

<b>Item No.</b> 10.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 7 July 2021	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Southwark Adoption Performance in 2020-2021	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Care	

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The committee notes the progress of the children in Southwark with a care plan of adoption during 2020/21.
2. The committee notes the activity of the local authority working in partnership with Adopt London South (ALS) during 2020/21.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. This report sets out how Southwark children in care with a permanence<sup>1</sup> plan for adoption have progressed during 2020/21. It gives an overview of all the key performance measures to achieve permanence for every child in the timescale that is right for them.
4. Southwark is the host to Adopt London South (ALS) providing adoption services to nine south London boroughs. ALS is one the largest regional adoption agencies (RAA) in the country in terms of numbers of local authorities in a partnership. It is hosted by Southwark Council. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Permanence 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

5. The chart below shows the key adoption activity for Children in Southwark in 2020 -2021 and the comparison data in Southwark over the last four years.

<b>Activity Overview - children</b>	<b>20 - 21</b>	<b>19- 20</b>	<b>18-19</b>	<b>18-19</b>
Decision that a plan for adoption is in child’s best interests <i>(called Best Interests Decision or Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decision)</i>	11	9	8	14
Children with a Placement Order made (plan for adoption agreed by Court)	8	9	5	11
Children matched with adopters at panel and agreed by Agency Decision Maker (ADM)	11	2	4	12
Children with an Adoption Order granted	4	5	12	14

6. Positively the data shows that in 2020/21 eleven children were matched to adoptive families and this is significant increase from 2019/20 when only two children were matched.
7. There is a clear correlation between the number of Best Interest / ADM decisions and the number of Placement Orders granted. In 2020/21 the Covid-19 pandemic led to severe delays in court hearings for children in court proceedings and this delayed many final court hearings and thus decisions being made. There is in the data a correlation with numbers of Placement Orders granted in 2019/21, and the numbers of children being matched with adoptive families during 2020/21.
8. The number of Adoption Orders granted was very low with only four orders made. This is again a reflection of court delays. Four children had adoption applications submitted in good time and we would have expected those Adoption Orders to have been in place now. These children remain in care until the Adoption Order is made.

### Early Permanence Planning

9. During 2020/21 Southwark have embedded across all services a strengthened approach to permanence planning meetings for all children in care, with a dedicated workflow on the electronic recording system for all children in care and those subject to pre proceedings. This has been achieved by practitioners and managers thinking permanence as early as possible before children becoming entering care through a dedicated legal planning panel that includes consideration of some children pre-birth as well as all those in a formal pre-proceedings process as part of the Public Law Outline, with robust fortnightly

tracking.

10. Excellent collaborative working together arrangements are in place with the Family Finding Team from Adopt London South (ALS) tracking children where adoption may be a possibility and attending permanence planning meetings, the effectiveness of which has been enhanced by virtual working during the pandemic. 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.
11. 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. Early permanence shifts the uncertainty away from children enabling them to achieve permanence more swiftly. It is a really positive achievement that in 2020/21 five Southwark children were placed in early permanence placements which was the most for any of the 9 local authorities part of ALS.

### **Matches of children in care with adopters**

12. Eleven Southwark children have been matched with prospective adopters during 2020/21. This is a significant increase from only two matched at the panel in 2019/20 and five matches in for children 2018/19.
13. The age range of children matched at panel in 2020/21 is under one to aged four. Three out of the eleven children are female and eight are male.
14. Eight children matched at panel were single children and three were siblings with two children together with adopters and a sibling with a separate adopter but a plan of high levels of direct contact. Of the eleven children who were matched at panel in 2020/21, eight benefitted from being matched with ALS approved families. Seven of the children are White British, one child has Black African heritage and three children are of dual heritage.
15. Of all the Southwark children being tracked at all stages by ALS, 76% are Black and of dual heritage and it is very clear that more needs to be done to actively recruit adopters able to meet the needs of children from a Black and ethnic minority background. Recruiting to meet the needs of Black and ethnic Minority children is a key priority for ALS.

### **Adoption scorecard and timescales for Southwark children**

16. 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	20-21	18-21	15-18	14-17
<b>A10:</b> Average time (days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, adjusted for foster carer adoptions	340	326	540	572
<b>A2:</b> Average time (days) between Placement Order and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family	111	162	231	265

17. The chart above shows continuing improvement in these measures since 2014 this means overall children are waiting less time to be matched with their adoptive families.
18. For children where adoption is the right care plan, ensuring they move without delay is essential to give them the best possible opportunity for stability and to enjoy family life. For 2020/21 Southwark performance shows continuous improvement, at A10 (adjusted A1 scorecard measures to include children adopted by their foster carers) is at 340 days. This is partly due to the higher ratio of early permanence placements, reducing the days from Placement Order to match.
19. For 2020/21 the A2 figure is 111 days. Although the performance in this area does not meet the Government threshold of 91 days, this is an improving measure.
20. 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 for every child. The taskforce has a culture of learning and for every child the reasons for any delay are well understood and there is healthy challenge as well as support to consider what more can be done to overcome the barriers to every child achieving permanence in the timescale that is right for them.
21. In 2021/22 the impact of Covid-19 causing significant delays in the court process and thus duration of court proceedings is very likely to negatively impact the A10, measuring the length of time between children entering care and being placed with their adoptive family.

### **Changes of care plan from adoption to long term foster care**

22. In 2020/21 Southwark applied to court for four children to seek to change the care plan from adoption to long term fostering. The children for whom the change plan was agreed by the court were aged from three to ten 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.

23. Three children with a change of care plan are from a Black and ethnic minority background and one child is from a White British background. Three of the children with a change of care plan are male and one child is female.
24. It is not possible to share further detail for individual children in this report as it would risk identifying those children but there are good outcomes for children within this, for example two of the children have remained with their foster carers matched as long term foster carers so their plans for family life have continued undisrupted, it is the intended legal status that has changed to a care rather than an adoptive placement. In the Care Service there is very robust tracking on achieving permanence via long term fostering and being matched modelled on best practice in adoption.

### **Siblings**

25. In Southwark our care planning practice is highly committed that whenever possible siblings should be placed together and where this is not possible it is crucial that placements are found that enable brothers and sisters to stay in touch. Sometimes the needs of each sibling are too great for one carer to be able to meet them all. Siblings are considered more difficult to find the right placement for 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)
26. In 2020/21 there have been four children adopted (Adoption Orders granted), all of them single children. Of the 11 matches agreed at that Adoption Panel during 2020/21 eight were single children, and there was a sibling group of three with two children matched together and a sibling matched with a separate adopter but with a plan of a high level of contact for all three children. One of the single children matched at panel was moving to an adoptive placement where he would be joining his older brother who had been adopted several years previously.

### **Children adopted**

27. In 2020/21 there were four children adopted (Adoption Order made) this was a decrease from the previous year when five children were adopted. The decrease does not fit with the practice that there was a significant increase in the numbers of children matched and placed for adoption with prospective adopters in 2020/21. For an additional four children adoption applications had been lodged with the court but significant delays impacted by Covid 19 meant the court set the final Adoption Court Hearings for after the 31 March 2021.
28. The age range of the children adopted was from aged under one to three years old. Two children adopted were of mixed heritage, one child was White British and one child was Black African. Two children adopted were female and two children were male.
29. As at June 2021 when writing this report there has been one Adoption Order

granted in April 2021, one child placed in a foster to adopt placement and there are ten children placed for adoption and one child just about to start introductions with their prospective adoptive family and so even with delays in Court Hearings the current data is indicative that it is likely that at least 10-12 children will be adopted in 2021/22.

### **Plan for 2021- 2022**

30. The biggest challenge in adoption remains the racial disparity in finding adoptive families for Black children and this is a key priority for Southwark and ALS. It remains very evident nationally and for children in Southwark 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. This requires robust action and challenge to ensure the life chances of these children is not disadvantaged.
31. A focus group in ALS with Black adopters and staff have been meeting looking at how to improve the adopter journey and overcome barriers to identifying more Black adopters and adopters able to meet the needs of Black children. A strategic plan is being developed for all four London Regional Adoption agencies to address this and take positive action on this critical issue. ALS are actively prioritising adoption assessments of Black adopters and adopters able to meet the needs of Black children and are offering all prospective adopters transracial training to be able to meet the needs of more children waiting for families.
32. In 2021/22 a review will take place with ALS to consider how children are profiled to ensure for Southwark children it is clear that there are excellent bespoke packages of support available to ensure support packages and finance is not a barrier to families coming forward to adopt Southwark children.
33. Currently the Coram BAAF Together and Apart Assessment tool is used to inform decision making on children being placed together with their brothers and sisters. This guidance has been updated into a sibling assessment tool that can be more regularly updated and embedded into ongoing assessments. In 2021/22 there is a plan for a working group to embed across services the new sibling assessments and ensure they are embedded in practice and in our electronic recording system (MOSAIC) workflow.

### **Community impact statement**

34. 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.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

## AUDIT TRAIL

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