

APPENDIX 2

*ADOPTION &
PERMANENCE
REPORT*

CLA Business Unit

2010/11

31st March 2011

1. **Key Messages**

Adoption performance is lower than previous years but special guardianship is higher resulting in overall stable levels of permanence outcomes for these key legal permanence options as a whole.

The rate of full care orders have continued to rise.

Approvals of adopters is healthy in line with previous years

The Independent Chair of the Adoption Panel reports positively on the quality and activity of Southwark as an Adoption Agency.

2. **Background Information**

This report is prepared through analysis of data including qualitative information gained through Southwark's Permanence Tracking Panel. It fulfils obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report 6 monthly to the "executive side" of the local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report below.

Data and information within this report is accurate as of 31st March 2011. Plans for children are dynamic and develop every day and the picture will have changed at the point this is read.

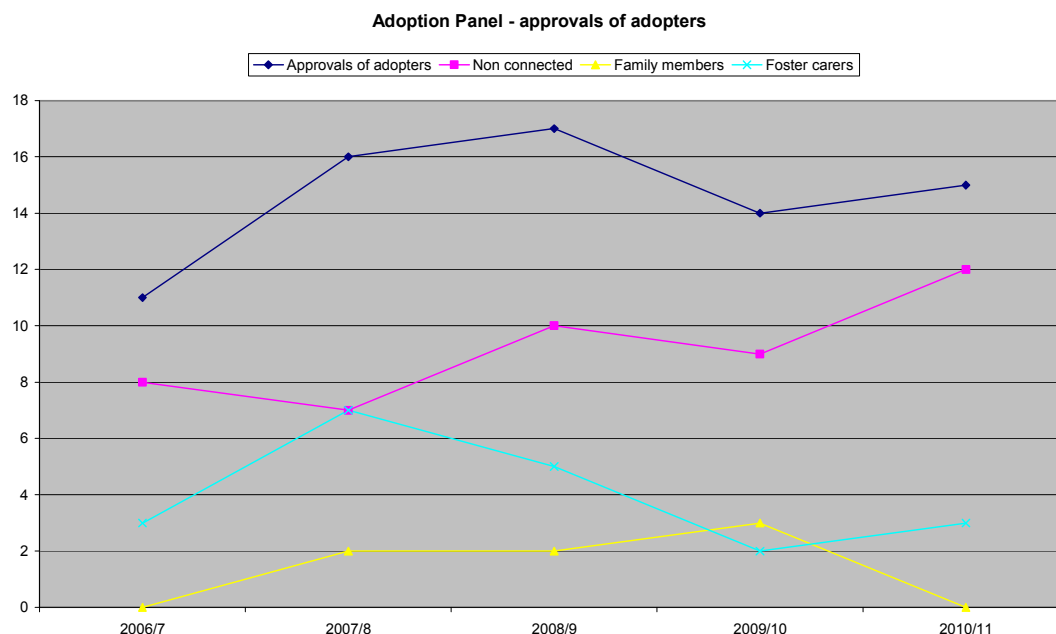
3. **Adoption enquiries, responsiveness and recruitment**

There have been 188 adoption enquiries in the last 12 months. Enquiries are defined as a person contacting Southwark to discuss their interest in becoming an adopter. There are good systems in place to ensure written information about the adoption process is sent within five working days to the enquirers in response to their enquiry. The Statement of Purpose 2011/12 sets out the process and frequency of information meetings where enquires hear more about adoption and meet adopters and adoptees. All enquirers who wish to attend such information events.

Recruitment activity is being reviewed and has lead to the development of a new recruitment strategy. Recruitment of prospective adopters appeared at a low ebb. This reflected the experience of all members of the South East London Adoption Consortium.

4. Approvals of adopters

15 new prospective adopters were recommended for approval. This is broadly in line with the number of new approvals over each of the previous five years. These new prospective adopters are then available as adopters for Southwark children or children from other local authorities. Whenever a child is placed by another local authority with an adopter approved by Southwark, this is known as an inter-agency placement and the placing local authority pays an interagency fee to Southwark.



5. Who adopted Southwark children?

It is essential to know where adopters come from that adopt Southwark children. Below is a breakdown of this.

Adopters of adopted children - how recruited	2010/11
Adoption Register	1
Advert/Magazine	2 (sib gp)
Family Member	4
Regional Event	2
Southwark Foster Carer	4
Southwark Recruited Direct	4

5 of the above adoptive placements (4 families) were purchased externally. 2 from other local authorities at £13,138 each and 2 from voluntary adoption agencies at £27,000 each. There is an approximate lifting in the price of 50% for a sibling and fees are staged for payment on placement, 12mths after, and 12 months of post-adoption support. London local authorities are 10% more.

Names and details of all approved adopters must be entered on the national Adoption Register and they can be matched with children waiting to be adopted through other local authorities.

In 2010/11 Southwark traded 1 households of approved adopters to another local authority generating income of £14, 452. In 2009/3 3 households were traded generating £51, 521. None have been traded so far this year although 1 is planned for November 2011.

7. Adoption data

Children waiting to be adopted	31/03/2011
Total Children waiting to be adopted	19
Age	
Under 2 yrs	7
2 to 4 yrs	9
5 yrs +	3
How long?	
Under 6 mths	8
6 to 12 mths	6
12 to 24 mths	4
24 + mths	1
Ethnicity of all waiting	
White British	5
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	7
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	7
Ethnicity 6+ mths waiting	
White British	3
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	4
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	4
Gender	
Female	8
Male	11
Sibling groups waiting	1

Children placed for adoption	31/03/2011
Total Children placed for adoption	10
Age	
Under 2 yrs	4
2 to 4 yrs	4
5 yrs +	2
How long did they wait until placement?	
Under 6 mths	4
6 to 12 mths	4
12 to 24 mths	2
24 + mths	0
Ethnicity of all placed for adoption	
White British	3
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	1
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	6
Ethnicity those who waited 6+ mths	
White British	0
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	1
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	5
Gender	
Female	4
Male	6
Sibling groups placed	2

Adopted children	2010/11
Total children adopted	17
Age at placement	
Under 1 yr	5
1 to 2 yrs	5
2 to 4 yrs	2
5 yrs +	5
How long did they wait until placement?	
Under 6 mths	10
6 to 12 mths	4
12 to 24 mths	3
24 + mths	0
Ethnicity of all placed for adoption	
White British	8
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	7
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	2
Ethnicity those who waited 6+ mths	
White British	2
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	5
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	0
Gender	
Female	7
Male	10
Sibling groups adopted	1

8. Children whose plan has changed from adoption

1 adoption placement disrupted in the previous 12 months. This was with adopters assessed by a voluntary adoption agency. The placement was ended due to safeguarding reasons. A full disruption meeting has been held to understand the reasons and learn from the breakdown.

9. Adoption Panels

Adoption Panels recommend children for whom adoption is in the child's best interests, recommends prospective adopters for approval as adopters and recommends matches for approved adopters with children. The final decision, based on the panel's recommendations is made by the Agency Decision Maker (Business Unit manager for the CLA Service).

In August 2010 Southwark's two adoption panels reconstituted and became one panel which meeting on a monthly basis on the third Thursday of the month with a facility to convene at other times should the need arise. This reduction was due to the decline in children being presented for an adoption decision which resulted in a number of panels being cancelled and fewer cases on the agenda. Capacity dropped from 8 cases per month to 6.

The Independent Chair of Southwark's Adoption Panel is Bernard Monaghan. In the Adoption Panel Annual Report he reported as follows:

The challenges of change came to the Southwark Adoption Panel and the adoption service this year. A decision was made by the agency to reduce to one Panel and for it to meet monthly. The membership of the Panel was reconstituted with the amalgamation from two panels into one.

The number of cases being presented to the Panel increased significantly, during the latter part of the year, as the number of care proceedings escalated. This required the Panel to have all day meetings and to convene extra meetings to avoid any delay in the process for the children. This has meant an increase in the workload for the panel members and for the staff who service the Panel. Their enthusiasm to make the new Panel work well has to be applauded. I am pleased to acknowledge the time and attention that every Panel Member takes in their preparation for the meetings. The Panel Members all make an excellent contribution to the conduct of the Panel's business. The support we have had from the professional advisers has been of the highest standard and they ensure that Panel members receive relevant and appropriate advice in each individual case and I thank them. The Panel administrators ensure the timely arrival of Panel papers and the increased demands to produce accurate minutes promptly.

The regular meetings which are held between the Panel Chair and managers of the agency provide a valuable forum to consider practice and look at ways of improving the service.

Change has also come in February in the form of new adoption Guidance and Standards issued by the government. This is aimed at improving and increasing the use made of adoption for looked after children. It will require all of us involved in the service to work collaboratively to implement the new requirements and improve the lives of the children for whom we work.

The attendance of prospective adopters at the Panel continues to be a most helpful occasion for them to create a vital impression of what they have to offer and despite obvious nervousness, they conduct themselves in an open and sincere manner. When children are being considered for placement many adopters are able to convey their understanding of what the needs of the child will require of them and of their sincere commitment to the child to be placed with them.

There is evidence that efforts have been made to improve the standards and quality of the Child Permanence Reports but this is not uniformly consistent. The year saw some very fine Child Permanence Reports of which their authors could be justly proud of their effort. In these the child was written about with warmth and vitality. The information about the history and the parents is recorded factually and clearly and there is also an element of compassion, so important for the child to read later in life. The Panel is always conscious of the differing audiences for whom the Child Permanence Reports are written and appreciate the fine balancing act which social workers have to perform in providing the Panel with clear information in each case while being mindful of the future impact of that information on the child. The potential importance of this document to adoptees in later years is not always fully appreciated. The demands made by the increase in the number of cases are recognised but continuing attention has to be applied to improve and maintain the consistent quality of these reports.

The agency has decided, as its own standard, to aim to provide a Later Life Letter in draft form to the Panel at the time matching is considered. Many of these have been written with care and consideration. They show sensitivity for the child who will receive this information.

The quality of the reports prepared on potential adoptive families has been of a generally high standard. Adoptive families have commented, when attending Panel, of their satisfaction with the manner in which they have been treated and their confidence in the professional service they have received from the Adoption Team.

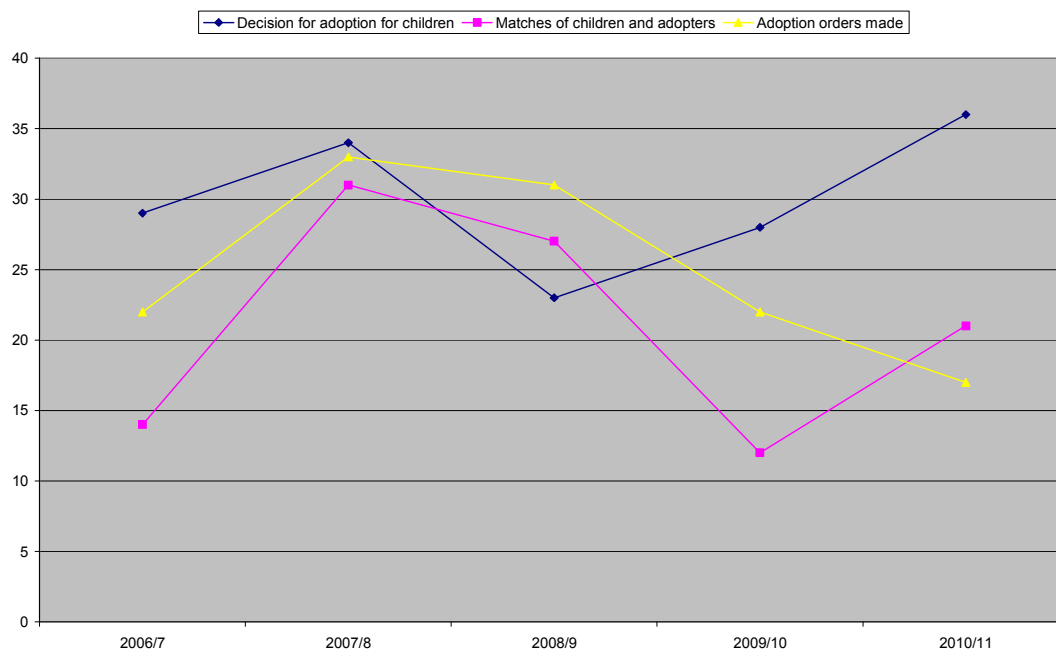
There was a positive panel training day held in February where panel members and adoption team staff attended.

The newly constituted Adoption Panel has achieved a consistency in its approach to the matters presented. The members are able to bring a rigorous scrutiny to the care planning and adoption plans presented and address any shortfalls or concerns that arise. The Panel has been able to maintain its independent, scrutiny role, whilst contributing to the thinking and practice of the staff that provide the service.

Bernard Monaghan

Chair Southwark Adoption Panel taken from Adoption Panel Annual Report July 2011

10. Adoption Panel activity and related outcomes



The graph shows the relationship between the sequential process of: decision for adoption for a child; match of a child with an adopter; the gaining of an adoption order. The trends are clear such that it is anticipated that during 2011/12 we would expect to see a rise in the number of children placed for adoption and adoption orders made.

It is pleasing to see the reversal of the decline in the number of children who were matched to adopters following a recommendation by the adoption panel. It is noted that the low point of matches for adoption in 2009/10 is markedly lower than decisions for adoption the previous year. It is hoped the anticipated increase in matching and placement activity will outpace the rate of decisions for adoption to make up for this difference.

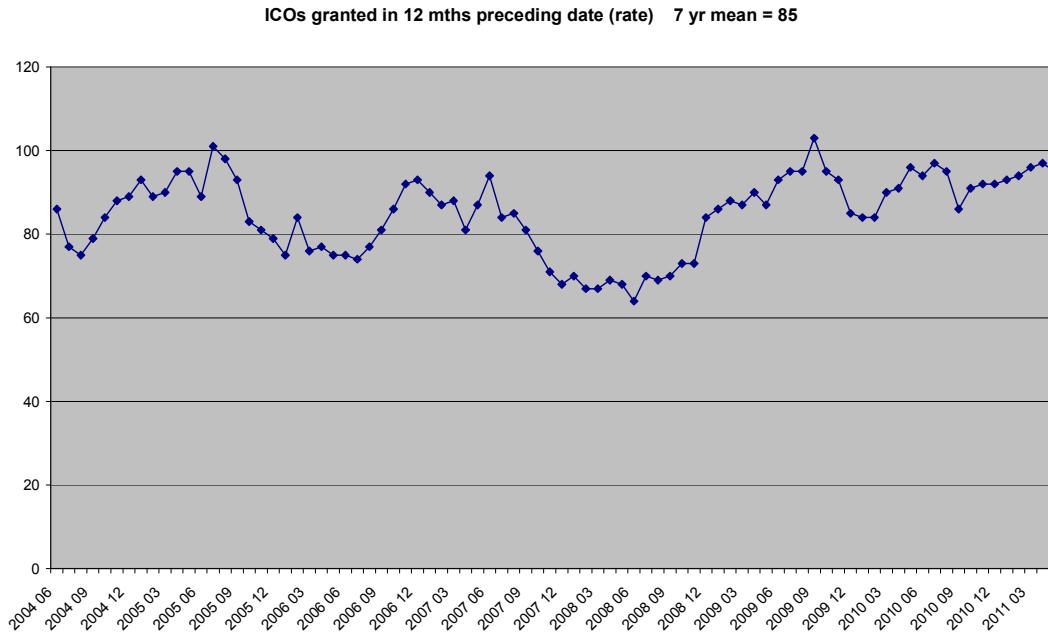
The number of decisions to adopt is directly related to the number of court proceedings with proposed care plans for adoption. There is approximately a 2 year period between a child entering the care system and being adopted on average. Thus lower levels of care proceedings during 2008/9 appear to correspond with lower levels of adoption in 2010/11. Trends in adoption performance are most significantly influenced by levels of care proceedings.

Notwithstanding this the number of matches for 2010/11 was lower than expected and this is most probably further explained by the delays experienced in court proceedings experienced from Autumn 2009, following the publicity around the death of baby Peter, all through 2010. It is estimated that the well publicised reduced capacity of the courts and CAFCASS to deal with cases in a timely way lengthened the time it took for final orders (Placement Orders) to enable children to be adopted. This is supported by the bar chart below showing that SGOs as well as adoptions reduced in 2009/10 demonstrating that issues were probably related to court proceedings and outcomes generally not just adoption. SGOs are obtained quicker than adoption orders through the court process as they are made at the conclusion of care proceedings rather than subsequent adoption proceedings. The rise in SGOs made during 2010/11 probably reflects the feeding through of permanent outcomes for children from higher levels of

care proceedings that we should see reflected by some rise in adoption orders made in 2010/11.

11. Care proceedings

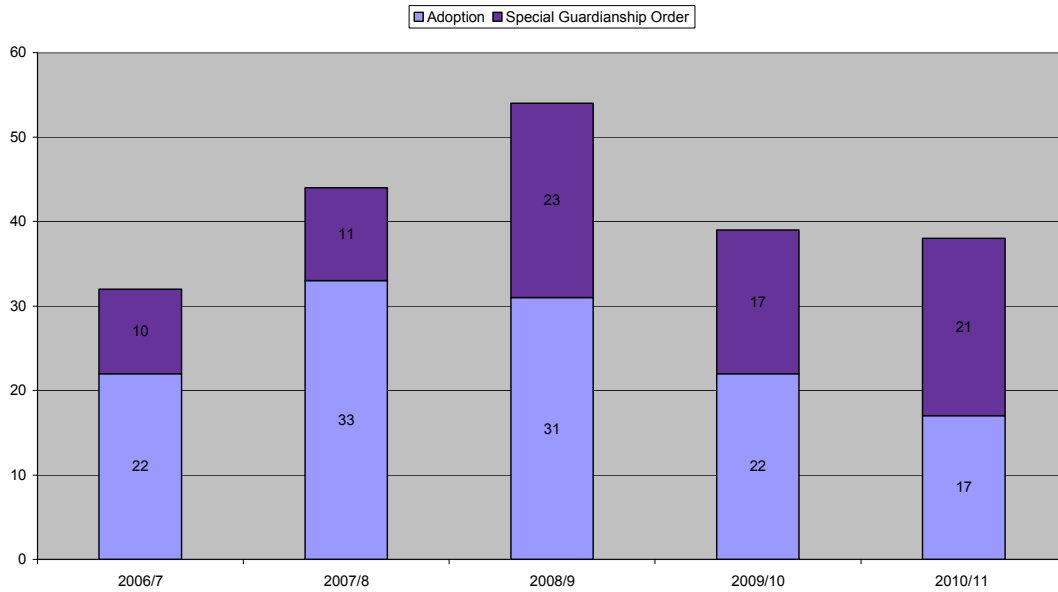
The rate of care proceedings remains high and this should directly relate to higher numbers of SGOs, Adoption and Full Care Orders.



12. Permanency outcomes – adoption and special guardianship

The 2002 Adoption Act, which came into effect in 2005, introduced a new order known as special guardianship. In considering permanence for children adoption must be considered alongside special guardianship. The latter is a form of legal order that confers parental responsibility on a relative or friend to look after a child for the duration of their childhood. Historically the government measured the two orders together as an indicator of the permanent outcomes for looked after children.

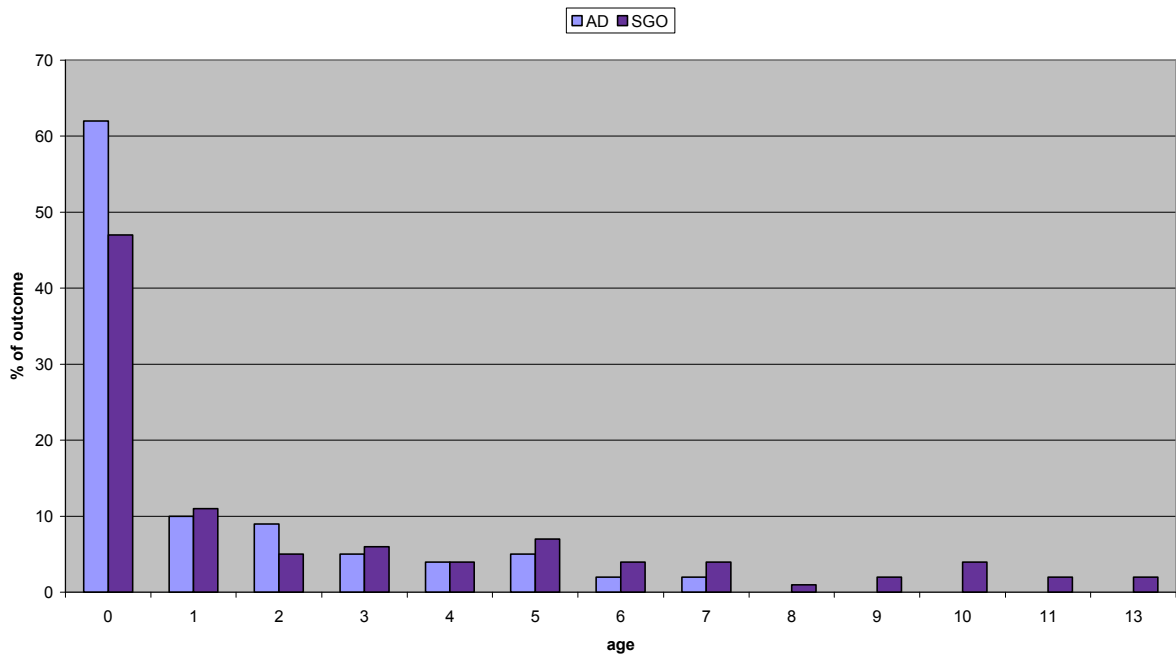
Adoptions & Special Guardianship Orders 5 yrs to end March 2011



13. Permanence outcomes adoption and special guardianship by age & entry to care

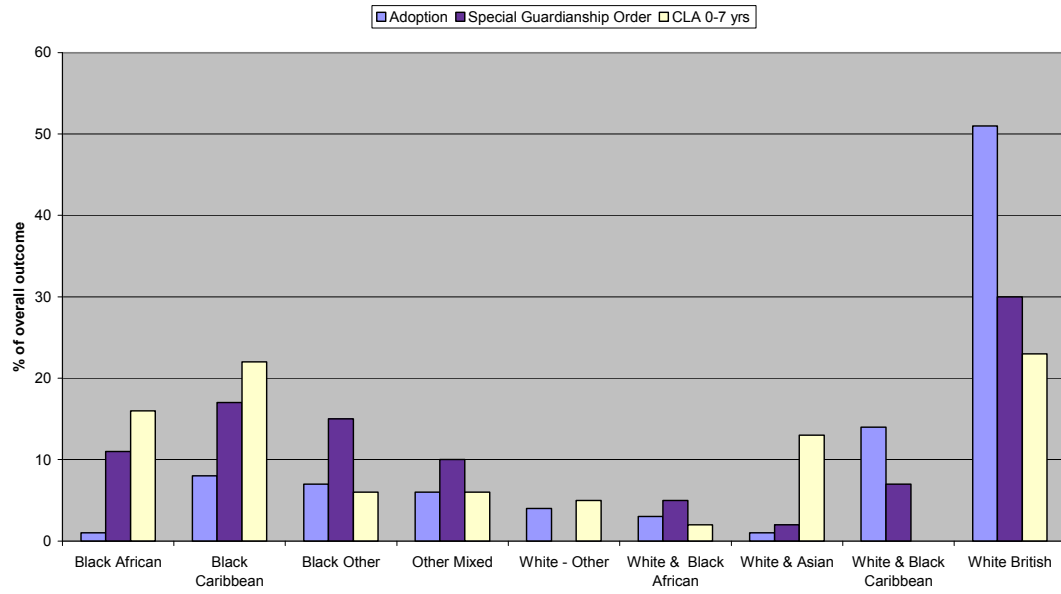
This graph shows some difference in the age group of children for whom adoption of special guardianship is the plan around the 0-1 yr old age group. It also shows special guardianship being favoured for older children. However large numbers of the youngest children are still placed in special guardianship arrangements.

Permanence Outcomes - Adoption and SGOs - age at entry to care to end March 2011



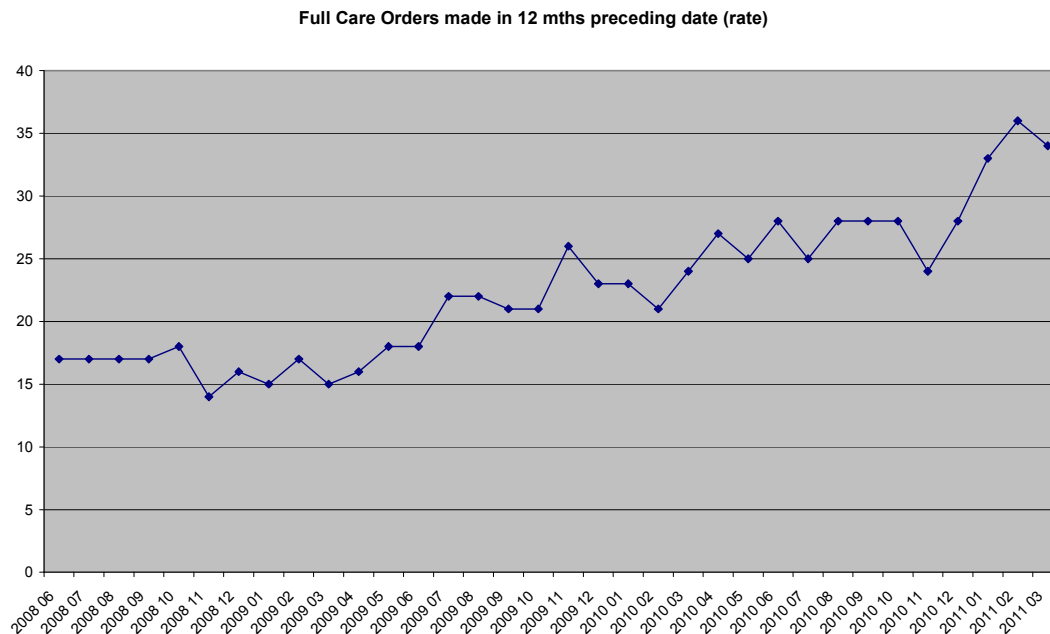
14. Permanency outcomes adoption and special guardianship by ethnicity

Permanence outcomes & ethnicity 6 years to end March 2011



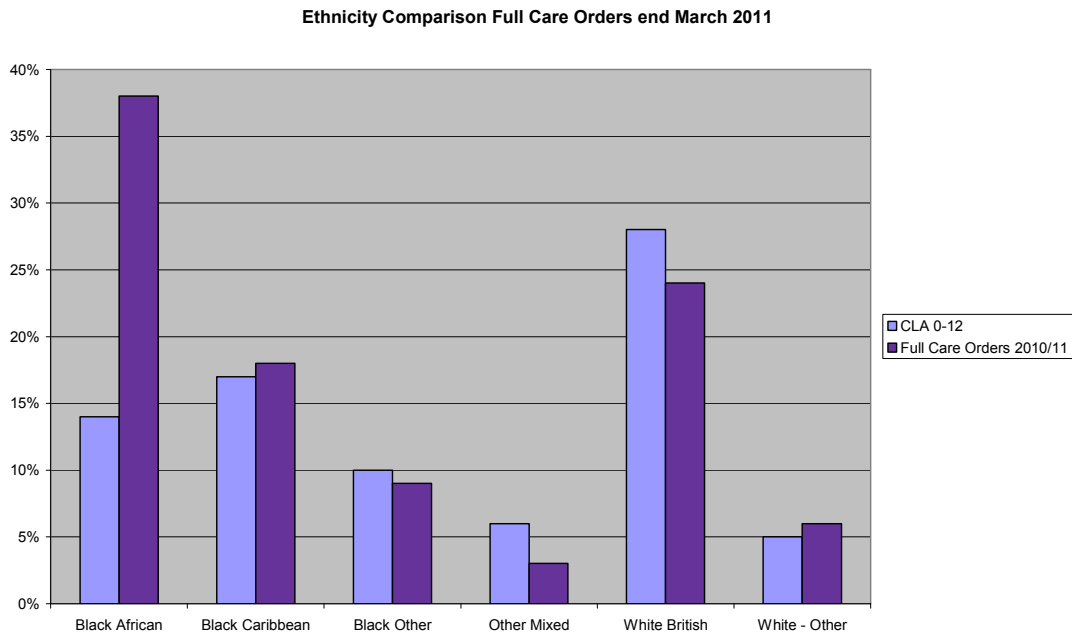
There is an on-going challenge to the care system to enable the adoption of children of black and minority ethnicity. This is a national issue and the above graph illustrates the evidence supporting this within Southwark. What it also shows however is that special guardianship as a route to permanence in Southwark for BME children illustrating there is a legitimate and well used facility through the courts that enables such children to leave the care system and achieve permanence with family members. The introduction of Special Guardianship Orders was made deliberately with the value base of enabling a route to permanence for BME children in recognising that some minority ethnic communities have religious and cultural difficulties with adoption.

15. Permanence outcomes Full Care Orders – long term foster care



The rate of Full Care Orders being made on children has seen a steady increase. These children are some of the most damaged and challenging children to look after. The average age of children made subject to Full Care Orders in 2010/11 was 10 years old when the order was made.

16. Permanency outcomes Full Care Orders by ethnicity



It is clear that Black African children are particularly over represented when their legal permanence is settled predominantly with plans for long term foster care. The average age of this group is 10 yrs old. 70% are boys against 58% for the CLA 0-12 age group as a whole and 59% for Black African children within that group.

17. Permanence Tracking

There is a bi-monthly Permanence Tracking Panel chaired by the CLA 0-12 and Adoption Service Manager, involving CLA 0-12 Team Managers, Adoption & Permanence Team Manager and the Quality Assurance service Manager for Independent Reviewing Officers. This tracks and catylses permanence planning for all children within the service. Its purpose is to promote greater accountability, share key information, reduce delay and promote the rigorous scrutiny and overview of permanence within Children's Specialist Services. These meetings often highlight complex legal and interagency issues

18. Audit and learning activity and organisational development

For the period April to September 2011 there is intended to be scrutiny on family finding. This will include an audit and study of those who haven't been adopted despite having an adoption plan and consideration of how processes can be renewed to create more focus on family finding.

The new National Minimum Standards and statutory guidance in the context of updated Care Planning Guidance will need to be embedded within the service. Considerable activity has already been undertaken but there will need to be a taking stock to ensure all procedures and processes are up to date and there is support for practice development where needed.

Alasdair Smith
CLA 0-12 and Adoption Service Manager