

Item No. 8	Classification: Open	Date: 6 July 2022	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Southwark Adoption Performance in 2021-2022	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Alasdair Smith, Director of Children and Families	

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. This report sets out how Southwark children in care with a permanence plan¹ for adoption have progressed during 2021-22. It gives an overview of all the key performance measures to achieve permanence for every child in the timescale that is right for them.
5. The council is the host to Adopt London South (ALS) providing adoption services to nine south London boroughs. From the 1 April 2022 ALS has grown to 10 boroughs with Greenwich joining.
6. ALS is one the largest regional adoption agencies (RAA) in the country in terms of numbers of local authorities in a partnership. ALS is part of Adopt London, a group of 4 RAAs covering 23 London local authorities. Adopt London combines a wealth of expertise in the capital, bringing together children with safe, secure, loving and permanent adoptive families.

¹Permanence means making a long-term plan for how a child will be cared for which lasts throughout their childhood. There are a range of options for permanence, inside and outside of the care system. Knowledge and Skills Statement: Achieving Permanence

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Southwark Data – Children’s Activity

7. The chart below shows the key adoption activity for children in the Council’s care in 2021-22 and the comparison data over the last four years.

Activity Overview - children	21 - 22	20- 21	19-20	18-19
Decision that a plan for adoption is in child’s best interests (called Best Interests Decision or Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decision)	15	11	9	8
Children with a Placement Order made (plan for adoption agreed by Court)	13	8	9	5
Children matched with adopters at panel and agreed by Agency Decision Maker (ADM)	10	11	2	4
Children with an Adoption Order granted	9	4	5	12

8. It is really positive that in 2021-22 10 children were matched with adoptive families a similar number to in 2020-21 and a significant increase on the previous two years.
9. There is a clear correlation between the number of Best Interest / ADM decisions and the number of Placement Orders granted. There is in the data a correlation with numbers of Placement Orders granted in 2020-21, and the numbers of children being matched with adoptive families during 2021-22.
10. The number of adoptions was more than double the previous year with nine children being adopted in 2021-22.

Early Permanence Planning

11. During 2021-22 there continued to be a strong focus on achieving permanence for every child in the timescale that is right for them. At legal panels and the fortnightly pre-proceedings meetings there is a continuous focus on planning for

permanence as early as possible including robustly considering all family options for children and consideration of early permanence placements.

12. Excellent collaborative working together arrangements are in place with the family finding team from ALS tracking children where adoption may be a possibility and attending permanence planning meetings. Permanence planning meetings ensure effective parallel planning always considering if an early permanence placement may be appropriate and avoid disruption and unnecessary moves for children.
13. Early permanence placements enable children to be placed with prospective adopters approved as foster carers who can, if the court agree an adoption plan, go on to adopt the children they are caring for.
14. Early permanence shifts the uncertainty away from children, to the adults that care for them, enabling children to achieve permanence more swiftly. It is a really positive achievement that in 2021-22 four children were placed in early permanence placements and out of the 9 adopted this year 3 had been placed in early permanence placements. It was also fantastic that two siblings were placed together in an early permanence placement in 2021-22.

Matches of children in Care with adopters

15. Ten children were matched with prospective adopters at Adoption Panels during in 2021-22.
16. The age range of children matched at panel in 2021-22 ranges from 8 months to aged 8. All of these children were single children i.e. not in sibling groups.
17. Of the ten children who 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.
18. In 2020-21 63% of matches were White British children and for 2021-22 this was 40% of children. Positively 60% of matches in 2021-22 were children who are Black and from a global majority background an increase from 36% in 2020-21.

Adoption Scorecard and Timescales for Southwark Children

19. Adoption scorecards have been published by the Department for Education annually since 2012. They measure local authority performance against many adoption indicators but two are regarded as key indicators and these are set out in the table below

Measure	2014-2017	2015-2018	2018-2021	2020-21	2021-22
A10: Average time (days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, adjusted for foster carer adoptions	572	540	326	340	362
A2: Average time (days) between Placement Order and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family	265	231	162	111	206

20. The chart above shows some decline in timescale performance in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21 but still much better performance when compared to 2014 – 2018.
21. For children where adoption is the right care plan ensuring children move without delay is absolutely essential. As had been predicted last year the A10 figure this year is impacted by an increase in the average duration of care proceedings significantly impacted by the pandemic in line with nationally identified concerns.
22. The A2 figures measures from when the Court grant a Placement Order to when a match is agreed. For 2020-21 the A2 figure is 206 days. Although the performance in this area does not meet the Government threshold of 91 days, it is understood this timescale reflects positively that for some children who had waited a long time families were found that are matched to their needs. For this measure the quickest match was within 57 days from the Placement Order being granted. The longest match was for a child with complex needs and took 726 days but was an excellent outcome for this child who has thrived and now been adopted.
23. For every child with a plan of adoption from the point of this plan being agreed by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) there is monthly scrutiny at the Permanence Taskforce on the family finding activity by ALS and progression to finding a match. The service has a culture of learning and for every child the

reasons for any delay are well understood and there is challenge to consider what more can be done to overcome the barriers to every child achieving permanence in the timescale that is right for them.

Changes of Plan from Adoption to Long term foster care

24. In 2022-2021 the council applied to the Court for four children to seek to change the care plan to long term fostering in all four cases this was agreed by the Court. The children for whom the plan was changed were aged from three years to eight years and for all four children there had been extensive family finding for over 18 months and a prospective adoptive family had not been found.
25. All four children with a change of care plan are from a Black and global majority background. Three of the children are male and one child is female. Adopt London's Black Adoption project indicates that for the last 5 years Black children had waited on average 7 months longer than white children. They were also much more likely to have a change of plan away from adoption because a placement could not be found for them.
26. Two of the children where the plan changed to long term fostering have now been matched with long term foster placements at the Fostering Panel and the other two children are in foster placements planned to be long term and should be formally matched in the next 6 months.

Children Adopted

27. In 2020-21 there were 9 children adopted this was an increase from the previous year when 4 children were adopted.
28. The age range of the children adopted was from aged under 1 to aged 5 years old. Two children adopted are of mixed heritage, one child is Black Caribbean and six children are White British.
29. As at June 2022 when writing this report there has been three Adoption Orders granted since 1st April 2022, two children placed in early permanence placements and there are six children placed for adoption the current data is indicative that at least 10-12 children will be adopted in 2022-23.

Reflections and Plans for 2021-2022

30. The most urgent challenge in adoption remains the racial disparity in finding adoptive families and this is a key priority for the Council and ALS. It remains very evident nationally and for children in the borough that Black children and those from an ethnic minority wait longer to find an adoptive family and they are

statistically more likely for their plan to be reversed and adopters not found. The Adopt London communications team prioritise attracting more Black families and finding families for children with additional needs.

31. The council offers packages of help and support to adopters to care for children who have additional needs and to ensure for all children with a plan of adoption finances for a potential family are not a barrier to being able to adopt. It is also recognised for some children being adopted by their current foster carer may be the best plan and in these circumstances bespoke packages of support are set out in the adoption support plan linked to children's needs.
32. In light of longer periods in Court proceedings, the service is exploring how more can be done to obtain permission for Court for sharing information so that greater proactive work can be done to identify a match prior to a Placement Order being granted.
33. The service and colleagues in the council's legal department, have totally embraced early permanence for children and recognise this offers the best experience of stability for children with a plan of adoption. In 2022-23 we will seek to challenge ourselves more identifying children who will benefit from early permanence and expanding to sibling groups and consideration of this permanence option for older children.

Policy framework implication

34. There are no policy implications

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

Community impact statement

35. Southwark is committed to ensuring children with an adoption plan, from all parts of the community, are enabled to live with families able to meet most of their needs as soon as possible

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

36. Southwark are committed to working with ALS in addressing the inequality noted on this report in how long Black children wait for adoptive families.

Health impact statement

37. There are none.

Climate change implications

38. There are none.

Resource implications

39. There are none.

Legal implications

40. There are none.

Financial implications

41. There are none.

Consultation

42. There are none.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Law and Governance

43. There are none.

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

44. There are none.

Other officers

45. There are none.

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Adopt London South Performance Report for Southwark April 2021 to March 2022

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	David Quirke-Thornton, Strategic Director of Children's and Adults' Services	
Report Author	Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director - Safeguarding and Care and Susanna Dauss, Head of Service, Adopt London South Regional Adoption Agency	
Version	Final	
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Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Governance	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		27 June 2022