

# Annual Report

## Southwark Adoption Service



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## **KEY MESSAGES**

Adoption performance continues to improve in Southwark on almost all measures including most impressively a 95% increase in the number of children adopted in the last 2 years.

We still need to continue do some things quicker particularly match children with adopters.

There have been significant developments within the national landscape of adoption and the Council's Adoption Service has responded well to this.

## **PURPOSE OF ANNUAL REPORT**

The purpose of the document is to report on the activity of the Adoption Service fulfilling obligations in the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) to report to the executive side of the local authority. It will cover: performance and developments in Southwark's delivery of adoption services; how the Council is compliant with key national minimum standards; and the service offered to those seeking to adopt and those affected by adoption through the provision of adoption support. It will also identify any significant trends within adoption and how Southwark can continue to meet the changing demands within the Adoption Service. This report details the work of Southwark Council Adoption Service from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> end March 2015.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Adoption is one of the most important and significant decisions that can be made for a child. As part of its wider agenda to create a fairer future for the most vulnerable children and families, Southwark Council wants every child to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. For those young children who cannot remain or return safely to their birth families, adoption offers them the best opportunity to experience a warm and loving family environment throughout life.

The adoption of children from care has a high profile nationally. Southwark continues to develop in its practice and systems in order to deliver the extensive change agenda presented in various Government papers including Adoption an Action Plan for Tackling Delay (March 2012) and Further Action on Adoption-Finding More Loving Families (January 2013). Many of the propositions in these papers have gone on to become embedded in new Law, regulation and statutory guidance since this time and the Council's Adoption Service and wider system has responded well to these changes and challenges.

Over the last year the impact of the reforms to the Family Justice System has been felt through the commencement in April 2014 of the Public Law Outline. It was introduced in July 2013 and has come into full effect to reduce the duration of Care Proceedings. As well as this, the impact of the Court of Appeal cases re.B (June 2013) and re. BS (September 2013), triggering a more robust approach to decision making, has been visible in the significant reduction of children available for adoption through Placement Orders being made in the year. Within the year the Children and Families Act 2014 introduced reforms relating to adoption including: requiring Fostering for Adoption to be considered for all children unable to be placed with friends and family and repealing the requirement that 'due consideration' is given to children's racial, religious, cultural or linguistic background when matching them with adopters. The Council's Children's Scrutiny sub-committee also took a close look at the delivery of adoption services from October 2014 to a planned Policy Seminar in April 2015.

## PERFORMANCE

Activity Overview - children	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Children with a Placement Order made (plan for adoption agreed by Court)	21	40	42
Children matched with adopters	32	29	28
Children with an Adoption Order granted	39	33	20

Numbers of children adopted have continued to increase, a 95% increase in two years far exceeding the national, London and statistical neighbour trend. For 2014/15 this was 14% of those who left care which is a great rise from 5% on 2010. This is good performance compared to the last available data from similar authorities and London wide.

Numbers of Placement Orders made reduced by almost 50% in 2014/15. This will have an impact on our numbers of adoptions next year as well as continuing to influence our recruitment strategy. This reduction is most likely to have been due to the impact of the Court of Appeal cases re B and re BS alongside reforms to the family justice system. One of the concerns nationally has been this reduction has led to an increase in Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) being made as an alternative to adoption. In 2014/15 28 SGOs were made an increase of 7 from the previous year. There is not sufficient evidence within Southwark to show this relationship definitely at this stage as in 2012/13 there were 26 SGOs made. It is an area we need to watch closely during 2015/16.

### Adoption timeliness

Rolling 3-year average				
2008/11	2009/12	2010/13	2011/14	2012/15
734	775	736	684	593
		Threshold 608	Threshold 548	Threshold 487

*the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (A1)*

The table shows continuing improvement. The figure for the performance year 2014/15 is 515 days which is significantly better performance compared to statistical neighbours (575), London (566) and the national figures (533). 77% of children wait less than 18 mths

25% of adoptions in 2014/15 were with foster carers in situations where the children were already living with them, all from when they entered care.

Rolling 3-year average				
2008/11	2009/12	2010/13	2011/14	2012/15
n/a	466	518	488	464

*the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster care adoptions (A10)*

### Matching children with adopters

Rolling 3 year average (days)				
2008/11	2009/12	2010/13	2011/14	2012/15
93	173	218	233	243
		Threshold 182	Threshold 152	Threshold 122

*the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and match decision (A2)*

This is the only adoption scorecard measure, out of 14, where performance has declined. A detailed analysis has been undertaken. Children in this cohort are only counted once they have been adopted. Only 15% of the adoptions in 2014/15 were matched in that year. Thus the measure captures historic not recent matching activity.

There were two main areas that explain this performance. Firstly, with more children adopted in a year than ever before this inevitably included a significant number of harder to place children including one child who had a previous adoption placement breakdown. These children generally take longer to find families for because of the level of their need. 15% of children adopted were over 5 years old and they all took significantly longer to place. These children have a disproportionate effect on the overall average. The 95% increase in numbers of children adopted in the last two years has inevitably meant that this included some children who had been waiting a long time. The second main area was a number of practice and system issues that were understood and addressed within the year. Most significant has been the transformation of the Adoption Service to a systemic model or practice mid-year in September 2014. This included a transition to children's cases being held within the Adoption Service to minimise delay and strengthen the quality of practice with more emphasis on early tracking for adoption alongside social workers in other services.

Matching practice has shown significant considerable improvement during 2014/15. The last quarter of 2014/15 showed an average of 111 days for 9 children. This is strongly influenced by adoption by foster carers including fostering for adoption. Indications about performance for 2015/16 show that improvement will continue, however with children who are harder to place continuing to comprise a significant proportion of those we need to find families for, and the numbers of children available for adoption declining, it will still be an area that needs continuing focus and challenge.

## Children waiting for adoption

Rolling 3 year average				
2008/11	2009/12	2010/13	2011/14	2012/15
52%	53% (21 months)	57% (20 months)	57% (18 months)	<b>64%</b>

*the percentage of children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (A3)*

The last national data available on this shows the national average as 51% which places Southwark in a much stronger position. A cohort analysis shows no difference in gender, however, black children are more likely to wait longer than 21 months compared to white children. The in year figure for 2014/15 shows 77% moving in within 18 months which continues to show excellent performance.

Number of children waiting for adoption 31 <sup>st</sup> March				
2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
35	44	48	45	18

This shows a dramatic decline in numbers of children waiting of 60% over the last year which is evidence of a much stronger system. Of the 18 children defined as waiting for adoption:

- 2 living with foster carers who were applying directly to the court to adopt
- 6 linked with adopters to be matched in the following 2 months
- 2 in court, one with a challenge to the adoption plan that was successful and another application for a Placement Order but delayed due to another family assessment.
- 8 waiting for adoption in the sense that we were actively looking for families for them. Only 1 of these children was not in a sibling group.

The Adoption Service extensively uses all means possible to find adopters for children. The system is overseen by the Adoption Taskforce chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care that meets monthly and reviews all children waiting for adoption were there may be concerns about delay. The service has made extensive and successful use of adoption activity days and Adoption Link as well as successful family finding through strong links within the South London Adoption Consortium and other London local authorities through the consortium network. All resources possible are used including DVDs and iPads to be able to show prospective adopters the most recent picture of children. Creative support packages that have been designed around the needs of the child in the adoptive family have enabled children with a higher level of needs to be adopted. Just over a quarter of adoptions in 2014/15 were transracial showing a strong commitment to matching children based on a range of their needs embracing the change in law in this area.

## Siblings

It is important as far as possible for siblings to be placed together. Sometimes the needs of each sibling are too great for one carer to be able to meet them all. Siblings are considered harder to place because of their greater needs and the smaller pool of adopters who wish to care for them. All sibling groups for whom there is a plan of adoption are assessed using the Together or Apart Assessment Model (BAAF 2008). Of the 39 children adopted during 2014/15 there were 4 sibling groups of 2. None were separated from siblings. Of the 31 children matched with adopters in 2014/15 this included 4 sibling groups of 2 as well as 3 children with adopters of older siblings. Only one child was separated from another sibling although this was part of the care plan agreed by the Court. The profile of our children waiting for adoption makes this an area of particular challenge for 2015/16 with an increased appreciation of outcomes for children being better the sooner they move to their adoptive family.

<b>Activity Overview - adopters</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
<b>Adopters approved</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Adoption inquiries</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>Adoption breakdowns prior to Adoption Order</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

## Recruitment of adopters

Numbers of approved adopters have decreased during 2014/15. The previous year saw a dramatic rise in the number of approved adopters following the Find 40 Campaign that achieved a national profile. The reduction in 2014/15 is in part attributable to a deliberate easing off in campaigning for prospective adopters. Within year we saw a reduction in children becoming available for adoption, and continuing from the previous year, a significant increase in numbers of adopters available without children. Our need for adopters developed to being particularly for those of harder to place children.

The 2014/15 Recruitment Strategy has been delivered and evaluated and a new strategy has been devised for 2015/16 with a continuing focus on harder to place children. This strategy was successful in helping account for the unprecedented numbers of children adopted during 2014/15. Of the 25 approved during 2015/16, six adoptive households had children placed with them from other local authorities. Four of these were sibling groups of 2, two of these were sibling groups of 3. We are clearly effective in recruiting adopters willing to take sibling groups although they weren't able to be matched to the sibling groups we had waiting.

Southwark Foster Carers continue to make up a significant proportion of adopters. Only 2 approved adopters of the 25 was a foster carer already caring for a child, 25% of children adopted in the year were by their foster carers who had either been approved in a previous year or made a direct application to the court for this.

There have been 262 adoption enquiries in the last year. This is significantly down but is explained through the easing off in campaigning as described above and good year in 2014/15 with the Find 40 campaign. It is still almost 20% up on the previous year. Enquiries are defined as a person contacting Southwark to discuss their interest in becoming an adopter. Telephone enquiries are managed by First for Adoption.

### **Adopter Assessment timeliness**

In 2014/15 there were 25 adopters approved. Of these two were single female adopters, five were same sex couples, and the rest were heterosexual couples, either married or in a partnership. Around 25% of approved adopters were non-white.

20 of the 25 approved adopters were assessed under the adoption assessment statutory guidance introduced in July 2013. This requires prospective adopters to be assessed within 6 months as part of a two stage process. The six months can be exceeded if an adopter is particularly struggling with the process or a significant life event takes place that leads to delay. 20% (4) of adopters approved under the new statutory guidance were assessed within 6 months. The average length of an assessment was 233 days.

Of the 16 that were outside the 6 month timescale, 4 were due to adopters requesting to delay the process, either taking a break between Stage 1 and 2 or for a personal reason within one of the assessment stages. The remaining 12 were due reasons explored further below.

37% of Stage 1 assessments were completed within 2 months. 26% of assessments delayed due to adopters for reasons including issues with: getting the equivalent to DBS checks from their country of origin: delays in adopters getting their initial medical reports from their GP; and issues over completing the Stage 1 workbook to a satisfactory standard. 26% of assessment were delayed due to other reasons more in the control and influence of the Adoption Service including delays in sending off DBS checks and problems with receiving medical reports from the local authority's medical advisor when initial adopter assessments identified more complicated medical histories.

45% of Stage 2 assessments were completed within 4 months. 20% were delayed due to adopters struggling with the process or significant life events for them. This is permissible within the statutory guidance and so should not be considered out of timescale. 35% were delayed due to other reasons more in the control and influence of the Adoption Service including workforce changes; lack of management oversight of assessment progress; and delays due to additional work required to improve the quality of Prospective Adopter Assessment.

Overall therefore 65% of Stage 2 adoption assessments in 2014/15 were within the guidelines set out by the statutory guidance. There is clearly considerable room to tighten and improve this process.

### **Adoption disruptions**

There were two disruptions of placements of children placed for adoption prior to an Adoption Order being made during 2014/15. There was no information about any post-Adoption Order placements by Southwark disrupting in the year.

6 adoption placements have disrupted prior to Adoption Order in the years 2006 to 2015. 3 were placements with voluntary adoption agencies, 2 with Southwark, 1 with another local authority. This is a disruption rate of around 2%. The estimated rate of post-order disruption is 3.2% from national research. There is no data on pre-order disruption.

Any disruption of an adoption placement is a very difficult experience for everyone involved, most importantly the child but also the adoptive parent. The Adoption Service takes an in-depth look at the reasons for each disruption both in relation to the child and adopter but also the practice and systems of the Adoption Service. The learning from such processes is incorporated into the ongoing development of the service.

## **ADOPTION SUPPORT**

The need for Adoption Support has continued to grow as more children have been placed for adoption and adopted. In 2014/15, as part of the Social Work Matters transformation, the Council brought its Special Guardianship Support Service alongside post-adoption support to develop an improved offer for both groups of carers. A survey of adopters was conducted in April 2015. 24 adopters responded, 75% rated the overall service as good or excellent. The survey contained very helpful comments on the service and what adopters felt would help develop the offer for adoptive families. That has informed the development plans for the service for 2015/16.

Adoption support plans are tailored to the individual needs of the child and their adoptive parent. There is a good range of effective pre- and post-adoption support provided by the in-house workers and commissioned services that are spot purchased as needed. The nature of support provided varies considerably from advice on strategies for integrating children into families, managing challenging behaviour and support with telling difficult life story information as well as requests for professional advice and help for children in school where early developmental trauma has led to attachment difficulties. 57 assessments were made for post-adoption support post Adoption Order for adoptive families. All of these were provided with support packages. On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 there were 169 financial support packages for adopters. We have been more creative in our use of financial packages for adopters to enable more children to be adopted. For a small number of adopters this has included guaranteed sum of money for them to use for any therapy or training they require throughout the duration of the child's placement.

### **Support Groups**

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

WAF run a weekly support group which alternates between a morning play group one week and an evening adopter support group the next. These groups have both a support and social function and meet in Southwark. In addition WAF have a once a month Family Meeting at the weekend to involve and include adoptive families who are working in the week. WAF also run a monthly support groups for adopters who are waiting for children who are placed and have invited social workers from Southwark's post adoption service to share information at their group.



## **Training**

A rolling programme of training and workshops is provided for adoptive parents directly by the Adoption Service as well as training available through the South London Consortium and training events run by WAF. In 2014/15 this included a Parenting Course facilitated by Family Futures "*the Great Behaviour Breakdown*" and rolling Saturday Workshops on Building Attachments, Moving into Placement, Helping Children to make sense of adoption and the Great Behaviour Breakdown.

A survey of adopters conducted in April 2015. 24 responded and 75% of those felt the training was either good or excellent. This survey and other work with WAF has led to a number of suggestions to develop the learning offer for adopters that have been incorporated into the training programme for 2015/16. These include 'Understanding and supporting adolescents who are adopted' as well as specific training around child to parent violence (Non Violent Resistance) and Supporting Adopted Children with Education.

## **Adoption Support Fund**

The Adoption Support Fund will open for business on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015 with 19.3 million available for agencies to apply for on behalf of their adoptive families for the provision of therapeutic services. The fund has been set up to reduce the gap between adoptive families needing therapeutic services and receiving them. From January 2015 the Adoption Service worked closely with a consultant from Core Assets to make itself ready for the launch of the fund including plans for market development and funding of Southwark Carelink (CAMHS) therapeutic help for adoptive children which was identified by the consultant as an area of excellent practice.

## **Post Adoption Contact**

The Adoption Service managed around 160 'letterbox' contacts during 2014/15 as well as 11 face to face contacts between adopted children and their birth families. The nature of this contact will vary from an annual meeting to very complex arrangements involving a number of birth family members (siblings, grandparents and parents).

The impact of social networking on adoption is far reaching and extremely difficult to support effectively. There can be safeguarding concerns as young people don't recognise the issues that necessitated the plan for adoption. It can also undermine the stability of the adoptive placement. During 2014/15 we offered training to adopters in relation to this through a number of specific courses commissioned through the South London Adoption Consortium and such training is an essential part of the preparation of being an adopter.

## **Work with birth families**

The Adoption Service has a contract with South London Adoption Counselling and Consultation Service to provide independent counselling for birth parents. The take up of this service has been increasing over the last 2/3 years with increasing promotion of this advocated by the Adoption Service. In 2014/15 9 birth parents made use of this service and the service was also provided to one birth grandmother.

In June 2015 the Council will be commencing a pilot project aimed at supporting parents who have had children repeatedly removed from their care. Southwark Pause will work with 20 women using an assertive outreach model. The pilot will last 18 months. This is a fantastic and creative approach based on the emerging success of the model within Hackney and offer birth parents a unique opportunity for high level support. Southwark Pause will work very closely with the Adoption Service and considerable preparatory work has taken place.

### **Birth records counselling**

The Council has a legal responsibility to provide a birth record counselling service to adult adoptees. The number of requests increases each year with growing requests from younger adopted people. In 2014/15 54 adult adoptees were supported in this way, an increase of almost 40% on the previous year. 13 of these were provided through arrangements with a Voluntary Adoption Agency.

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

The Adoption Service has a clear quality assurance framework. This includes: effective adoption panel scrutiny; comprehensive adopter feedback; management review including audit activity; as well as learning from complaints and disruption.

### **Adoption Panel**

Adoption Panels recommend: prospective adopters for approval as adopters; matches for approved adopters with children; and the suitability of relinquished children for adoption. The final decision, based on the panel's recommendations is made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) Rory Patterson, Director of Children's Social Care.

Southwark's Adoption Panels meets twice a month.

All Adoption Panels are independently chaired. The chair writes a six-monthly report on the activity of the Adoption Service. The last report up to March 2015 identifies the main areas for comment: the establishment of a stable workforce following a period of change; largely good or excellent Child Permanence Reports; as well as improvement in the quality of Prospective Adopter Reports. The report makes comment on timescales which are considered in detail elsewhere in this report.

During 2014/15 the Adoption Service has worked hard with the Adoption Panel to make best use of the its quality assurance potential by: developing a more systematic approach to feedback and identifying issues that need improving; strengthening the Central List particularly in relation to diversity; as well as improving the stability of business support to enable it to function most effectively. There are termly meetings with the Head of Service and independent chair and vice-chairs as well as other key staff to facilitate good communication between the panel and the agency to focus on continuing improvement.

## **Adopter feedback**

Adopter's views on the Adoption Service are gained as part of the assessment process but also routinely by questionnaire following approval. The feedback from adopters through the questionnaire for those approved in 2014/15 was a 40% response rate. Almost 100% of the 4 questions asking for adopters views on how well social worker worked with them in different areas (quality of social work assessment practice) answered either 'well' or 'very well'. This is a heartening view on the quality of our work. 40% of adopters did feel there were unnecessary delays in the process of assessment with some comments around needing to improve the administrative side of this. Other areas noted for improvement were in the written information for panel and need for a simpler information leaflet about the process of assessment.

Adopters views were gained to inform preparation for the Adoption Support Fund (February 2015) and in a survey at the Adoption Party in April 2015. The feedback from these processes are set out in the relevant sections below.

The Adoption Service works collaboratively with Southwark We Are Family, an adopter led support and advocacy group. There is a termly meeting with them that is a focal point for dialogue between the large adopter community that they represent and the Adoption Service. This has contributed to a number of service developments including the establishment of a support group for approved adopters who do not have children placed with them and involvement with the Adoption Service in making itself ready for the implementation of the Adoption Support Fund and development of its training programme. Southwark We Are Family was involved in the focus group that was part of the Review of Adoption by the Council's Children's Scrutiny sub-committee during 2014/15.

## **Management overview and audit activity**

Case file audits have been carried out during 2014/15 and an audit plan developed for 2015/16. There was an identified need to make clear recording and practice standards so there was a consistency of approach across different functions of the service. The quality assurance approach to Child Permanence Reports was strengthened with every one being audited prior to being presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision about suitability for adoption. A peer audit approach was commenced to try and improve the quality of Adoption Support Plans by engaging workers more in the process of ownership and reflection. There has been a more focused approach to auditing family finding activity, exploring the reasons for any delays to plug such learning back into the system in a dynamic way.

## **Complaints**

There were 7 complaints made regarding the Adoption Service during the year. A number of themes emerged including: providing better and clearer advice about the assessment and approval process; working pro-actively with adopters post-approval; developing a more systematic approach to later life letters and life-story work to ensure these are received sooner; and better continuity of practice when there are changes of worker. A lot of the underlying causes of these complaints relate to the changes to the Adoption Service particularly around workforce during 2014/15 that are described in more detail below and service developments have taken full account of the learning from these.

## REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS DURING 2014/15

The following significant developments were made in the Adoption Service during 2014/15

**Establishment of a systemic model of social work practice.** This included the forming of 4 practice groups led by an Advanced Practitioner and supported by a full time business support role. They meet weekly and share responsibility for work. There is no clinical practitioner in the Adoption Service so these are not multi-disciplinary teams. Carelink (CAMHS) work closely with the service which has benefitted particularly from the assessment and interventions offered by the SUSI Project where all children in care under 4 years old are assessed for their social and emotional functioning and a bespoke intervention for the carer and child delivered to improve the quality of care aiming to have a long term impact on the child's mental and emotional well-being. This is a high quality provision that has had a direct and beneficial impact on strengthening adoptive placements.

**Separation of responsibility and practice into 3 areas:** children and family finding; assessment and support of adopters; post-permanence (Adoption and Special Guardianship). It was felt that quality of practice could be improved and timescales for children and adopters better managed by more focused arrangements. This is particularly useful given the range of experience and competence within the service and intensity and complexity of some of the work.

**Children allocated within the Adoption Service from point of Placement Order.** This practice began to happen during late 2014. Children with Placement Orders and adoption plans are still allocated within other services to retain continuity of worker but during 2015 it is expected that all children where adoption is being actively pursued as the plan will be in the Adoption Service. This is anticipated to have many practice benefits by reducing delay by intense focus on family finding by workers who know the child as well as quality practice with carers and children including direct work and life story work. The signs are this is having the impact it was designed to deliver.

**Establishment of a stable permanent workforce.** The Adoption Improvement Grant for 2013/14 enabled the Adoption Service to increase its capacity quickly to deliver improved adoption outcomes. Initially this was through use of largely agency staff who provided extra capacity as well as covering for 4 full time posts during maternity leave. During 2014/15, coordinated with the Social Work Matters transformation, and the return of experienced workers from maternity leave, we moved to an almost exclusively permanent workforce. This is a highly experienced and competent workforce although some fairly new to adoption work. They have high potential and this is an excellent and exciting platform on which to continue to improve adoption within Southwark.

**Early Permanence including Fostering for Adoption.** The focus on early permanence has developed particularly around developing the practice of Permanence Consultations to other services as well as improving systems to track children where there is a prospect of adoption to reduce delay as far as possible. Southwark now has an effective Fostering for Adoption Scheme that was developed in a way that is sustainable and integrated into the main business of the Adoption Service as well as linking closely with Carelink and the Contact Service. 2014/15 saw 3 children placed in these arrangements although 4 children matched in the year were placed previously with foster parents with a plan of adoption under fostering regulations before the Fostering for Adoption regulations were enacted. The Adoption Panel became fully fit for purpose to approve such carers and we have a pool of carers available for suitable children.

## **DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR 2015/16**

2014/15 was a time of unprecedented change for children's social work in Southwark. The modernisation of the Adoption Service as part of this has been substantial. With the establishment of a new management team and an almost exclusively permanent, stable and highly competent workforce, the main task of this year is to consolidate the gains that have been made and use this as a secure base to develop the potential of the system and individuals in it to achieve and sustain permanence for as many children as possible through adoption, and do so quicker.

The Development Plan 2015/16 has specific objectives ensuring:

**Children go to live with their adoptive families quicker and without delay.** We will continue to be tough on delay, and tough on the causes of delay. We have a rolling programme of audits specifically focused on family finding developing dynamic learning. This has embedded new practice standards within the service. The system tracking and Permanence Consultations as well as offer of early permanence options through Southwark's Fostering for Adoption scheme will be consolidated and grown including strengthening relationships with other services. The approach will continue to be overseen by the Adoption Taskforce.

**Prospective adopters are well supported and assessed within timescales.** We will continue to build on the feedback from adopters about the strong areas of our practice around quality of assessment work. We will improve on timeliness of our assessments and their administration as well as develop our feedback approach with adopters to hear more systematically about how effective our support is following approval.

**There are more than enough adopters available to meet the needs of all our children.** We will continue to review and evaluate our recruitment approach but also work tirelessly with all adoption agencies, using all methods possible, to explore possible placements for children. We will continue to attend Adoption Activity Days anywhere in the UK as appropriate and continue to make extensive use of Adoption Link and strong links within the South London Adoption Consortium.

**We have an excellent post permanence support service.** We will make extensive use of the Adoption Support Fund particularly to gain if possible a funded post within CAMHS to work exclusively with adopters and children, recognising the work that already happens, but giving opportunities to develop this further. We will continue to work with Southwark We Are Family to ensure the views of adoptive families are at the heart of our approach to adoption support.

The service is committed to continuous development and key to this is listening to and working with adoptive families and birth parents to further develop the service. In 2015 a key area of development will be working with the LAC Education Team and PAC-UK to promote awareness of the needs of permanently placed children in Southwark Schools and provide training and consultation from PAC-UK where the need is identified.

**Workers have the knowledge and expertise to make a real difference to children's wellbeing.** This means we will continue to invest in the skills and learning development of our workforce particularly through developing systemic practice but also ensuring all staff are trained at Theraplay Level 1 and some are trained at Level 2. This is so we can offer an increased therapeutic approach to our work with both children and carers to strengthen and support adoptive placements from the earliest point.