day.

There are currently 14 Panel Members on the central list, which will increase to 19, following recent appointments of 2 Care Experienced, 2 Agency Social Workers and 1 independent Social Worker. Southwark has worked hard to ensure its Panel remains as diverse as possible to reflect that of the wider community.

### **Panel Advisor**

This reviewing period has seen the loss of the temporary Panel Advisor, who accepted a permanent post elsewhere and the welcoming in of another. Panel Members greatly appreciate the substantial knowledge and experience of fostering practice a Panel Advisor can provide. More importantly, however is their quality assurance role in gatekeeping reports to ensure they are fit for purpose and referring those with gaps or queries back to the authors for correction.

## **Panel Administrator**

The Panel Administrator is responsible for the effective functioning of the Panel. Her role include planning Panel dates throughout the year, managing the agenda (in distributing the Panel papers on Egress secure platform a week before Panel, liaising with applicants before Panel day to ensure they are able to log onto the virtual platform, managing the virtual waiting room, minuting the meetings and distributing the minutes for approval. The administrator also keeps the central list records and collects data relating to Panel activity. She is always available to Panel Members to troubleshoot any issues they may have. The fact that Panel functions as efficiently as it does, particularly since becoming a virtual Panel is due to the Panel Administrator.

## **Panel Members Appraisals**

Panel appraisals were completed for all Panel Members in December 2021 and January 2022. Panel Members have all remained positive about their roles and despite only meeting during virtual Panels felt that they were a part of a committed and diverse group that worked well together in the best interest of the children. They all felt listened to, not only by Panel Members but those attending Panel and a new Panel Member stated that they felt very welcomed by existing Panel Members. Panel Members have continued to struggle with Kinship cases (more below) and enjoy matching Panels, and welcomed the opportunity to meet with more children and young people through the virtual platform, though fewer matching cases have been presented.

## **Panel training**

Panel Members were invited to attend a workshop on recruiting and assessing Foster Carers to help inform their understanding of the assessment process. New Panel Members were also provided with an induction on the current legislative framework, research and Case Law. They also attend two Panel observations before sitting on Panel. Learning material in the form of articles is shared with, and between Panel Members as part of their ongoing development.

## **Panel activity throughout the year**

The Fostering Panel met on 21 occasions out of the 23 expected, between April 2021 and March 2022. There were 3 cancelled Panels due to insufficient paperwork within the required timescale or withdrawn. An additional Panel was held to hear a Kinship Carer assessment and Reg. 25 extension request to prevent the placements becoming unregulated.



The tables below provide data on Panel activity for the review year. Where available, data on activity in the previous year is included to allow some comparison.

<b>2021-2022</b>	
<b>Type and number of cases presented</b>	
General Fostering Household approvals	8
Kinship Carers approvals	16
Family Link approvals	1
Return to Panel following 1 <sup>st</sup> Year Annual Reviews	6
Return to Panel following 3 year Review	2
Regulation 25 Extension	12
Deregistration	0
Matches	5
Review following Standards of Care	3

Total number of cases presented: 53

### **Fostering approvals**

<b>Fostering Approvals</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
General Fostering Households	8	15*
Kinship Carers Households	11	20
Family Link Short Break Carers	1	1

There has been an almost 50% reduction in the number of assessments presented to Panel during this period when compared with 2020/21. It is likely that recruitment and a number of assessments were already underway during the 2020/21, when Covid-19 led to periods of lockdown. The reduction in assessments during 2021/22 may therefore be due to limited interest linked to the pandemic, difficulties holding recruitment sessions and continued delay and backlog of checks and medicals preventing their presentation at Panel.

Although 15\* households were presented to panel in 2020/21 due to delays with medical reports required by the ADM to ratify the recommendations 6 of these were approved and ratified by the ADM in 2021/22 and 1 household left the UK in the Covid period and withdrew from seeking to foster so was not ratified. The ADM ratified the 8 recommendations made by the Fostering Panel involving General Fostering Households in 2021/2022, one of the recommendations was not to approve the carer which was ratified by the ADM. Six out of the eight households presented to panel in 2021/2022 live in Southwark which means more children can remain in borough.

In relation to the 16 Kinship Care cases heard 4 were deferred due to insufficient information including Medical Advisor reports. This raised the possibility that some would become unregulated as a result. An issue that has presented a number of local authorities with difficulties due to the continued pressure on medical staff. 12 cases were recommended for approval and 11 were ratified by the ADM. Kinship Carers remain the highest number of assessments completed during this period.

The majority of Kinship Carers are dual purpose and only presented to Panel to ensure placements remain regulated while awaiting Court dates for SGO hearings. These hearings are rarely completed within 24 weeks allowed for the Kinship Care assessment. The majority of these assessments presented to Panel made no reference to the applicant's suitability to foster. If an SGO is not granted it would be helpful to know whether they are able to work with the local authority, attend training and provide reports.

Credit must be given to the assessors as these remain the most challenging assessments for both assessor and carer. Carers are often suspicious and reluctant to provide personal information about pre-existing and often complex family relationships during assessments. Panel has also struggled with recommending some carers due to health, age and accommodation leading to uncertainty about their ability to care for a child to majority. A number of these carers will choose to become Special Guardians, even though they may need ongoing support. The 2021 Kinship Survey found that 62% of the 1,651 carers caring for 2,538 children, believe that their children have long-term physical and mental health needs. It also found that 70% of those carers do not receive the support they feel they need from their local authorities. Panel has remained reassured by Southwark's Special Guardians team's feedback during Panel about continued advice, support and training available for all Kinship Carers who have become Special Guardians.

This is the second year where only one Family Link carer has been assessed and approved to provide short break care for a child with a disability. This is a much needed respite service for families with children with disabilities, as can help prevent family breakdown and children coming into care. Panel is therefore keen to see an increase in such assessments.

### **Fostering Matches**

<b>Fostering Matches 2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	
Total number of children matched with permanent Foster Carers	6	26
Children matched with Southwark Foster Carers	3	8
Children matched with Independent Fostering Agency Foster Carers	3	18

Total number of children matched as part of a sibling group	2	11
Children matched as part of a sibling group with Southwark Foster Carers	2	4
Children matched as part of a sibling group with Independent Fostering Agency Foster Carers	0	7
Total Number of fostering households	5	20
Number of Southwark fostering households	2	6
Number of Independent Fostering Agency households	3	14

There were only 6 children matched via panel, 1 of whom was part of a sibling group in 5 fostering households. All of the children were already living within general fostering households.

2020/21 saw a significant increase in the number of children matched to address historic delays in the process for some children. The decrease in numbers of children matched during this period is understood to be due to staff absences and time off work with Covid-19 and other health issues that have had a significant impact on the Care Service.

It is however positive to note that there has been a gradual increase in the number of children achieving permanency through placements with Connected Carers. Older children, aged 14 and over are also matched during their Statutory Reviews where reports are presented directly to the Agency Decision Maker for ratification.

The child's voice is actively encouraged and Panel is always pleased to hear or read the direct feedback about the match from children in matching households, including those of carers own children. As previously stated children regularly attended panels with their carers, however it has been noted that fewer have attended despite it being easier to attend virtual panels.

### **Fostering households 1<sup>st</sup> Year Reviews**

<b>Fostering 1<sup>st</sup> Year Reviews</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
General fostering households	5	6
Kinship Carers households	1	6
Family Link short break carers	1	2

It is a regulatory requirement that all Foster Carers 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Reviews are presented to Panel for consideration of their continued approval, following their first year of practice. Panel Members take note and comment on the Independent Reviews and recommendations made outlining the foster carer's approval number, age range and ability to meet the NMS.

A number of children's Social Workers contribute to Foster Carers reviews, although this is still not universal and should be as it is key to Fostering reviewing Officers (FIRO) assessment of the Foster Carers ability to meet the needs of that child.

Southwark commissions an independent agency to conduct its Foster Carers Annual Reviews. This provides an additional level of independent scrutiny of Foster Carers practice and the local authority's monitoring and support role. Overall Panel have rated the quality of the Annual Review reports as 'Good' with full reports outlining details of the discussion held, whether Foster Carers meet the NMS and provide a clear action plan and recommendation. An example of Panel feedback can be seen below:

*'The ARA was very thorough, fair but sensitive. Did not shy away from addressing issues. Covered the issue of housing and corporate parenting, the differences between domestic violence and domestic abuse including intimidation. It looked at FC's not only with the looked after children but with her own children as well.'*

Foster Carers have generally provided positive comments about the annual review process.

The 7 Cases presented to Panel following their 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Review include 5 General Households, 1 Kinship Carer and 1 Family Link carer. All were recommended for continued approval during this period, and ratified by the ADM.

There were 36 approvals during 2020/21, therefore at least 15 general fostering household's should have been returned to Panel following their 1st Annual review as well as those Kinship Carers who had not gone on to become Special Guardians. There was a delay in obtaining 6 reports from the Medical Advisor towards the end of the financial year therefore these carers reviews were held during 2021/22, and one carer left the UK and did not return. It is also possible that some of these carers have already attended their annual review and there has been a delay presenting them to Panel, but unlikely that this is the case for all. As Panel's role is to consider continued approval and comment on the Annual Review these cases are now overdue their return to Panel.

### Three Yearly Fostering Reviews

Two cases returned to Panel after three years, one involving a same sex couple who have been fostering since 2011, and the other a single carer who had been fostering since 2006, and had also adopted 3 children previously fostered over the years, the youngest now aged 12. When asked what it was about fostering that made her wish to continue she said '*she loved doing something that improved someone else's life.*' When she attended Panel she was about to return to fostering after major renovations to increase the number of bedrooms to enable her to continue fostering. In the interim she was helping to facilitate the 'Skills to Foster' training.

The same sex couple had been approved for a long term transracial match with a sibling group of 3 children who had been in their care for over 9 years. Two are now young adults but have remained under 'Staying Put' arrangements. These carers had advocated for the children over the years, ensuring their educational needs were fully met, promoted safe contact with family members, some in another country and were meeting the young people's cultural and identity needs.

Panel was impressed and agreed that the benefit of the 3 year return to Panel provided the opportunity to acknowledge the positive work of committed carers, as well as discuss and offer Panel advice about gaps in Foster Carers practice and/or support from the local authority.

### Regulation 25, Extensions

The majority of Regulation 25, requests for an 8 week extension are prompted by delays in outstanding checks, primarily medical and DBS checks. There have been 12 such requests during this period. While such requests should be the exception, Panel have noted there is often a 3-4 week delay in seeking checks as this is left to Fostering Service after the case has been transferred. Supervising Social Workers have no choice at that stage but to seek an extension to prevent placements becoming unregulated. There have nevertheless been 3 cases where continued delay in receiving these checks have led to placements becoming unregulated by the time the final report is represented to Panel. While Panel is able to provide a view about the carers ability to care for children in such cases, it cannot make a recommendation on unregulated placements as different arrangements should, in such cases be made for the child concerned.

This is an issue discussed in Quality Assurance meetings. A potential solution would be for checks to begin as soon as viability assessments are signed off, including medical appointments. Social Workers completing viability assessment could request sight of relevant documents for DBS checks to ensure they are available. Two cases presented to Panel have found applicants did not have the appropriate documents to obtain DBS' which led to further delay. If this process starts earlier it will prevent, or reduce extension requests, delay in care planning and unregulated placements.

## **Return to Panel following Standards of Care, Allegations or other reasons**

Panel heard 3 Standards of Care cases concerning Foster Carers practice that led to Standards of Care investigations. Two involved complaints from children where their carers have raised their voices, one mirroring the child's use of bad language so the child could experience how this felt, while another spoke negatively about a child in earshot, causing upset. The third case involved an altercation outside of the home between neighbours who were both Foster Carers while children were in the household. Panel agreed with Standards of Care action plan and recommended continued approval in all 3 cases, that was ratified by the ADM. There have been no de-registrations recommended by Panel during this period.

## **Fostering Panel's role in Quality Assurance**

### **Evaluation of work submitted to Panel (measured through Panel feedback forms)**

<b>Feedback of assessments and reports</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Form F	2	4		
Form C		4	1	
Family Link		1		
Annual Review		1		
Matching Reports	1	2	1	

Reports presented to Panel are fundamental to Panel's judgement of the quality of the assessment or review. They are supplemented by information from the assessing social worker at the Panel meeting. Panel's judgement can also be influenced by relevant comment made by the prospective foster, Kinship Carers during the meeting.

Panel will regard an assessment report to be of sufficient quality to be 'Good' when it provides comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the applicant, their abilities and motivation. It identifies their strengths and vulnerabilities, and provides a clear analysis leading to the reasons for the recommendation and matching considerations. This will also apply to Kinship Carers, continued approval and long term matches.

As in previous years, a small number of reviews were prompted by Standards of Care concerns, in the cases presented Panel was satisfied that the investigations had been correctly conducted and the conclusions justified.

Feedback from Panel Members is a standing agenda item and is recorded by the Panel administrator at the end of each Panel. The feedback relates to individual cases, noting for example Foster Carers and Social Workers presentation as well as assessments.

The majority of reports presented to Panel have been graded as 'Good' and the quality has remained consistent. While it is acknowledged that feedback is subjective, Panel ensure each is discussed before reaching a consensus with evidence. There have been 3 'Excellent' reports presented to Panel, 2 Form F assessments and 1 matching report.

A minority were noted to include factual errors, but in most cases, the errors were minor such as the use of different dates in different parts of the report. Although there has been an improvement over the review year in children's Social Workers contributing to Foster Carers reviews, this is still not universal. In addition when present some children's views are reported second hand in Social Workers report, for example *'Susan and Troy said they are happy in the placement.'* Feedback forms are available for different ages, so it is unclear why these are not regularly used.

There is evidence that issues of equality and diversity are being addressed in reports, but more so in assessments and matching reports. As well as discussions about food, skin, hair and taking them to faith meetings more insight into the carers ability to understand how the lack of both can impact the child in order to support them would be helpful. Similarly greater knowledge about sexual orientation and gender identity would be beneficial for Social Workers and applicants as are rarely discussed in any depth. Training for Social Workers and Panel Members would be beneficial.

Panel tries to provide additional information on well written areas as well as those that would raise the quality of reports in the feedback it provides.

*'The Form F reads very well. The analysis was very thorough of all the key areas. It was well written, easy to read, and it provided a good understanding of the couple's history.'*

*'The whole report was excellent and gave a rounded view of the applicant. The report flowed well, it was an easy read, had good analysis and included excerpts of the applicant's own comments.'*

*'The FC was well prepared for Panel and supported by her SSW in her presentation which was excellent, as was the presentation of SSW and CSW. Very clear, knowledgeable and all knew the child well. The Annual Review minutes included by the IFA was excellent.'*

*'It would help if the Matching Report had considered questions about preparing for independence; e.g. what would need to happen if child were placed and to remain out of borough. Carer's thoughts on what they would need to do to prepare child for independence.'*

*'How the carer would help the children understand the difference of ethnicity within the family in the outside world was not explored.'*

*'There were a number of gaps in the report: lack of information about children, adult children and extended family; no information about male FCs job and what this means in terms of his involvement.'*

Foster carers training moved from face to face to virtual due to the pandemic. This does not appear to have increased the numbers attending training as gaps remain. The Training & Development plans are not always presented to Panel and sometimes not fully completed with carers learning.

*'It would have been helpful to have read about what FC learned from training on autism. However it was positive to hear the SW updates to Panel about recent progress, and to see what FC has learned from training.'*

### **Foster Carers feedback on the Panel process**

Foster Carers and Social Workers attending Panel are asked to provide feedback on their experience. There have been fewer responses, as it is harder to encourage completion of electronic forms. Moving forward the Panel Administrator plans to obtain phone feedback after Panel. Those that have responded 13 have reported their experience to be 'excellent' 5 described their experience as "good' 2 'adequate' and 1 'poor'.

The majority felt the Panel Members to be welcoming and they felt they were listened to and questions appropriate:

*'Everybody was really nice. I was really nervous but they put me at ease. It felt they really listened to my answers to their questions.'*

*'I cannot add any suggestion as I feel the Panel handled my individual case with care and understanding. All concerns on both parts addressed and fully explained.'*

This was not the case for the two 'adequate' responses, one returning following a Standards of Care concern and the other a new applicant:

*'I understand why I came to Panel but I didn't feel I had done anything wrong to necessitate coming to Panel. It made me feel in the wrong. I was nervous about coming to Panel, but after talking a while I relaxed. The questions gave me a chance to explain myself.'*

*'Some of the questions that were asked were asking about things that I would not be able to answer until a child is in place, so it was difficult to answer without the experience. Other than that it went well.'*

The 'Poor' feedback involving an applicant who had previous fostering experience, however the former agency had raised some practice issues:



*'I answered all the questions well because I have done fostering before. The Panel questioned me about my past – I have moved on. I have fostered with an agency. I am in contact with the children I cared for. It's a job I love. I tried to convince Panel but they were not listening to me. I was not happy about it.'*

### **Social Workers Feedback**

There has been limited feedback from Social Workers, despite best efforts by the Panel administrator. Feedback received has however largely been positive. All have confirmed that they and their Foster Carers/applicants have been warmly welcomed:

*'I have attended the Southwark Fostering Panel on a number of occasions. At every Panel my applicants have received a warm welcome from all the Panel Members and all Foster Carers have reported that any anxieties they had were allayed.'*

Social Workers feel the questions are appropriate as can be seen from the comment below:

*'The Panel is well organised, the Panel Members are diverse and they are keen to know and understand the motivations to foster and cover a range of questions with the applicants and all the while ensuring that the applicants are put at ease.'*

*'The Panel Members have asked a good range of questions which were appropriate and whenever the applicants have struggled to answer they have re-phrased and clarified.'*

There has also been positive feedback on how well the Panel Administrator manages the Panel process:

*'The timing of each case is thoughtfully scheduled and I have received regular updates prior to the Panel date.'*

There has been some verbal comments from Social Workers and a written comment from a foster carer that questions on diversity have not featured during Panel.

*'Diversity didn't come up even though it was a transracial placement, it wasn't an issue.'*

If sufficient relevant information is contained in the reports presented to Panel questions on diversity are not routinely asked. Nevertheless, in view of the concerns Panel will ensure that diversity remains in focus by asking relevant questions, or confirming during Panel that it has been noted in the report.

Of particular concern to Panel was the comment from one Social Worker who felt that Panel seemed more critical of Kinship Carer applicants. This prompted Panel to consider the reasons for this and wondered whether Social Workers thought Panel had a greater expectation of Kinship Carers than unrelated applicants. On reflection

the questions may have been more focused as they already had a child in placement, unlike unrelated Foster Carers. It however led to the recruitment of two Kinship Carers as Panel Members who have provided good feedback and helped Panel consider some of the issues for Kinship Carers. Panel Chair also circulated a court judgement where the judge had reminded a local authority that the NMS applied to the agency and not the carer, it was therefore the agency's responsibility to help the carers meet the standards. This has helped focus Panel's questions on support the local authority can provide Kinship Carers in particular to meet children's needs and minimise any concerns Panel may have.

### **Quality Assurance Meetings**

The Panel chair, Head of Service, Service Manager, Panel Advisor and Panel Administrator meet four times a year with the Agency Decision Maker. These meetings are particularly helpful as address any concerns about paperwork and process, including any concerns about Panel practice or process. A discussion about increasing Social Workers understanding of Reg. 24 and Reg. 25 timescales resulted in the Panel advisor and Service Manager providing information for managers and Social Workers on the Kinship Care process and looking at how it could be added to the Mosaic system workflow to prevent placements becoming unregulated. Quality assurance feedback themes are discussed and action is assigned and reviewed at the next meeting.

### **Conclusion**

Although Covid-19 presented a number of continuing challenges for the Fostering Service it also highlighted the level of commitment and resilience in Foster Carers. They accepted new placements, or provided respite support and continued to provide the same level of care throughout, with support from their Supervising Social Workers. The Fostering Service has struggled due to depleted numbers as a result of loss of staff and sickness, but have continued to present cases to the Fostering Panel, albeit at a reduced number as evidenced by the data.

Panel continues to be satisfied with the standard of practice and the quality of the majority of reports presented to it. There is also evidence of improving practice, for example children's Social Workers now have a better understanding of Regulation 24 and timescales and are working to meet them. More Training & Development plans are being presented to Panel and the SGO team offers ongoing support to Special Guardians. The majority of reports presented were 'Good' and where minor gaps are present Social Workers an applicants are usually able to provide missing information during the Panel discussion.

When considering areas for development, Panel would like to see:

- Kinship Care assessments presented to Panel within the 16 week timescale rather than requiring an additional 8 week extension. Panel would like consideration given to DBS checks and medical's beginning earlier, before transfer to prevent delay.
- A plan in place to increase the return to Panel of Foster and Kinship Carers following their First Annual Review during 2021 -2022.
- Kinship Care assessments should always include information about the applicants ability to foster the child in question whether or not an SGO is being sought, as may not be granted.
- Where applicable, matching reports need to clearly state that funding has been agreed.
- Information on Foster Carers ability to prepare a young for independence, and what this will mean to a young person remaining out of borough.
- Children's views are expressed by the children and young people themselves, rather than through Social Workers in their reports. There are plenty of tools and materials to enable/empower children to provide their own feedback.
- All reports need to provide sufficient detail, evidence, an appropriate level of analysis and clear recommendation.
- Any relevant ex-partner has been consulted, or reasons why not and information about them triangulated from other sources.
- All children's Social Workers' contribute to Foster Carers reviews, as this is still not universal and should be.
- All Training & Development profiles need to be fully completed with detail of learning from training attended and presented to Panel.
- Where Health Disclosures were commonly used during the pandemic, where appropriate Foster Carers should be asked to attend their GPs for medicals.
- An increase in Family Link assessments as such links can prevent the need for a child to be accommodated.

#### Areas for Panel development:

- Panel to ensure it seeks information about Foster and Kinships Carers understanding of equality, diversity and identity, including sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Panel will work to ensure it remains non-judgmental in discussion and when considering recommendations.
- Panel is to seek confirmation of how the local authority will support the Kinship Carers to meet the needs of a children in their care where the NMS would suggest there is a gap.

<b>Item No.</b> 10.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 2 November 2022	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report 2021-22	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Director, Children & Families	

### RECOMMENDATION

1. That the corporate parenting committee note the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report 2021-22.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The IRO annual report provides relating to the independent reviewing service for children and young people in care within the local authority, as required by statutory guidance arising from the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.
3. This report contains a summary of work completed by Southwark's IRO service for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. It identifies the work of the service in fulfilling its statutory remit and highlights areas for development in relation to the IRO function.
4. The report is to be presented to the strategic director of children's and adults' services, the lead cabinet member for children, young people, education and refugees and to the corporate parenting committee.

### KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

5. Independent Reviewing Officers are dedicated to improving outcomes for children and young people in care through the review and challenge aspect of their role. They are often the stable and constant factor for children and young people in care and are committed to driving and improving outcomes for them through working in partnership with young people, their carers and the social work and professional network around children.

6. In the Ofsted Inspection of 2017 the oversight was an area that was felt to need development. Previous focused visits from Ofsted have shown that this area had improved and is continually improving. In considering the IRO report the corporate parenting committee is able to exercise its own scrutiny and challenge function and hold services to account.
7. The report set out in Appendix 1, highlights the work of the service and the areas for development going forward and provides an overview of children in care and services provided to them.

### **Policy framework implications**

8. The Borough Plan has a commitment to a great start in life for all children and young people in the borough. This particularly has in mind those who are in care, for whom Independent Reviewing Officers are a key part of overseeing the Borough Plan commitment.

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

#### **Community impact statement**

9. The decision to note this report has been judged to have no or a very small impact on local people and communities.
10. The work of the IROs is intended to improve the outcome for children and young people in care.
11. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, lays out the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day to day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. The council's [Approach to Equality](#) commits the council to ensuring that equality is an integral part of our day to day business.
12. The council's children and families directorate involves working closely with all relevant stakeholders and partners across the sector and collectively we are committed to upholding the responsibilities towards advocating the Public Sector Equality Duty and complying with the Equalities Act 2010.
13. The PSED enables public bodies to consider the diverse needs of groups and have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Due regard is about considering the different needs of protected characteristics in relation to the three parts of the duty.

14. The Equalities Act 2010 define the following as protected characteristics; age; disability, gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

#### **Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement**

15. The report takes account of the ethnicity, age and disabilities of children in care, as well as the racial and ethnic background of current staffing of the IRO Service and addresses these areas in light of commitments set out by Southwark Stands Together (SST).

#### **Health impact statement**

16. The report takes account of the impact of the ongoing pandemic (Covid -19) upon children in care and staff, as well as those measures reported regarding the health and wellbeing of children in care.

#### **Climate change implications**

17. None.

#### **Resource implications**

18. None

#### **Legal implications**

19. None.

#### **Financial implications**

20. None

#### **Consultation**

21. Not applicable.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Southwark's Approach to Equality	Quality Assurance and Practice Development, Children and Families, Children's and Adults' Services 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0654
<b>Web link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/equality-and-diversity/equality-objectives">https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/equality-and-diversity/equality-objectives</a>		
Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010	Quality Assurance and Practice Development, Children and Families, Children's and Adults' Services 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0654
<b>Web link:</b> <a href="https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/959/contents/2013-07-01">https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/959/contents/2013-07-01</a>		
Southwark's Borough Plan 2020-22	Quality Assurance and Practice Development, Children and Families, Children's and Adults' Services 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0654
<b>Web link:</b> <a href="https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/fairer-future/council-plan">https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/fairer-future/council-plan</a>		

**APPENDICES**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Title</b>
Appendix 1	Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report 2021-22

**AUDIT TRAIL**

<b>Lead Officer</b>	David Quirke-Thornton, Strategic Director, Children's and Adults' Services	
<b>Report Author</b>	Tendai Murowe, Assistant Director, Quality Assurance and Practice Development	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	2 November 2022	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>
Director of Law and Governance	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>		24 October 2022





# Annual Report Independent Reviewing Service 2021/22

London Borough of Southwark  
Children and Families Services

**Report of :** Clare Ryan, Service Manager, Quality Assurance, Children & Families, Children's and Adults' Services

**Accountable Assistant Director:** Tendai Murowe, Assistant Director of Quality Assurance and Practice Development, Children & Families, Children's and Adults' Services

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- 2. Profile of Southwark's Children and Young People**
- 3. Outcomes & Performance**
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- 5. Monitoring & Escalation**
- 6. Developmental Work for 2022/23**

## Summary to year end 2022

- Numbers of looked after children in Southwark increased from 449 to 457 between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 (1.7% increase)
- There were also increases in children entering and ceasing care in Southwark during the same time period (37% and 20% increases respectively)<sup>1</sup>
- There was a decrease in the total number of reviews (of children's care plans) held in the year (n= 1222 vs 1264, meaning 42 less reviews in the year)
- Timeliness of children and young people's reviews decreased by 4% to the year-end 2022.
- 94% of children and young people over 4 years old participated in some way in their review and 6% did not.
- There will be continued focus throughout 2022/23 to ensure that reviews are child centred and children are given every opportunity to participate.
- The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children increased by 87% to 71 at year-end 2022. This resulted in Southwark being removed from the rota for the latter part of the year.
- The proportion of children who are of Black or Black British ethnicity remains well above inner London (IL) and above statistical neighbours (SN) averages (41% for Southwark vs 28% and 36% for IL and SN respectively), necessitating particular skills from the IROs when reviewing the cultural, emotional and health needs of these children and young people who are likely to be more sociologically and economically disadvantaged.<sup>2</sup>
- Placement stability for children in care has improved, with 8.5% of children looked after at the end of the year with three or more placements during the year. Short term stability (those with three or more placements) is now in-line with the London and statistical neighbour averages at 71%, whilst long term stability (same placement for 2 or more years) performance is above London and statistical neighbours 72%.
- IROs raised 677 case alerts between 1 April 2021 and the 31 March 2022.<sup>3</sup> There were 61 formal escalations in the same time period.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that 616 formal escalations were avoided through the use of the case alerts.

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<sup>1</sup> This is percentage decreases between year end figures 2020/21 vs 2021/22

<sup>2</sup> See Research in Practice, '[Understanding the lived experiences of black and ethnic minority children and families.](#)'

<sup>3</sup> Case alerts are created by IROs on the case management system (Mosaic) to alert the allocated social worker to a care planning concern or issue they wish to draw attention to and have addressed.

<sup>4</sup> Escalations are governed by the protocol contained in [online policies and procedures](#). Escalations occur when the initial case alert remains unresolved. IROs can refer an escalation to CAF/CASS at any time but must notify the Head of Service for QA who in turn will inform the Assistant Director and the Director for CSC.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this annual report is to provide an overview of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service for Looked After Children between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022. This report is required by statutory guidance (see 1.3 below and 7.11 of the IRO Handbook, 2010) and seeks to analyse and evaluate practice, plans and arrangements for looked after children. The report is also intended to review the effectiveness of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service in ensuring that the Local Authority discharges its statutory and corporate parenting responsibilities well towards those children who are looked after.
- 1.2 This annual report provides qualitative and quantitative information about the service provided in 2021/22, and also sets-out the priorities for 2022/23 to further improve the effectiveness of the service.

### Legal Context and Purpose of Service

- 1.3 The Independent Review Officers Service is set within the framework of the [IRO Handbook \(Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010\)](#) and reflects statutory regulation, the [Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2010](#).
- 1.4 Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) have a critical and statutory role in relation to the improvement of care planning for looked after children. The responsibility of the IRO is to have an overview of the child's care planning arrangements and of the child's wellbeing in placement. IROs achieve this primarily through chairing multi-agency reviews of children's care plans and will have a strong focus on plans for children's futures, as well as oversight of the child's health and education. The IRO must offer constructive and targeted scrutiny and challenge regarding case management and care planning through regular review and monitoring and follow up between children's reviews as appropriate to the child's needs and circumstances.

### Functions & Duties of the IRO Service

- 1.5 The primary task of the IRO is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child.<sup>5</sup> The IRO Service must have strong oversight of all care planning for children and young people throughout their time experiencing care services, notably at the key transition points where children and young people are entering and leaving care. This is in order to ensure that children and young people's needs are well identified and defined, and that the planning of service delivery is proportionate, impactful and effective in a positive way, and without delay.

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<sup>5</sup> [IRO Handbook, 2.10](#)

1.6 To achieve the above, the IRO Service is expected to:

- Ensure that **the care plan is based on a detailed and up-to-date assessment of the child's needs**, and sets out realistic and effective actions to meet those needs, within an appropriate timescale for the child;
- **Identify any gaps** in the assessment process or provision of services, and notify the corporate parent about the implications of this for the child;
- Ensure that the **child's voice is heard**, their views, wishes and feelings are given full consideration and weight and, as appropriate, the child fully understands their care plan and the implications of any proposed changes to it;
- Ensure that the **child understands how an advocate could help** and that a referral to an advocate is made if necessary;
- **Consult** with and involve the child's parents, as well as other significant adults in the **family and professional networks**;
- Ensure any **safeguarding issues are identified** and addressed;
- **Challenge robustly any drift or delay** in the progress of the child's care plan, or the delivery of services to them;
- Ensure that **formal statutory reviews are held and recorded** within timescales set out by statutory guidance;
- **Monitor the local authority's actions** in between the review meetings, to make sure that progress is being made to achieve the outcomes for the child as set-out in their care plan, and to act on any concerns about drift or delay;
- **Take appropriate action** if the local authority fails to comply with regulations, or is in breach of its duties to the child in any material way, including making a referral to Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS).

## Service Overview



Fig 1

- 1.7 Figure 1 above shows the IRO Service within the wider service structure for Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement. The Service Manager for Quality Assurance (Care) is responsible for the direct line management of the IRO Service provided by IROs and also has management responsibility for the provision of advocacy and children and young people's participation (for those receiving children who are looked after by the local authority).
- 1.8 The Service benefits from close links to Permanency and Care Services (0-15) and 16 plus Service, Safeguarding and Family Support Service, the Virtual School and Head and other services within Quality Assurance and auditing services. There is also collaborative work with the Extra Familial Harm Service and with the QA Safeguarding Service (Child Protection Conferencing). This is to ensure that there is continued IRO oversight at the point that this is required for children and young people's experiences of services provided to them.
- 1.9 Administrative support is provided by a fulltime administrative officer managed by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) Administration Manager. IROs are responsible with social workers for arranging looked after review meetings, and also for recording all review meetings. There is administrative capacity for the distribution of care plans and IRO reports to the professional network. Social workers are tasked with sending out consultation documents and sharing plans and IRO reports with children and parents.

- 1.10 The Southwark IRO Service is staffed by permanent and locum staff (5.5 x permanent and 1 x locum). The Service will at times make use of sessional staff and additional capacity via the AidHour Service and freelance IROs whenever there is a need to ensure capacity to function within statutory regulation. For example, when there is an increase in numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children requiring a service from the local authority.
- 1.11 The IRO Service (despite use of agency and sessional IROs) has been largely stable over the past 12 months to April 2022. A permanent Service Manager was appointed in September 2021. The new Service Manager had been employed by Southwark within Care and Permanency Services for some years and therefore, is very familiar with our looked after population. The Service Manager has been focussing on recruitment of permanent IROs to enable the service to cease using agency staff.
- 1.12 Approximately 73% of children receiving care services are allocated to the full time IROs and approximately 27% are allocated to those who are sessional IROs. There was an increased use of sessional IROs over 2021/22 due to growing numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children entering the care of Southwark, and to afford the Service the flexibility it requires. This ensures immediate IRO oversight for this particularly vulnerable and often traumatised group of children and young people. However, in 2022/23 we will be seeking to reduce the use of sessional staff as 3 more permanent staff have been recruited.
- 1.13 IROs who are male, and of Black or Black British ethnicity continue to be unrepresented in the profile of our IRO service, although there are 3 IROs who are female, and of Black/Black British ethnicity. Habitually and in line with expectations, the IROs consider and promote the specific cultural and identity needs of children and young people through the review of their care plans.
- 1.15 All IROs have at least five years post-qualifying experience as a social worker and are registered with Social Work England. IROs have previously held managerial roles in other services and have had experience of oversight within safeguarding services as well as services to looked after children.
- 1.16 Some of Southwark's IROs have known children on their caseloads for almost the whole of their life (children now in their early teens who came into care as very young children, e.g. under 6mths old). Often, IROs are the consistent professionals in children's lives and as such, hold a wealth of knowledge about them.

*Email to IRO from a Supervising Social Worker*

Your input into care planning and **delivery** for L has been enormously appreciated. It really demonstrated the value of an effective IRO in holding the team to account and moving things forward so that L's needs were met.'

## **Caseloads**

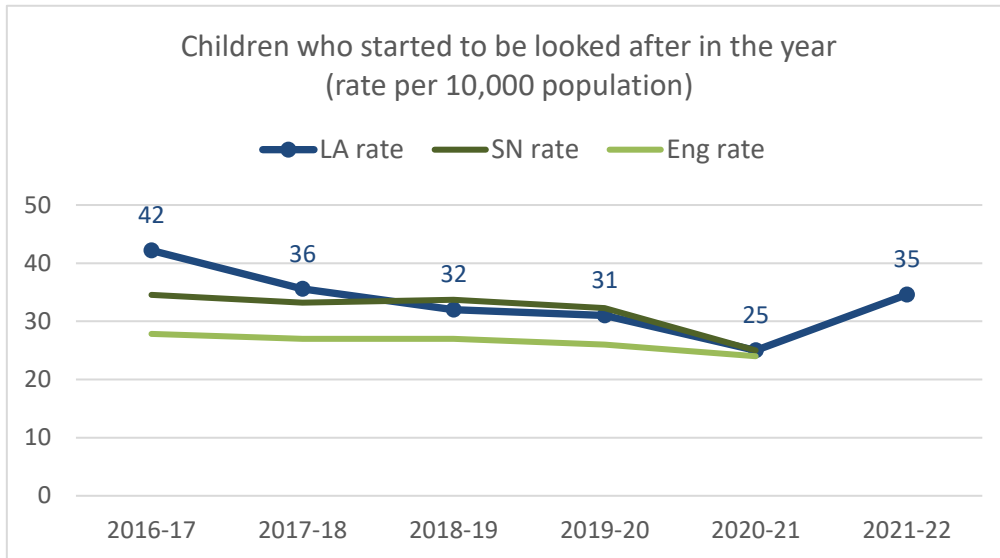
- 1.17 IRO caseloads in Southwark are within those limits recommended in guidance (see 7.13 to 7.15 of the IRO Handbook). The recommended average caseload is between 50 and 70 looked after children. The average caseload an IRO holds in Southwark is approximately 52 to 56 children. Full time and permanent IROs can hold up to 60 cases. The highest currently is 60. The workload for an IRO may also be considered in relation to time taken to travel to placements as well as the complexity of issues for each child. Children and families whose origins are in other countries may need additional time in the care planning and review process to properly explore their cultural needs, as well as additional time for interpretation.
- 1.18 IROs have now mostly moved back to holding in person reviews however, some children and young people prefer virtual methods of interaction. If a review takes place virtually there is an expectation that the IRO will visit the child or young person where they live either before or after the review. All children and young people should be visited by their IRO a minimum of twice per year.

## **Multi-agency Liaison & Quality Assurance**

- 1.19 A permanent Assistant Director for Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement has been appointed and commenced their role in July 2022. They directly line manage the Service Manager for the IRO Service.
- 1.20 The Head of Southwark's Virtual School regularly attends IRO team meetings to discuss educational provision, personal education plans (PEPs) for children and how these are monitored through review and to highlight key areas for IRO attention such as achievement at KS5. Health Leads such as the Nurse for children in care also routinely attend IRO team meetings to ensure health outcomes for children in care are actively monitored. The Service Manager also attends a weekly multi-agency meeting which focusses on the timeliness of PEPs, Initial Health Assessments and Review Health Assessments.
- 1.21 CAF/CASS liaison has improved and there are quarterly meetings with the Service Manager and CAF/CASS. IROs remain in close contact with Guardians and have electronic access to legal bundles to ensure oversight of children's cases where these are in proceedings.
- 1.22 The IRO Service Manager attends the Extra Familial Harm Panel, Complex Needs Panel and the Access to Resources Panel for children entering the care of Southwark Council.
- 1.23 IROs regularly participate in monthly and thematic case audit and the Service Manager attends monthly performance meetings for the All Age Disability, Care and Permanency and 16+ Service

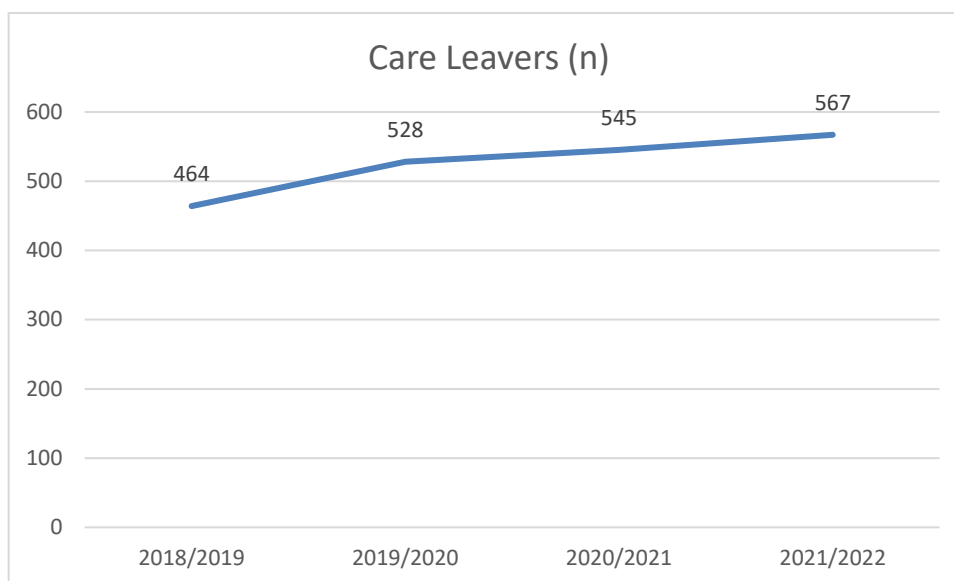


## 2. Profile of Southwark's Children & Young People



Graph1  
Source: SSDA903

- 2.1 The graph above relates to the rates of children starting to be looked after and compares Southwark's rate of children entering care with our statistical neighbours and the national rate. Southwark's rate has increased over 2021/22 and this upturn is as a result of an influx of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- 2.2 For IROs, manageable caseloads (as previously evidenced at 1.17) enable improved oversight, allowing time for midway reviews and attendance at other key meetings for children (such as Permanency & Placement Planning Meetings, Stability Meetings and Professionals Meetings). This then means a greater focus on collaborative working across Southwark's services and with other agencies (schools, primary, community and acute health care, CAMHs etc.)



Graph 2  
Source: SSDA903

- 2.3 The graph above (Graph 2) shows the numbers of children leaving care by year (2019 to year end 2022). Each year the numbers of young people leaving care has increased, with a 22% increase across the four years shown above (n= 103). IROs have oversight of pathway planning for young people as they approach leaving care age and liaise closely with the 16+ Services. The 16+ Service is in touch with approximately 97% of care leavers aged between 19 and 21 years. Audit work has demonstrated that staying in touch and forming trusted relationships for Care Leavers is a particular strength.

No. & Rate of Children Looked After (CLA)	SNs 2019/20	Southwark 2019/20	Southwark 2020/21	Southwark 2021/22
CLA as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March (n)	361	458	449	457
CLA as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March per 10,000	61	70	69	69
CLA starting to 31 <sup>st</sup> March (n)	179	204	166	228
CLA ceasing to 31 <sup>st</sup> March (n)	177	222	167	214

Table 1  
Source: SSDA903

- 2.4 The table above (Table 1) shows children in care as at the 31<sup>st</sup> of March by number and rate as well as the numbers starting and ceasing to be looked after in the year. The table below (Table 2) shows the proportions of children in care by ethnicity.

- 2.5 As noted in the summary, children who are of Black or Black British are over represented amongst our children in care (41% for 2021/22). There are no published mid-year population estimates by ethnicity and age for London boroughs. The published comparative data (for whole population) comes from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) estimates for 2019. This shows that for all under 19 year olds in Southwark's population, 40.1% and 13.1% of children and young people were of Black and Mixed ethnicity respectively. Southwark's looked after children population was 41% and 19% respectively by comparison.
- 2.6 The proportion children and young people looked after by Southwark who are Black or Black British ethnicity is almost equal to the proportions of children of White and Mixed ethnicities combined.
- 2.7 The proportion of children who are of White or Asian ethnicity who are looked after by Southwark is lower than both our statistical neighbours and the inner London averages.
- 2.8

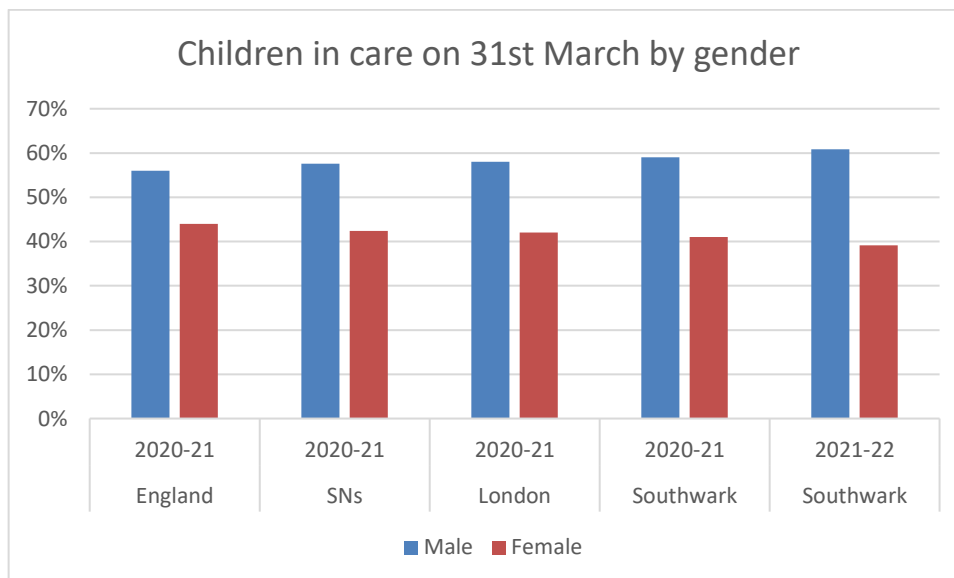
Children by Ethnicity %	England 2019/20	SNs 2019/20	Inner London 2019/20	Southwark 2019/20	Southwark 2020/21	Southwark 2021/22
White	74	33	35	25	26	23
Mixed	10	18	17	17	20	19
Asian or Asian British	4	9	10	5	5	7
Black or Black British	7	37	30	48	45	41
Other ethnic groups	4	6	7	5	4	9

Table 2  
Source: SSDA903

Southwark School Census Data (%)				
White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Other
31	13	6	41	9

- 2.9 This is significant for the IRO Service. The professional development, and the profile of the IRO Service, should keep pace with the needs and profile of our children and young people. IROs must be well informed of children's cultural needs and monitoring activities and children's reviews must reflect their needs around health, skin and hair care as well as dietary and identity needs.
- 2.10 Through Southwark Stands Together (SST), the Council has made a commitment to ensuring that Southwark's staffing profile at senior levels is reflective of the local population, and to promote equality and diversity at all levels. Similarly, a commitment is made to make our IRO Service reflective of children and young people's ethnicity, and knowledgeable and responsive to their cultural and emotional needs. Achieving and maintaining a sense of security in care may be more difficult for children and young people of Black, minority ethnic and multiple heritage backgrounds, and for unaccompanied asylum seekers. These children and young people may face racism, discrimination and isolation which can challenge their ability to develop resilience and high self-esteem.

- 2.11 A bespoke and mandatory training programme has been developed and commenced in September 2022 for all social work staff, inclusive of IROs which covers racism, anti-discriminatory practice, black history and reducing inequalities. Southwark also run a mandatory inverse mentoring scheme where white senior managers are matched with a black, Asian or ethnic minority member of staff as their mentor.
- 2.12 There is continued developmental work on Life Long Links and ReConnect programmes to safely support children in care to establish meaningful links with people who are important to them and offer them insight into their history, culture and identity.<sup>6</sup>
- 2.13 The graph below (Graph 3) shows the gender of children and young people which remains comparable to statistical neighbours, inner London. As with our statistical neighbours, more male children than female receive care services.



Graph 3  
Source: SSSA903

- 2.14 Southwark's looked after children are proportionately older than our statistical neighbours and the inner London averages. The highest proportion are aged between 10 to 15 years (43% at end of 2021/22). The proportion of children who are aged under 10 years old is more or less comparable to both our statistical neighbours and the inner London averages.
- 2.15 Strong IRO oversight of care plans for very young children coming into care is crucial if the plan is to return children home where this is assessed as a realistic possibility. Many of our young children's parents and carers are affected by issues such as domestic abuse and violence, substance and alcohol use, and or mental health issues. Often, these issues are not resolved for children and

<sup>6</sup> Lifelong Links aims to ensure that children in care have positive support networks around them to help them during their time in care and into adulthood.

they remain in care, therefore, securing permanency early on at the initial and second reviews for these children becomes critical.

- 2.16 Permanency for children can be achieved in a number of ways. Children can be matched for adoption or matched for long term foster care. Children can also be placed with someone who is connected or related to the child or children (Connected Carers).

Children by age %	England 2019/20	SNs 2019/20	Inner London 2019/20	Southwark 2019/20	Southwark 2020/21	Southwark 2021/22
Under 1	5	4	4	4	4	2
1 to 4	14	9	9	6	9	6
5 to 9	18	12	12	13	11	10
10 to 15	39	38	38	45	44	43
16 and over	24	36	37	32	32	39

Table 3  
Source: SSDA903

### 3. Outcomes & Performance

#### Stability of Care

- 3.1 IROs have a significant role in supporting children to remain in placement and in ensuring that they are in the right type of placement to meet their needs (stability of care). Stability of children's placements has improved over the last year with fewer children experiencing three or more placement moves (a decrease of 1.5% compared with the previous year, and now comparable with other boroughs) and more children remaining in the same placement for longer (see Table 4 below).
- 3.2 Where children were living (by placement type) as at the end of year 2022 is shown in the table below (Table 4). Some comparative information on placement type is unavailable, for example, permanent foster placement information. Southwark has a higher proportion of children in foster care than our statistical neighbours and inner London averages, and a good proportion of placements for children are with permanent foster carers. It is deemed preferable for children to be placed with families rather than in a residential setting. However, for some children and young people, a residential setting may be more conducive to their needs.
- 3.3 Audit work completed with the Care and Permanency Service has shown that children in long term stable placements with committed carers do very well at school and socially. This was also the case for another young person in a very effective residential placement.
- 3.4 During the focused visit by HM Inspector (Ofsted) in September 2020, sufficiency of placements for older children with complex and high needs was highlighted as an area for improvement. Southwark has joined the [Commissioning Alliance](#) to support work on sufficiency of placements and

developing capacity within and in the proximity of the Borough is a high priority. Placement sufficiency remains a national issue.

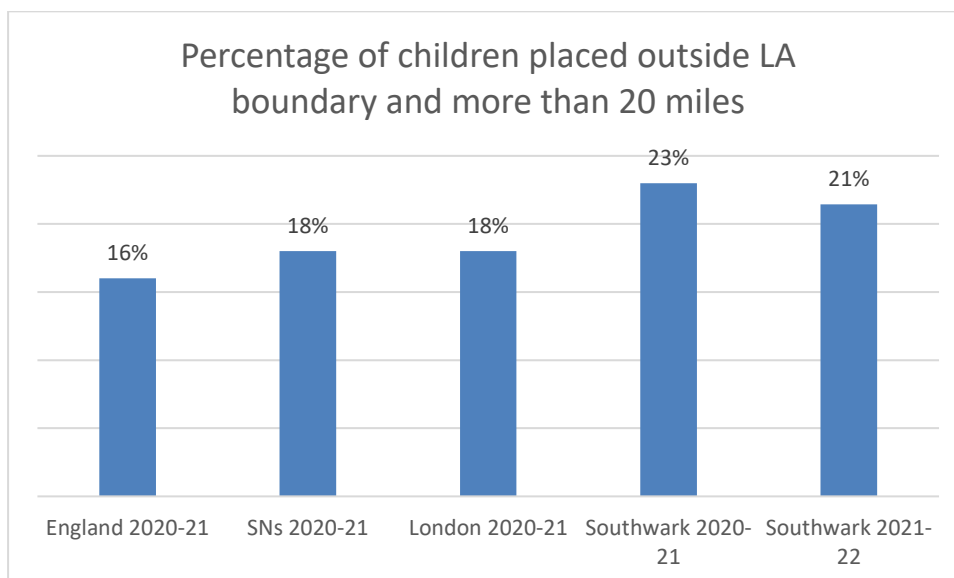
Children by Placement Type	England	SNs	London	Southwark	Southwark
	2020-21	2020-21	2020-21	2020-21	2021-22
Foster placements	71%	75%	71%		76%
Concurrent planning foster placements	-	-	-	-	1%
Foster placements with relative(s) or friends(s)	-	-	-	-	20%
Foster placements confirmed as permanent (long term)	-	-	-	-	42%
Placed for adoption	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Placement with parents	7%	4%	3%	2%	1%
Other placement in the community	2%	2%	2%	-	0%
Children's homes, secure units and hostels	14%	16%	20%		18%
Other residential settings	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Residential schools	-	0%	-	-	0%
Other placements	1%	0%	-	-	0%

Table 4 Source: SSSA903

Stability of Care	SNs 2020/21	Inner London 2020/21	Southwark 2020/21	Southwark 2020/22
% of children with 3+ placements	9%	9%	10%	8.5%
% of children in care for 2.5 years in placement for 2 years +	70%	72%	71%	76.4%

Table 5 Source: SSDA903

- 3.5 Wherever possible, children and young people should be placed to live close to their families for obvious reasons. The graph below (Graph 7) shows the proportion of children in care at the end of the year placed more than 20 miles from their home. For Southwark's children and young people, this is above both the England, inner London and statistical neighbours' average, although it has reduced by 2% in 2021/22. This can also impact on IROs' time to perform other key duties and tasks if they have to travel extensively to where children are living to conduct reviews.
- 3.7 To monitor this and to support children and young people better, the IRO Service will be looking at ways to identify earlier where placements are becoming unstable and to improve how this information is collated to provide improved quality assurance of all children's placements.

Graph 7  
Source: SSDA903

- 3.8 As stated, IROs have a statutory role in seeking to improve outcomes for children in Southwark's care. This includes ensuring that children have an initial health assessment in good time, and that they then have an up to date annual

health assessment and developmental checks, and that their mental health and wellbeing is monitored and addressed.

- 3.9 Whilst the majority of children and young people have an up to date annual health assessment (95% as at the end of year 2022), the timeliness of initial health assessments requires improvement. There is a weekly meeting to address this which is chaired by the Assistant Director and the timeliness of initial health assessments is increasing.
- 3.10 Children's access to timely dental checks has been and remains an area significantly impacted by the pandemic and had dropped significantly in 2021 to 30%. This outcome is improving and children are now accessing dental services more readily with performance for 2022 at 57%. The vast majority of children in care have a contemporary SDQ score (81%), but these indicators of emotional and behavioural health need should be consistently evident in children's care plans. However, there is embedded clinical capacity (for children's mental health needs) available to Southwark's children as well as a Virtual Mental Health Lead exclusive to children and young people in care.
- 3.11 Audits continue to show that IROs are addressing health assessments in reviews to inform review recommendations. SDQ results need to be used better to inform care plans and reviews. Audits indicate that SDQs are completed, but social workers and IROs must relate the findings more explicitly to the child's care plan.



Outcomes for Children Looked After	England 2020-21	SNs 2020-21	London 2020-21	Southwark 2020-21	Southwark 2021-22
Number of children whose immunisations were up to date	86%	69%	75%	86%	82%
Number of children who had their teeth checked by a dentist	40%	36%	38%	30%	57%
Number of children who had their annual health assessment	91%	92%	94%	97%	95%
Children looked after for at least 12 months aged 4 to 16 with an SDQ score	80%	84%	85%	94%	81%
Average score per child	14%	12%	12%	14%	13%

Table 8  
Source: SSSA903

### Educational Achievement & Attainment

3.12 The IRO Service is instrumental in supporting and improving the completion and quality of Personal Education Plans for children and young people, and in monitoring and tracking attainment and achievement outcomes. A PEP should be started within 10 days of a child becoming looked after and their plan must be in place by their first review. PEP documents include:

- Strengths and achievements
- Views of the student
- SMART academic targets
- Current and target attainment data

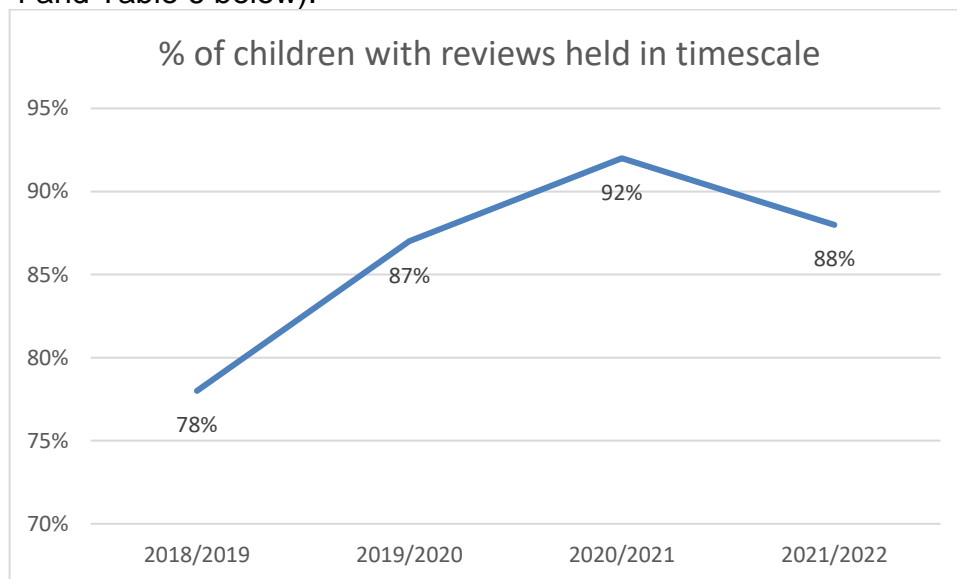
3.13 The Virtual Head reported that 42% of Southwark's 2021 GCSE cohort achieved a Grade 1-9 in English and Maths. 19% of our looked after children achieved a 9-4 pass in English and Maths in 2021. Due to the pandemic there were no formal exams. Instead, teacher assessed grades were given so comparisons could not be made regarding the previous year or national statistics.

## Children & Young People's Reviews

- 3.14 A child's initial review should be conducted within 20 working days of the child becoming looked after; and the second review should be conducted within three months of the initial review of the child's care plan. Subsequent reviews should be held not more than six months after this. A review should be held in a venue which is comfortable for the child or young person, usually where the child or young person is living. IROs are now seeing children and young people where they live either before the review, as part of the review, or afterwards, depending on the wishes of the child or young person.

The Care Plan and IRO minutes were reviewed in 2022 and following a consultation with children, young people and social work staff the Care Plans are now being written in the first person and co-produced with children and young people. The IROs are writing their minutes as a letter to the child or young person. Initial feedback from social workers, IROs and children and young people has highlighted how much more meaningful this style of co-production and writing is and that it can be used as a piece of life story work now or in the future.

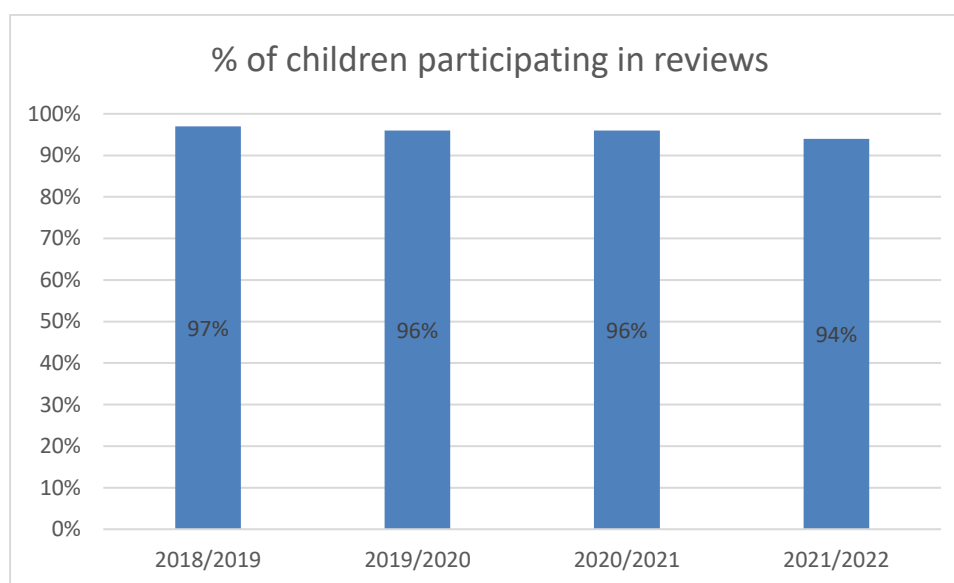
- 3.15 The timeliness of children's reviews has decreased slightly. The proportion of reviews held in timescale was 88% at the end of the year (2021/22) (see Graph 4 and Table 6 below).



Graph 4  
Source: SSDA903

Reviews for Children Looked After	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
<b>No. of children looked after for 20+ working days at 31st March</b>	437	441	444	439
<b>(of the above) No. of children with reviews held in timescale</b>	343	385	407	394
<b>% of children with reviews held in timescale</b>	78	87	92	88
<b>Total no. of reviews held in the year for all children &amp; young people</b>	1267	1278	1264	1222

Table 6  
Source: SSDA903



Graph 5  
Source: SSDA903

### Children & Young People's Views

- 3.16 The above graph shows the proportion of children and young people looked after (at the end of year) aged 4 years and above who had participated in their review in some way. There is no published comparative information available for participation. Various methodology is used to encourage children's participation, notably if they do not wish to physically attend their review. Children and young people often meet with their named IRO face to face before their review to give their views. They can also use texting, emailing and online methods to share their views about where they live, their education, their social life and their health care. There are plans to develop an 'App' and website for children and young people and this will be an additional medium where they can share their views.
- 3.17 Family time with birth families and carers remains a high priority for children and the frequency with which they can see their parents and or their siblings.

- 3.18 IROs will consult with children and young people before, during and after their reviews to hear their views, wishes and feelings and to monitor their needs whilst in care. The Service has moved from recording consultations on paper to an electronic format which is overseen administratively by the Quality Assurance Service and with greater involvement from the Children's Rights Officer. How we gather and report upon what children and young people are saying about the services they receive and the quality of their care is an area for greater focus in 2022/23.

## 4. Children and Young People's Views

### Bright Spots Survey

- 4.1 The Bright Spots Survey was conducted with children and young people in care from January to April 2020. Children and young people gave their views on a series of wellbeing indicators. The IRO Service, including the Children's Rights Officer, was very actively involved in the planning and implementation of the this survey.
- 4.2 A substantial proportion of children who participated in the survey aged 11 to 18 years indicated that they did not speak regularly to the adults that they live with (40%). In response, the IRO Service has offered to hold focus groups with Carers to understand what further help and support can be offered to ensure children and young people feel confident and able to talk regularly with the adults with whom they live about their wishes and feelings.
- 4.3 The vast majority of those who participated stated that they liked their living accommodation and their bedrooms (95%). As stated previously, a good number of children (1 in 5 surveyed) stated that they were unhappy with contact arrangements with their parents. The obvious restrictions in place during the pandemic has impacted children and young people's level of contact with birth families. To address this, IROs are placing greater focus on improving contact arrangements during reviews and ensuring appropriate referral to ReConnect.
- 4.4 Ninety one percent of children and young people participating in the survey felt that they had a good understanding of why they were in care, but a significant proportion of under 5s didn't have such an understanding. IROs are focusing on explaining to very young children as they enter care why these arrangements are in place for them. A stronger focus on life story work will support very young children in achieving an understanding.
- 4.5 Eleven percent of 11-18 year olds were identified as having low well-being. Most of were young people aged over 16. They also had in common:
- No adult in their life they could trust
  - Didn't like how they looked
  - Felt they were not given opportunities to be trusted
  - Didn't get to spend time outdoors

- 4.6 The above relates to the issue previously noted of improved use of SDQ information in care planning to assist with directing services to young people through the Clinical Care Service.
- 4.7 Support provided by the Children's Rights Officer has also highlighted that throughout the pandemic the mental health and the general wellbeing of young people remained a concern due to limited contact or poor relationships with family and friends and professionals.

A further Brightspots survey will be commissioned to take place in 2022/23.

### **Children's Rights Officer & Speakerbox**

- 4.8 Speakerbox<sup>7</sup>, our Children in Care Council is chaired by designated young people supported by the Children's Rights Officer (CRO) and is divided into Speakerbox Junior and Speakerbox Senior. It continues to shape practice and influence decision making, and has developed effective conversations with the Corporate Parenting Committee. Workshop sessions with senior managers, focussing on specific topics, such as housing for young people leaving care, have been powerful and effective ways to communicate and to influence plans and services for young people. Children, young people and parents are actively involved in the recruitment of social workers and managers of all levels, there is an expectation that all recruitment will include a panel of young people and parents. Panel chairs and members frequently feedback how much children and young people bring to the process and how insightful they are. Children and young people have also been involved in developing and delivering training packages for staff and there have been focus group with children and young people to inform changes to statutory forms and processes.
- 4.9 Speakerbox have been planning activities and events throughout 2021/22 to take place each holiday period to provide new opportunities and experiences for children in care and care leavers. These activities have included a project on identity for different age groups, a film making project, well-being and pampering sessions, a sports mentoring programme, a young parents group to build connections and confidence using children's centres and trips to Thorpe Park and Legoland.
- 4.10 The virtual school are collaborating with Speakerbox in 2022/23 and providing financial support to fund activities to inspire children and young people.

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<sup>7</sup> SpeakerBox is a forum for Southwark children and young people in care and care leavers up to the age of 25.

## Advocacy and Independent Visitors

- 4.11 IROs are proactive in making referrals and encourage children and young people to make referrals for an advocate if they feel they are not being heard or specific issues are not resolved in a timely or satisfactory way. Social workers and Personal Advisors are also proactive with making referrals or promoting advocacy for children and young people.
- 4.12 Southwark commissions Coram Voice to provide advocacy and Independent Visiting services to children and young. In respect of advocacy, in 2021/22, Coram Voice provided advocacy to 135 children and young people. This is an increase by 15 from the previous year.
- 4.13 Coram received 103 new referrals and completed 98 closures (ceasing advocacy). In addition, 8 children and young people were provided with advocacy funded by Coram Voice Outreach and Always Heard.
- 4.14 The advocacy service is designed to be as accessible as possible, via a freephone helpline, text and website, outreach, referrals from professionals and carers, and promoted with age specific and translated promotional materials. All Southwark young people have access to telephone interpretation where English is not their first language.<sup>8</sup>
- 4.15 The total number of cases has risen but the hours provided to children has dropped over the 2021/22 period (total number of cases = 131 vs 150, total number of hours =1677.6 vs 1647.91).
- 4.16 A high proportion of children who have a disability accessed advocacy services in 2021/22. Sixty-five children or young people used the service throughout the period who identified as having a disability, which equates to 48.1% of the young people worked with.
- 4.17 Access to advocacy services seems not to be reflective of children and young people in care's ages or ethnicity (see profile at Section 2). Advocacy is more likely to be accessed by those who are much older (16 to 21 years of age) and who are either of Black or Black British African, Black or Black British Caribbean or White ethnicity. It could be argued that it is always desirable that children and young people with a disability are over represented in this cohort, which they currently are.

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<sup>8</sup> Coram Voice Annual Report into the provision of Advocacy Services to Southwark 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022

4.18 The predominant issues raised via advocacy are shown below.

<b>ISSUE</b>	<b>No.</b>
Housing	74
Finance, benefits and debt	51
Concerns about social worker/Personal Advisor	45
Request to move placement	43
Complaint	42
Support at meetings	37
Pathway Planning	34
Education, training and employment	33
Legal	24
Homelessness	33

4.20 Children and young people were concerned about getting the right support at the right time with educational and housing needs, and about the level of finances received as well as support to manage these. IROs bring these issues raised via advocacy to bear during children's reviews and via monitoring and oversight of cases.

4.21 More active monitoring of the work done by Coram is taking place, and the Service Manager for the IRO Service and Children's Rights Officer has established regular meetings with Coram and the wider Social Work Services (All Age Disability, Care and 16+) to track children through the process to speedy resolution of issues where practicable.

In respect of Independent Visitors, Coram Voice provided 33 children and young people with an independent visiting service with 250 recorded visits between young people and their independent visitors across the year. There were a broad range of different age groups accessing the independent visiting service with 14 children aged under 13 years (42%) and 19 children aged 14-19 years (58%). 42% of the young people matched a reported to have a disability, have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) or have mental health needs.

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*Feedback from young people about Independent Visitors*

*'S is an independent person I can always talk to – it's always easy to get hold of her. She's always there. I think of her as a friend and not another service.'*

*'What's been positive is that I've been able to do stuff that I wouldn't have done otherwise, especially going to new places that I wouldn't have seen without my IV.'*

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## 5. Monitoring & Escalation

- 5.1 As stated, IROs have a statutory responsibility to raise concerns about the arrangements or services being provided for and to children and young people, and ensure that Southwark Council addresses issues raised in a prompt manner to prevent delay in service provision or decision making affecting children's care.
- 5.2 It is usual that issues raised for children can be resolved at an early stage by talking to or meeting with the social worker or Team Manager directly. IROs will seek to resolve issues informally, and this is evidenced by data which shows that from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 30<sup>th</sup> March 2022 there were 677 case alerts (on Mosaic) by IROs resulting in resolution at an earlier stage necessitating far fewer higher level escalations. The main focus is improving services for children and pursuing any alerts through to resolution.
- 5.3 IROs may not always pursue escalations assertively enough if they perceive that services are under pressure. However, IROs need to maintain their independence as befits their statutory function.
- 5.4 The IRO Service has mechanisms in place to scrutinise the practice of IROs and make sure that the focus remains entirely on the needs of the child. Managerial oversight of midway reviews and escalations are the checks and balances in place to monitor IROs' effectiveness in responding to concerns and achieving improved outcomes for children.
- 5.5 The table below (Table 7) shows escalations made to year end 2021/22 by type of issue raised by the IRO Service. As can be seen, the predominant issues centre on the quality of care planning and care plan delays as well as health and education. **Please note that numbers will not tally as IROs will select multiple choices from Mosaic when recording alerts and escalations.**



Issue raised	Issues number
LAC Inadequate care plan	14
LAC Drift in implementing plan	17
LAC Safeguarding concerns	3
LAC Social work provision concerns	8
LAC Placement concerns	10
LAC Education concerns	15
LAC Health concerns	15
LAC 18+ planning concerns	2
LAC Incomplete review decisions	12
LAC Other	10

Table 7  
Source: Mosaic

- 5.6 From April 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2022 IROs have made 61 formal escalations to managers. Two escalations (4%) were escalated to stage 2 to Head of Service to be resolved, with none escalated to Stage 3 (Assistant Director). No issues were referred to CAFCASS, although as stated, IROs work in close liaison with Guardians for independent oversight of care planning.
- 5.7 Monitoring, alerts and escalation is an area which requires ongoing review to ensure the IRO Service is as effective as possible in the interests of children. Evidence of the IRO 'footprint' is becoming more evident, and this work will continue through 2022/23 to improve how well children's views, wants, needs and wishes are monitored and promoted.

## 6. Developmental Work for 2022/23

- 6.1 Work is ongoing continually to improve the effectiveness and quality of the work done by IROs and the wider Service. A Service Plan was developed at the start of 2021/22 to guide this work and is currently under review to ensure it is driven by performance information, audit outcomes and any learning gained via case review.
- 6.2 We will be seeking to ensure that the Service meets the Practice Standards for Children & Families that was launched in 2021, ensuring that further developmental work is done to achieve this. The following priorities have been identified for 2022/23;
- Working across all services, improvements to the timeliness of allocation of a named IRO to every child entering the care of Southwark Council
  - Increasing the timeliness of children's looked after reviews
  - More face to face time between IROs and children and young people where they live and in the community

- Training provided to the social work teams by the Quality Assurance Unit and young people, to ensure Care Plans are co-produced with children and young people and written in the first person
- Continued improvement in making reviews child centred (writing letters directly to children following reviews about decisions made that affect them) and increasing participation in reviews.
- Collating and reporting on issues and themes arising from consultation with children and young people before and during their reviews and ensuring these are evident on children's case files
- Training to be rolled out in 2022/23 for parent advocates who are supporting parents at Child Protection Conferences to extend this offer to parents attending LAC reviews to increase parental participation
- Greater contact and collaboration with Speakerbox and proactively responding to children and young people about their wants and needs and how to promote meaningful young person centred reviews (young people chairing their own review, for example)
- Speakerbox reaching a wider group of children and young people, particularly those with additional needs or a disability, living out of borough, in custodial settings and unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- Responding to learning from audit and case review and reflecting this in service provision
- Ensuring advocacy access is reflective of children and young people's profile and ensuring themes are used to inform and improve service delivery
- Improving monitoring and escalation processes in the interests of children and young people's care planning and evidencing the IRO's 'footprint'

<b>Item No.</b> 11.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 2 November 2022	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Corporate Parenting Committee – Work Plan 2022-23	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Director, Children and Families	

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the corporate parenting committee agree the approach and work plan as set out in the report.
2. That the committee review and identify any further items for consideration in the work plan.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Role and function of the corporate parenting committee

3. The constitution for the municipal year 2022-2023 records the corporate parenting committee's role and functions as follows:
  - a. To secure real and sustained improvements in the life chances of looked after children, and to work within an annual programme to that end.
  - b. To develop, monitor and review a corporate parenting strategy and work plan.
  - c. To seek to ensure that the life chances of looked after children are maximised in terms of health, educational attainment, and access to training and employment, to aid the transition to a secure and productive adulthood.
  - d. To develop and co-ordinate a life chances strategy and work plan to improve the life chances of Southwark looked after children.
  - e. To recommend ways in which more integrated services can be developed across all council departments, schools and the voluntary sector to lead towards better outcomes for looked after children.
  - f. To ensure that mechanisms are in place to enable looked after children and young people to play an integral role in service

planning and design, and that their views are regularly sought and acted upon.

- g. To ensure performance monitoring systems are in place, and regularly review performance data to ensure sustained performance improvements in outcomes for looked after children.
- h. To receive an annual report on the adoption and fostering services to monitor their effectiveness in providing safe and secure care for looked after children.
- i. To report to the council's cabinet on a twice yearly basis.
- j. To make recommendations to the relevant cabinet decision maker where responsibility for that particular function rests with the cabinet.
- k. To report to the scrutiny sub-committee with responsibility for children's services after each meeting.
- l. To appoint non-voting co-opted members.

#### **National and local context for care leavers**

- 4. There is national momentum towards improving outcomes for care leavers. The government introduced 'Keep on Caring' strategy in 2016, increased council statutory duties to care leavers in the Children and Social Work Act in 2017, appointed a national Adviser for Care Leavers who produced a report in 2018, alongside the national launch of the Care Covenant. The council has responded to the various recommendations, for example by prioritising education, employment and training outcomes for care leavers in the Council Plan and developing the care leaver local offer as well as increasing service capacity for the extended personal adviser duties to 25.
- 5. Although much has been done to improve services and outcomes for care leavers, the council has an ambition to go above and beyond, by creating the best Leaving Care Service possible, by co-designing this with young people, learning from other organisations and trialling new ideas to test what works best.
- 6. In 2017 the council and Catch22 received funding from the DfE Social Care Innovation Programme to work in partnership to design and test new ways of working to support care leavers. The Care Leavers Partnership (CLP) works to improve outcomes for young people in Southwark by working across boundaries, reshaping the service delivery model, unlocking capacity in the community, and co-designing solutions. There are a number of strands that the CLP is working on to achieve our goals.

#### **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 7. The corporate parenting committee review and update the work plan each

meeting. Following the beginning of the municipal year 2019-20, and reflecting on the momentum towards improving outcomes for care leavers, the opportunity has been taken to review how the committee works and present proposals to refresh this in relation to: non-voting co-opted members; committee approach; and work plan and suggested agenda items.

### **Non-voting co-opted members**

8. It is recommended that the committee is supported and enhanced by adding a number of non-voting co-opted members. By bringing perspectives, knowledge and experience from young people, practitioners, subject matter experts, council and local community representatives together with elected members, there will be more opportunity to add value to the committee in its work to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers. This will promote wider ownership of the important work of the service and enhance plans developed to improve its work.
9. A **representative of Speakerbox**, Southwark's Children in Care Council, should be formally designated a non-voting co-opted member. This person would help the committee perform its role and function by bringing expertise by experience about how the system of support works around children in care and care leavers (3f above). The committee would recognise the person would preferably be consistent through the year, but may change. The council would support this person in that role, as well as Speakerbox, through its Children's Rights and Participation function, to enable as far as possible the Speakerbox member to be representative of the voice of children in care and care leavers.
10. A **representative from Southwark's frontline workforce**, who works face to face with children in care and care leavers, should be formally designated a non-voting co-opted member. This person would help the committee perform its role and function by giving a sense of the reality of work on the frontline to enable it to better seek to ensure that the life chances of looked after children are maximised (3c above). This committee member would be supported by the Children and Families Principal Social Worker to enable them to be a representative voice for those that work everyday with children in care and care leavers.
11. A **subject matter expert** who has undertaken extensive research and/or improvement work in the area of children in care and care leavers, should be formally designated a non-voting co-opted member. This person would help the committee perform its role and function by adding knowledge and experience that is outside the day to day ambit of those working within the Southwark system to help the council better secure real and sustained improvements in the life chances of looked after children (3a above). The committee member would be supported by the Quality Assurance Unit to ensure they provide a valuable and relevant contribution to every committee.
12. A **critical friend** from an area of the council outside children and adults

service, should be formally designated a non-voting co-opted member. This person would help the committee perform its role and function by adding knowledge and experience of the council outside social care and education areas to aid the development of a cross council approach to corporate parenting (3e above). The committee member would be supported by the quality assurance unit to ensure they provide a valuable and relevant contribution to every committee.

13. A **critical friend** from the local community, should be formally designated a non-voting co-opted member. This person would help the committee perform its role and function by adding knowledge and experience of the community and its assets and to aid the development of a wider community ownership of outcomes for children in care and care leavers. (3e above). The committee member would be supported by the Quality Assurance Unit to ensure they provide a valuable and relevant contribution to every committee.

### **Corporate Parenting Committee approach**

14. The traditional way of managing the committee has been for officers to prepare reports and then members to scrutinise this at committee meetings. It is proposed that the agenda is split into two halves: children in care and care leavers. The children in care section would continue in a more traditional way as described.
15. The care leaver section could be managed differently with a thematic approach where officers responsible for those areas would attend. A presentation would be made about the area, and then a workshop approach would be taken whereby committee members would be invited to question and discuss, with an aim of developing recommendations for improvement. The workshops will produce targeted actions that thematic groups can take away to put into practice to make lasting change for care leavers.
16. The suggested main themes would be housing; education, employment and training; health and wellbeing. Others could be developed depending on the areas that might be considered important at the beginning of the year "kick off" meeting (see 17 below), and capacity of the committee. It would be expected that those attending for the themed areas would be at Director level within the council, and at a most senior level from other organisations.
17. The municipal year would start with a 'kick-off' meeting. This will present performance data about the outcomes for care leavers and plans for improvement. This will help the committee look at what is happening in Southwark, in comparison to neighbours and nationally. Quality and performance analysts could be available at the meeting to respond to detailed questions to deepen understanding. The whole approach would help the committee develop its plan for the year with areas of focus for the year ahead as well as being a place to question the whole approach to improvement.
18. The committee may develop, as part of its agenda, engagement with some

areas between committee meetings. For example historically the committee has sometimes taken the opportunity to meet with SpeakerBox during some school holidays at focused events. These engagement opportunities could still be planned as an important aspect of the work of the committee that builds their knowledge and understanding, and thus the committee's capacity to deliver its role and function

## **Corporate Parenting Committee work plan – draft outline**

### **2 November 2022**

#### *Children in care*

- Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report
- Sufficiency strategy update
- Annual Fostering report 2019-20
- Speakerbox verbal update.

#### *Care Leavers*

Workshop theme – To be agreed

### **1 March 2023**

#### *Children in care*

- Annual health report for looked after children
- Ofsted report update for committee
- Children with disabilities
- Housing issues for young people / semi-independent accommodation
- Speakerbox verbal update.

#### *Care Leavers*

Workshop theme – To be agreed

### **19 April 2023**

#### *Children in care*

Speakerbox verbal update

#### *Care Leavers*

Workshop theme – To be agreed

## **SpeakerBox**

19. SpeakerBox, established in 2005, ensures that the views of looked after children and care leavers are used to influence decision making that affects their care and support particularly service planning and design.

Representing children and young people between 8 and 24 years the group also provides a peer to peer networking support system for looked after children. The programme is operated independently and run by the young people themselves, although it is supported by the council's Children Services and councillors.

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

#### **Community impact statement**

5. The work of the corporate parenting committee contributes to community cohesion and stability.

#### **Equalities (including socio-economic) impact and health impact statement**

6. Relevant issues will be addressed in the reports submitted to the corporate parenting committee.

#### **Climate change implications**

7. The work plan process for the committee has no direct implications.

#### **Resource implications**

8. There are no specific implications arising from this report.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

<b>Background Papers</b>	<b>Held At</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Minutes of meetings of Corporate Parenting Committee	Constitutional Team 160 Tooley Street London SE1 2QH	<a href="mailto:Paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk">Paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk</a>
<b>Web link:</b> <a href="http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=129&amp;Year=0">http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=129&amp;Year=0</a>		

### **APPENDICES**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Title</b>
None	



**AUDIT TRAIL**

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Alasdair Smith, Director, Children and Families	
<b>Report Author</b>	Beverley Olamijulo/ Paula Thornton, Constitutional Team	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	19 October 2022	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Director of Law and Governance	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	19 October 2022	

**CORPORATE PARENTING DISTRIBUTION LIST (OPEN)****MUNICIPAL YEAR 2022-23**

**NOTE:** Original held by Constitutional Team; all amendments/queries to  
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Name	No of copies	Name	No of copies
<b>Membership</b>		Paula Thornton/Beverley Olamijulo	12
Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)	1		
Councillor Darren Merrill	1	<b>Total:</b>	14
<b>Electronic versions (No hard copy)</b>		<b>Dated:</b> 25 October 2022	
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Councillor Rachel Bentley			
Councillor Esme Dobson			
Councillor Natasha Ennin			
Councillor Charlie Smith			
<b>Reserve members – electronic copy</b>			
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Councillor Sunny Lambe			
Councillor Kimberly McIntosh			
Councillor Joseph Vambe			
Councillor Irina Von Wiese			
<b>Co-opted members</b>			
Mark Kerr (email)			
Rosamond Marshall (email)			
<b>Children’s Services - electronic versions (No hard copy)</b>			
David Quirke-Thornton			
Alasdair Smith			
<b>Legal – electronic version (no hard copy)</b>			
Sarah Feasey			