

Chief Officer Confirmation of Report Submission	
Cabinet Member Confirmation of Briefing	
Report for: Mayor	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mayor and Cabinet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mayor and Cabinet (Contracts)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Executive Director	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information <input type="checkbox"/>	Part 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Part 2 <input type="checkbox"/>	Key Decision <input type="checkbox"/>

Date of Meeting	11 th April 2011
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Title of Report	Adoption Service Update, Revised Statement of Purpose and Children's Guides to Adoption
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Originator of Report	Ian Smith	Ext. 48140
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At the time of submission for the Agenda, I confirm that the report has:

Category	Yes	No
Financial Comments from Exec Director for Resources	√	
Legal Comments from the Head of Law	√	
Crime & Disorder Implications		√
Environmental Implications		√
Equality Implications/Impact Assessment (as appropriate)		√
Confirmed Adherence to Budget & Policy Framework		√
Risk Assessment Comments (as appropriate)		√
Reason for Urgency (as appropriate)		

Signed: *Helen Khin* Executive Member

Date: 28th March 2012

Signed: *[Signature]* Executive Director
Date: 28th March 2012

Control Record by Committee Support

Action	Date
Listed on Schedule of Business/Forward Plan (if appropriate)	
Draft Report Cleared at Agenda Planning Meeting (not delegated decisions)	
Submitted Report from CO Received by Committee Support	
Scheduled Date for Call-in (if appropriate)	
To be Referred to Full Council	

MAYOR AND CABINET		
Report Title	Adoption Service Update, Revised Statement of Purpose and Children's Guides to Adoption	
Key Decision	Yes	Item No.
Ward	n/a	
Contributors	Executive Director for Children & Young People	
Class	Open	Date: 11 April 2012

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide the Mayor and Cabinet with an overview of the work of the Adoption Service and the Adoption Panel in compliance with legislation, and to present the revised Statement of Purpose and Children's Guides.

2. Summary

- 2.1 This report sets out the work undertaken by the Adoption Service and presents the Statement of Purpose and two new Children's Guides on Adoption.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the Mayor and Cabinet notes the report of the work of the Adoption Service
- 3.2 That the Mayor and Cabinet approve the review of the Statement of Purpose (Appendix 1).
- 3.3. That the Mayor and Cabinet accepts the two new Children's Guides to Adoption (Appendix 2)

4. Policy Context

- 4.1 Lewisham is a registered Adoption Agency. Adoption Agencies are subject to the Adoption Agency Regulations (AAR) 2005 and 2011 and are subject to the National Minimum Standards (NMS) which accompany the Regulations. Standard 25.6a of the National Minimum Standards requires the Adoption Agency to produce a six monthly report to be received by the Council Executive.
- 4.2 Standard 18.3 of the National Minimum Standards requires that the Adoption Agency approves and annually reviews the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guides.
- 4.3 The Statement of Purpose contributes to five of the key priority outcomes of Lewisham's Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2020:

- **Ambitious and achieving** – where people are inspired and supported to fulfil their potential
- **Safer** – where people feel safe and live free from crime, antisocial behaviour and abuse
- **Empowered and responsible** – where people are actively involved in their local area and contribute to supportive communities
- **Healthy, active and enjoyable** – where people can actively participate in maintaining and improving their health and well-being
- **Dynamic and prosperous** – where people are part of vibrant communities and town centres, well connected to London and beyond.

5. Background

- 5.1 The Adoption Service is primarily a service for looked after children and the service is committed to finding and supporting stable and secure adoption placements for children where adoption is the identified plan. The majority of children placed for adoption will have been removed from their parents through the court system. All of these children will have had their plan for adoption approved by the court.
- 5.2 Currently the Adoption Team is working with 33 looked after children, preparing them for adoption and supporting adoptive placements.
- 5.3 Between 1 October 2010 and 30 September 2011, 27 Adoption Orders were made.

	Apr to Sep 09	Oct 09 to Mar 10	Apr to Sep 10	Oct 10 to Mar 11	Apr to Sep 11
Number of adoption orders	10	13	13	13	14
Adoption orders, child placed with family approved Lewisham	7	7	7	7	4
Adoption orders, family approved by Inter-agency	3	5	6	6	10
Number of single adopters	2	3	4	5	4
Number adopted by foster carer	4	4	3	0	1
Number adopted by relative	0	0	0	0	1
Children adopted Male / Female	3/7	8/5	5/8	2/11	8/6

- 5.4 Between 1 October 2010 and 30 September 2011, 27 children were placed for adoption, that is, they were placed with approved adoptive parents prior to an adoption order being granted.

	Oct 09 to Mar 10	Apr to Sep 10	Oct 10 to Mar 11	Apr to Sep 11
Number of children placed for adoption	10	15	14	13

With families approved by Lewisham	5	8	4	7
With families through inter-agency placements	5	7	10	6
Number of children placed with single adopters	0	5	5	4
Number of children placed with gay/lesbian adopters	0	0	2	0
Number of children placed with foster carers	1	2	1	4
Male / Female	5/5	4/11	8/6	5/8
Ethnicity				
White UK	4	7	6	3
Mixed heritage (incl mixed white parentage)	4	3	3	5
Black African Caribbean	1	2	3	0
Black African	1	1	1	0
Black African Caribbean / Black African	0	0	0	4
Black other		1	0	0
White other		1	1	1

5.5 Comparison of ages at time of placement for the last two years of data.

Age of child at time of placement for adoption	Oct 09 to Sept 10	Oct 10 to Sept 11
Under 2 years	14	7
Age 2 to 3	3	10
Age 4	2	5
Age 5	3	3
Age 6	2	1
Age 7-15	1	1
Age 16+	1	0

5.6 The Adoption Panel considers a) whether a child should be placed for adoption, b) whether an applicant(s) should be recommended to become adopter(s) and c) whether a specific child/ren should be matched with an identified adoptive parent(s). The purpose of the adoption panel is to consider each matter and make clear recommendations to the agency decision maker (Director of Children's Social Care) who on behalf of the Council has the ultimate decision making authority on the cases that the panel considers. New guidance sets out that adoption agencies must not deny or delay a child an adoptive home on the grounds that they do not share the same ethnic or cultural background. Lewisham are clear that they will give due consideration to the ethnicity and cultural background of children when matching children to adoptive parents but will not delay the placing of a child. Paragraph 5.18 sets out Lewisham's performance on the timeliness of adoptions.

5.7 From 1st April 2011, new guidance on the Adoption Agency Regulations stipulate that Local Authority Adoption Panels should be drawn from a list of persons whom the agency consider have appropriate qualifications and/or experience. Members must include experienced adoption social workers, a medical adviser and other suitable persons not employed by the agency to reflect the independent nature of the panel. The panel must be chaired by a person independent of the agency and appoint a vice chair. The Lewisham

Adoption and Permanence Panel, which convenes on a fortnightly basis, will meet the requirements of these Regulations and currently consists of one member nominated by elected Members, three independent persons of whom one is an adoptee, one is an adopter, with another having personal and professional experience of adoption and fostering. All of the three social workers are employed in Children's Social Care. The Medical Adviser is a consultant paediatrician with the Lewisham Primary Care Trust. The chair is independent of the Council and has extensive experience of adoption work. The Panel is supported by a Solicitor and the Adoption Team Manager who acts as Panel Adviser.

- 5.8 National Minimum Standards specify that an Adoption Panel has a minimum of one annual joint training day with the Adoption Service. A training day took place for the Panel and the Adoption Team on the 9th February 2012, on the topic of social networking and its implications for adopters and adopted children.
- 5.9 The Permanence Planning Officer who was appointed last year continues to support and advise social workers in making permanence plans for children and assures the quality of Child Permanence Reports to the Adoption Panel. It has been noted that the quality of reports to the Panel has improved since this appointment.
- 5.10 The primary purpose of recruiting and approving any family to become an adoptive family is to meet the needs of children in Lewisham. When a person approaches an adoption agency and expresses an interest in being assessed as a prospective adopter, the adoption agency has a duty to provide all enquirers with information and counselling about adoption. If the person wishes to proceed, the agency considers whether it should provide them with an application form so that the formal process for checks, references, preparation and assessment can start. A report is provided to the Adoption Panel who recommends to the agency decision maker in Lewisham, the Director of Children's Social Care, if the prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child.
- 5.11 Between 1 October 2010 and 30 September 2011, 19 families were approved by the panel to adopt.

	Apr 09 to Sep 09	Oct 09 to Mar 10	Apr 10 to Sep 10	Oct 10 to Mar 11	Apr to Sep 11
Number of applicants approved to adopt	12	11	6	6	13
Of these applicants, number who were heterosexual couples	9	8	3	2	9
Of these applicants, number who were single female	2	3	3	4	2
Of these applicants, number who were single male	1	0	0	0	0
Of these applicants, number who were same sex couple		0	0	0	2
Of these applicants, number who were second time adopters	4	1	1	0	3
Of these applicants, number who were kinship / foster carers	3	2	1	2	0
Ethnicity					
White UK	6	6	4	2	5
Mixed heritage (including White UK/Asian)	2	4	0	1	1
Black African Caribbean	2	1	2	1	2
Black African		0	0	2	0
Black African Caribbean / Black African		0	0	0	0
Other	2	0	0	0	5

5.12 Inter-country Adoption

Adoption in the UK is principally a service for children in the UK. A small number of applicants in the UK want to adopt a child from overseas and Lewisham, as an adoption agency, has a duty to ensure these applicants are assessed. A charge is made for these assessments. From July 2011 PACT (Parents and Children Together), a voluntary agency, has provided this service for Lewisham.

- 5.13 Between 1 October 2010 and 30 September 2011, one applicant was approved by the Panel for intercountry adoption (USA). Three families, previously approved, are currently still awaiting a child from abroad to be identified (Kazakhstan, China and Jamaica).

	Apr 09 to Sep 09	Oct 09 to Mar 10	Apr 10 to Sep 10	Oct 10 to Mar 11	Apr to Sep 11
Number of families waiting for a child to be identified	8	7	7	5	3
Countries					
China	2	1	1	1	1
Russia	2	1			
India	1	1	1		
Guatemala	1				
Kazakhstan	1	1	1	1	1
Nepal		1	1	1	
Bulgaria	1	1	1		
Thailand		1	1	1	
Jamaica			1	1	1

- 5.14 Adoption Support Services are available to adoptive families which provide a range of services to support adoptive families and their children which includes counselling, advice and information, workshops/support groups, an annual conference, financial support and links with CAMHS. The team manages all post adoption contact arrangements. Counselling is also provided to birth relatives who are losing a child to adoption and Lewisham provides an intermediary service between birth relatives and adopted adults.
- 5.15 The National Minimum Standards require that a clear written statement of purpose is available to all users of the service which sets out the aims and objectives of the Adoption Agency and describes the facilities and services that are provided and the principles to which the service adheres. The Lewisham Statement of Purpose (Appendix 1) has been updated and is presented to Mayor & Cabinet for approval. Updating has included information on staff and expanded information for birth parents and to enable the monitoring of the service.
- 5.16 The National Minimum Standards require that two Children's Guides to Adoption are produced, one for younger children and one for older children. The Guides (appendix 2) have been produced and are presented to Mayor and Cabinet for approval.
- 5.17 The Adoption Service in Lewisham is near the top of all London Local Authorities in the performance measure on the timeliness of adoption. That is, the percentage of children adopted during the year who were placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision that they should be placed. Lewisham also performs well above the national average.

National performance	72.4%
London	68.4%
Inner London	73.6%
Lewisham	84.6% (Mar 2011)

- 5.18 Of the percentage of Looked After Children who were looked after for more than 6 months, in March 2011, 9.4% were adopted against a target of 8.7% and a statistical neighbour performance of 7.4%.
- 5.19 The Adoption Service was last inspected by Ofsted in October 2009 and was found to be good with outstanding features.
- 5.20 On 14th March 2012 the Coalition Government published 'An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay'. The aim behind the publication was to speed up the adoption process. The Government aims to overhaul the system for prospective adopters and strengthen the performance regime for local authorities.
- 5.21 The Action Plan includes proposals for:
- New adoption scorecards to hold local authorities to account.
 - Revised approval process for new adopters, cutting the time to 6 months.
 - A national gateway for adoption, providing a first point of contact for anyone interested in adoption.
- 5.22 Lewisham is well placed to meet the demands of the Action Plan. As can be seen from paragraph 5.17, Lewisham is already outperforming the national average, statistical neighbours and the inner London average in timeliness of adoptions. Our performance places us within the top 10 nationally. Our rate of disrupted placements is also very low with only 2 adoptive placements breaking down in the last 10 years out of 267 adoptions. National figures are not currently collected for adoption breakdowns but research points to a figure of between 10% and 20%. Lewisham's figure of less than 1% compares very favourably.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 Lewisham provides these services pursuant to their powers and duties under the Children Act 1989 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

8. Crime and Disorder Implications

- 8.1 Research indicates that early adoption secures better outcomes for looked after children and improves their life chances and thereby reduces the likelihood of them becoming involved in crime or becoming victims of crime.

9. Equalities Implications

- 9.1 Looked After Children are one of the most vulnerable groups of children. They are more likely to have poorer education and health outcomes that lead to social exclusion. Looked After Children are also more likely to have special educational needs.

10. Environmental Implications

10.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

11. Conclusion

11.1 The Mayor is asked to accept the report of the Adoption Service and to approve the revised statement of purpose and the two new Children's Guides.

12. Background documents

12.1 Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 and 2011
National Minimum Standards (Adoption) 2003 and 2011

Appendix 1

Statement of Purpose

Appendix 2

Children's Guides (x2)