

APPENDIX 3

*ADOPTION &
PERMANENCE
REPORT*

CLA Business Unit

2011/12

Mid Year

30th Sept 2011

1. Key Messages

There has been a significant rise in the number of children placed for adoption which should see an increase in the number of adoptions in the year 2011/12.

Special guardianship while increasing over the past 12 months is projected to significantly decrease over 2011/12 as a whole.

Full care orders have increased generally with particular over-representation of black African children.

Interest in adoption has increased with more activity in recruitment, preparation and assessment. This is anticipated to continue for the coming months.

Scrutiny has increased on family finding activity with tracking, auditing and analysis improving with the intention to deliver better outcomes

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 30th Sept 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 70 adoption enquiries in the last 6 months. This is a reduction of 36% on the same period last year. Enquiries are defined as a person contacting Southwark to discuss their interest in becoming an adopter. The best explanation for this difference is a general low ebb of enquiries as experienced generally by members of the South East London Adoption Consortium and beyond. Of the 6 months of the year 2011/12 56% of enquiries have been received in the last 2 months probably reflecting a broader national and political interest in adoption.

Information packs were sent to each enquirer within 5 days including and an invite to an information meeting or an informal chat/telephone call with the recruitment officer unless after discussion they did not want to pursue their enquiry with Southwark. 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 Adoption 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.

In the last 6 months 3 Information Meetings have been held Peckham Library on a Saturday mornings in May, June and September. Two further informal coffee mornings held in July and August. The total number of household unit attending was May (15) June (19) September (29). Coffee mornings (9)

From this total of 63 households attending key information events to gain more information about adoption – 16 Initial visits to the prospective adopter's home were made. This number of visits represents 62% of the 2010/11 total showing an increase in early stages of recruitment activity.

In June a Preparation Group was held for adopters and 8 households attended. 3 were from other local authorities, 1 was a foster carer and of the 4 remaining 1 has withdrawn, 1 has requested a delay in commencing assessment, 2 are progressing although 1 of these may cease soon.

A Preparation Group is running in October with 9 households attending. It is anticipated 6 new assessments will arise from this.

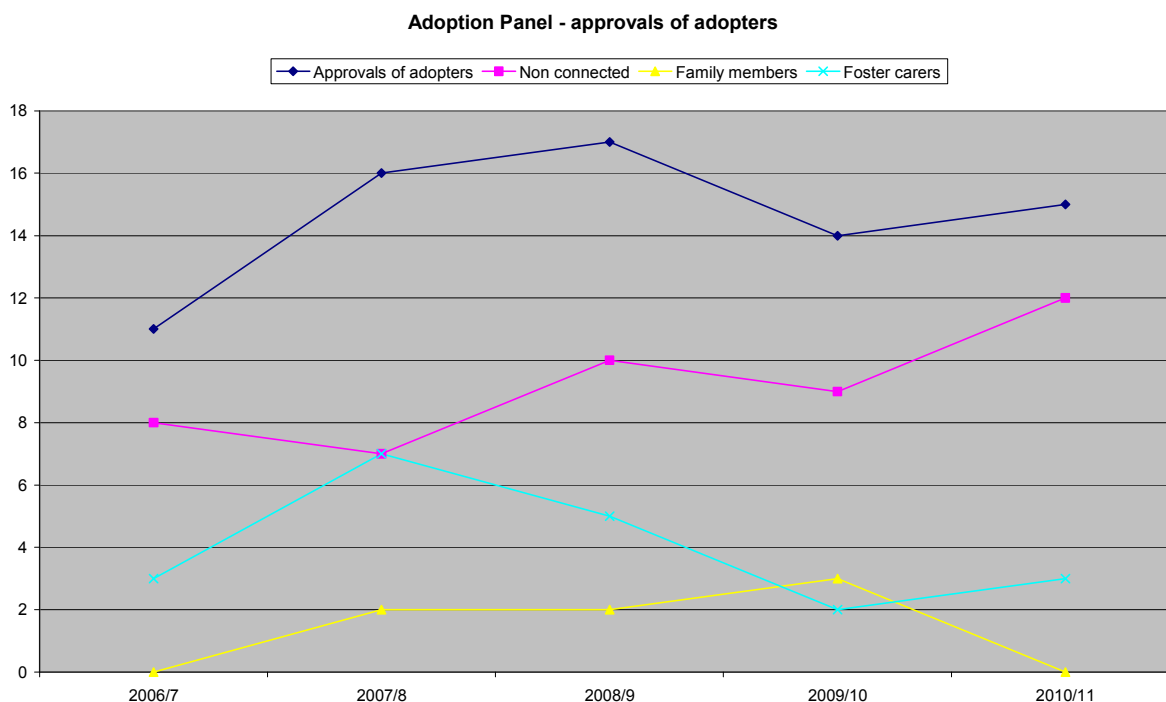
The 2011/12 Recruitment Strategy is being delivered and this helpfully coincided with renewed national interest in adoption. Enquiries, initial visits and assessments have now all increased. Note above the increased attendance at the September Information event.

Recruitment activity in Southwark has been geared to respond to this particularly with Adoption Week in November. Analysis of those waiting to be adopted has shown particular need for carers for Black African boys and this has influenced recruitment activity. A full page advert was taken out in Black History Month brochure and links are being made by the Recruitment Coordinator with community groups, churches and individuals who may help to develop further awareness in the Black African community of Southwark children waiting for adoption and how well placed Southwark is to assess any prospective adopters.

Publicity materials (leaflets, postcards, flyers case studies) and Southwark's adoption website have all been refreshed.

4. Approvals of adopters

6 new prospective adopters were approved in the last 6 months. Of these 2 were foster carers. 15 were approved in 2010/11. 10 prospective adopters are currently in the process of being assessed. Of these 6 should be approved by end March 2012 making the projection for 2011/12 12 adoption approvals. 3 of these will be a Southwark foster carer. Approved adopters are then available as adopters for Southwark children or children from other local authorities.



5. Who adopted Southwark children?

Adopters of adopted children - how recruited	2011/12 mid year	2010/11
Adoption Register	1	1
Advert/Magazine		2
Family Member		4
Regional Event		2
Southwark Foster Carer	1	4
Southwark Recruited Direct	2	4

The 1 adoptive placement sourced externally so far this year has been from another local authority at a cost of £13,138.

5 of the above adoptive placements (4 families) in 2010/11 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 expensive. BAAF set these rates and revise them annually.

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 2 household of approved adopters to another local authority generating income of £14, 452. In 2009/10 2 households were traded generating £51, 521. None have been traded so far this year although 1 is planned for November 2011.

6. Adoption data

Children waiting to be adopted	31/09/2011	31/03/2011
Total Children waiting to be adopted	17	19
Status		
Matched not placed	3	
Match planned	4	
Linked not matched	3	
No family identified	7	
Age		
Under 2 yrs	6	7
2 to 4 yrs	6	9
5 yrs +	5	3
How long?		
Under 6 mths	9	8
6 to 12 mths	3	6
12 to 24 mths	3	4
24 + mths	2	1
Ethnicity of all waiting		
White British	2	5
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	9	7
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	6	7
Ethnicity 6+ mths waiting		
White British	1	3
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	3	4
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	4	4
Gender		
Female	9	8
Male	8	11
Sibling groups waiting	2	1

No family identified	31/09/2011
Total children	7
Age	
Under 6 mths	2
6 to 12 mths	1
12 to 24 mths	2
24 + mths	2
Ethnicity of all waiting	
White British	1
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	1
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	5

Note: Of these of 24+ mths waiting both children experienced adoption placement disruptions (see section below). Both are Black African. 4 of 5 children no family identified are Black African.

Children placed for adoption	31/09/2011	31/03/2011
Total Children placed for adoption	20	10
Age		
Under 2 yrs	8	4
2 to 4 yrs	10	4
5 yrs +	2	2
How long did they wait until placement?		
Under 6 mths	8	4
6 to 12 mths	6	4
12 to 24 mths	4	2
24 + mths	2	0
Ethnicity of all placed for adoption		
White British	7	3
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	6	1
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	7	6
Ethnicity those who waited 6+ mths		
White British	2	0
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	3	1
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	7	5
Gender		
Female	8	4
Male	10	6
Sibling groups placed	2	2

Adopted children - 12 months to	31/09/2011	31/03/2011
Total children adopted	16	17
Age at placement		
Under 1 yr	6	5
1 to 2 yrs	4	5
2 to 4 yrs	4	2
5 yrs +	2	5
How long did they wait until placement?		
Under 6 mths	8	10
6 to 12 mths	6	4
12 to 24 mths	2	3
24 + mths	0	0
Ethnicity of all placed for adoption		
White British	8	8
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	6	7
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	2	2
Ethnicity those who waited 6+ mths		
White British	2	2
White & other ethnicity, & other mixed	5	5
Black (African, Caribbean, other)	1	0
Gender		
Female	5	7
Male	11	10
Sibling groups adopted	1	1

7. Timeliness of Adoptions N61

This is measured as period of time from decision for adoption to placement for adoption once adoption order is made. The percentage is those made within 12 mths of decision for adoption. In 2010/11 Southwark performance for N61 was 82%. The national average for 2010/11 was 68.4%.

8. Children whose plan has changed from adoption

1 adoption “disrupted” in the previous 6 months. 2 adoption placement disrupted in the previous 12 months. The first was an adopter assessed by another local authority, the second was a placement assessed by a voluntary adoption agency. The first ended due to emergent behaviour of considerable concern. The second ended due to safeguarding reasons. Disruption meetings have been held to understand the reasons and learn from the breakdown of both children’s placements. The practice issues raised, as well as lessons from successful placements of hard to place children, will be shared in a programme of learning with CLA 0-12 and Adoption and Permanence Team social workers and managers.

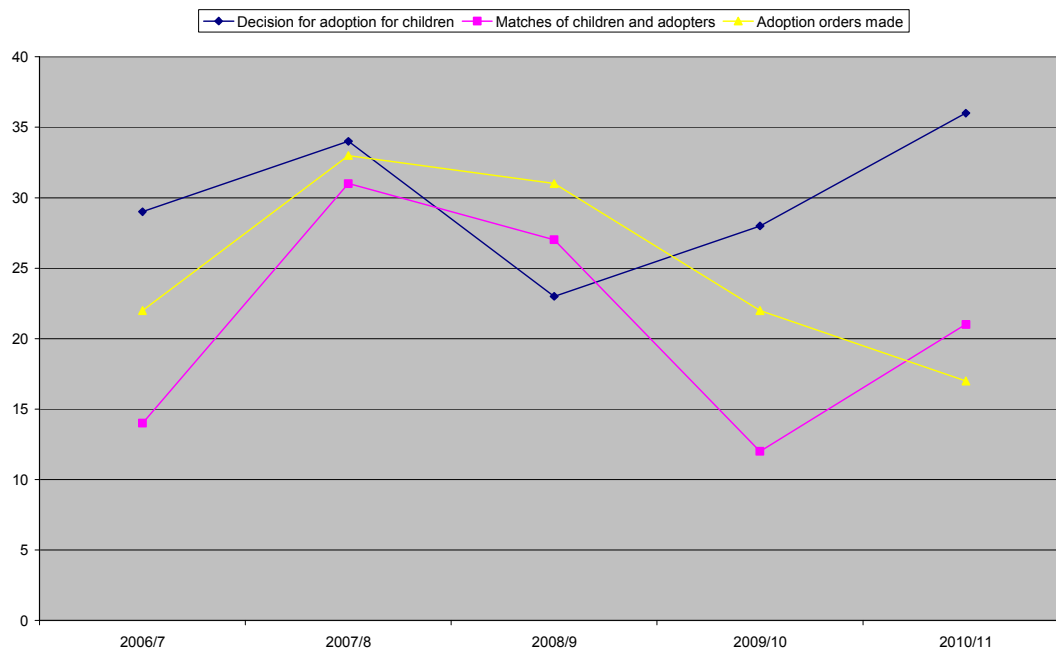
There have been no changes of care plan from adoption to long term foster care.

9. Adoption Panels

Adoption Panels recommend: children for whom adoption is in the child’s best interests; prospective adopters for approval as adopters; and 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).

Southwark’s Adoption Panels meets on the third Thursday of the month. An additional panel was held in August and a further one is planned for November due to volume of work and the need to minimise delay for children.

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.

At this mid year month point there have been:

13 decisions for adoption. This is the 50% of the 2010/11.

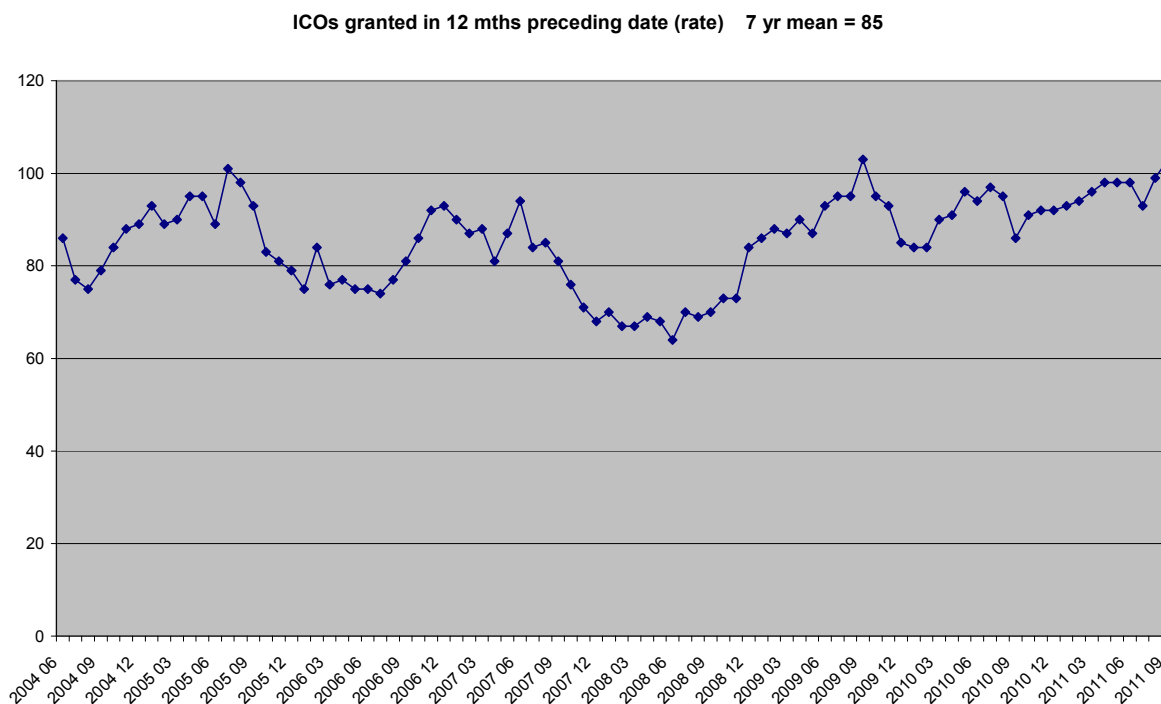
15 matches for adoption placements. This is 71% of the total number for 2010/11. The number of children placed for adoption has risen by 100%.

4 Adoption Orders have been made which is 24% of the 2010/11 total. In the 12 months to end Sept 2011 16 adoption orders were made. The Permanence Tracking Panel estimates 15 more adoption orders to be made this year. This is based on consideration of progress on plans for 20 children currently placed. Thus the estimate is for a 12% rise in adoptions 2011/12.

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. The rise in care proceedings from 2009 should see some rise in adoptions. Trends in adoption performance are most significantly influenced by levels of care proceedings.

11. Care proceedings

The rate of care proceedings appears to be the equal highest ever with 103 ICOs made in the last year. This should mean continued higher numbers of SGOs, Adoption and Full Care Orders. 104 ICOs ceased in the last year. The average length of an ICO was 349 days. 4 ICOs were under a month, excluding those the average length of an ICO was 362 days. In the last 6 months 57 ICOs have been made and 48 ceased.



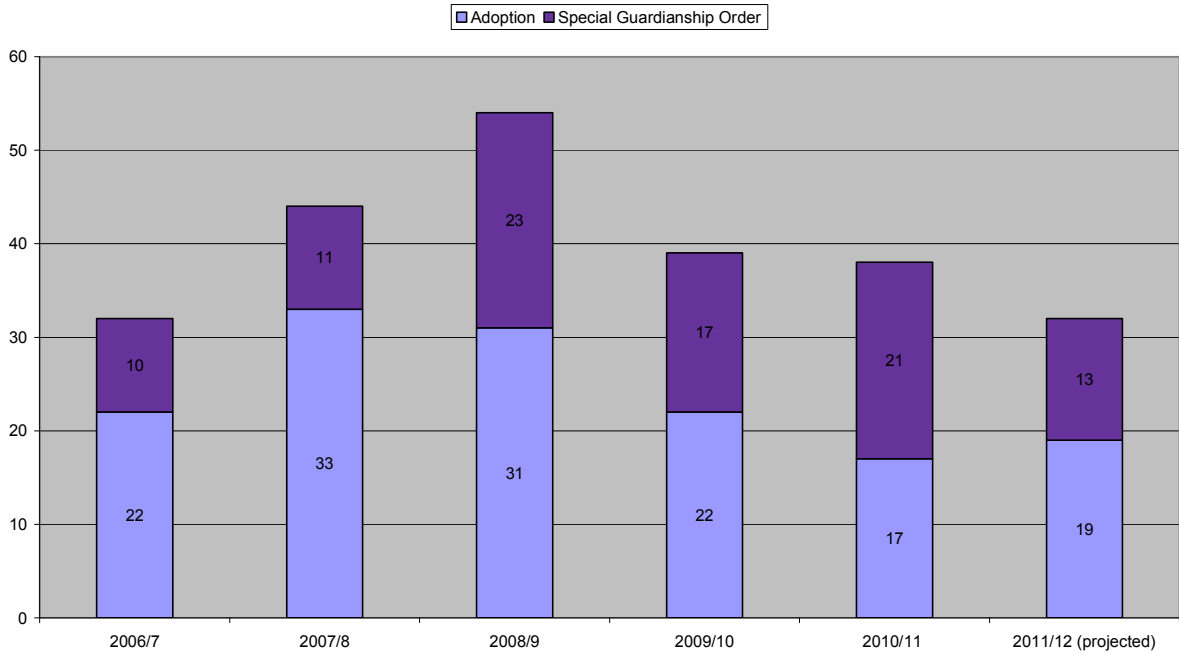
12. Permanency outcomes – adoption and special guardianship

In considering permanence for children adoption must be considered alongside special guardianship. Historically the government measured the two orders together as an indicator of the permanent outcomes for looked after children. Currently there is no requirement to for a certain percentage of children to reach permanence through adoption or special guardianship although there is considerable national interest in the numbers being too low.

The chart below shows projected outcomes for 2011/12. This information comes from the Permanence Tracking Panel. The adoption figure is felt to be more reliable give or take 1 or 2. The SGO figure a little less so and if anything more likely to be higher than lower. 24 SGOs have been made on children leaving care in the last 12 months. The 2011/12 projection seems low and this may warrant more warrant a more detailed consideration over the next 6 months.

Higher numbers of adoptions in 2007/8 and 2008/9 are directly related to higher numbers of foster carers adopting children following the introduction of a conversion scheme.

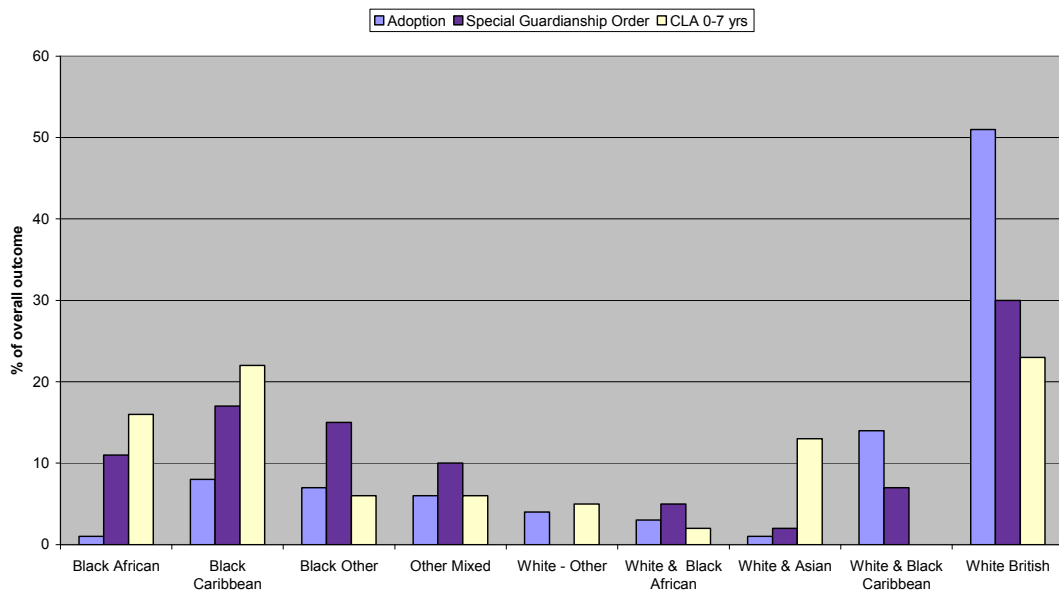
Adoptions & Special Guardianship Orders 5 yrs to end March 2011



13. Permanence outcomes adoption and special guardianship by ethnicity

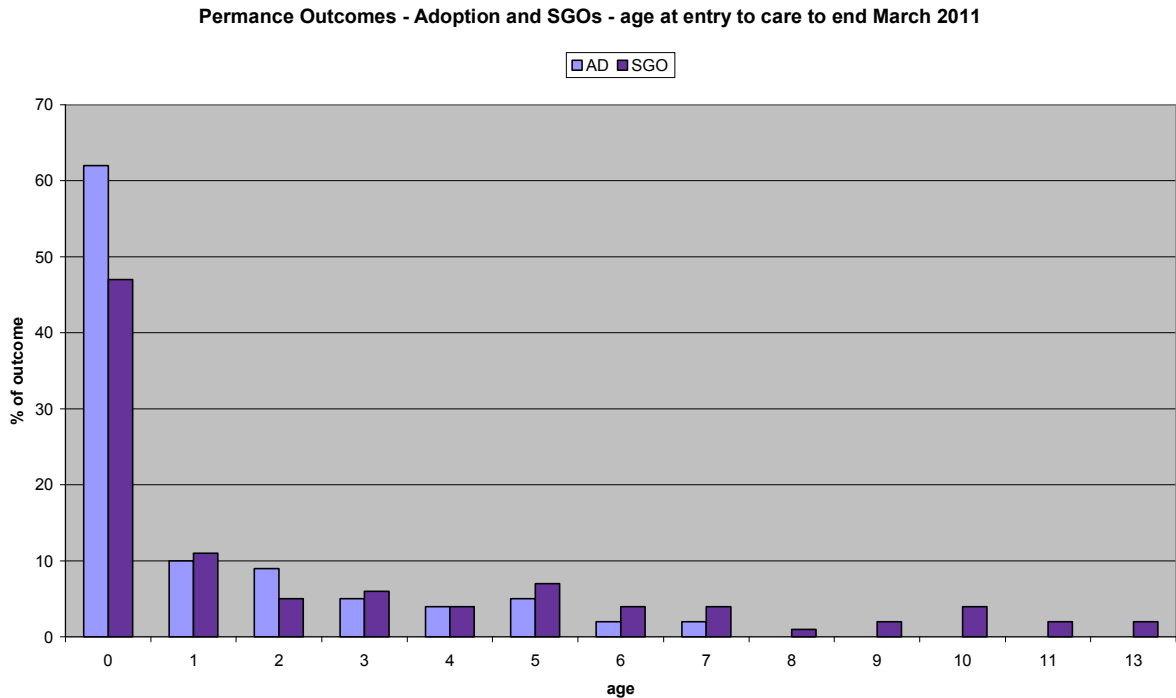
There is an on-going challenge to the care system to enable the adoption of children of black and minority ethnicity. This is a national issue and the above graph illustrates the evidence supporting this within Southwark. What it also shows however is that special guardianship as a route to permanence 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.

Permanence outcomes & ethnicity 6 yrs to end March 2011

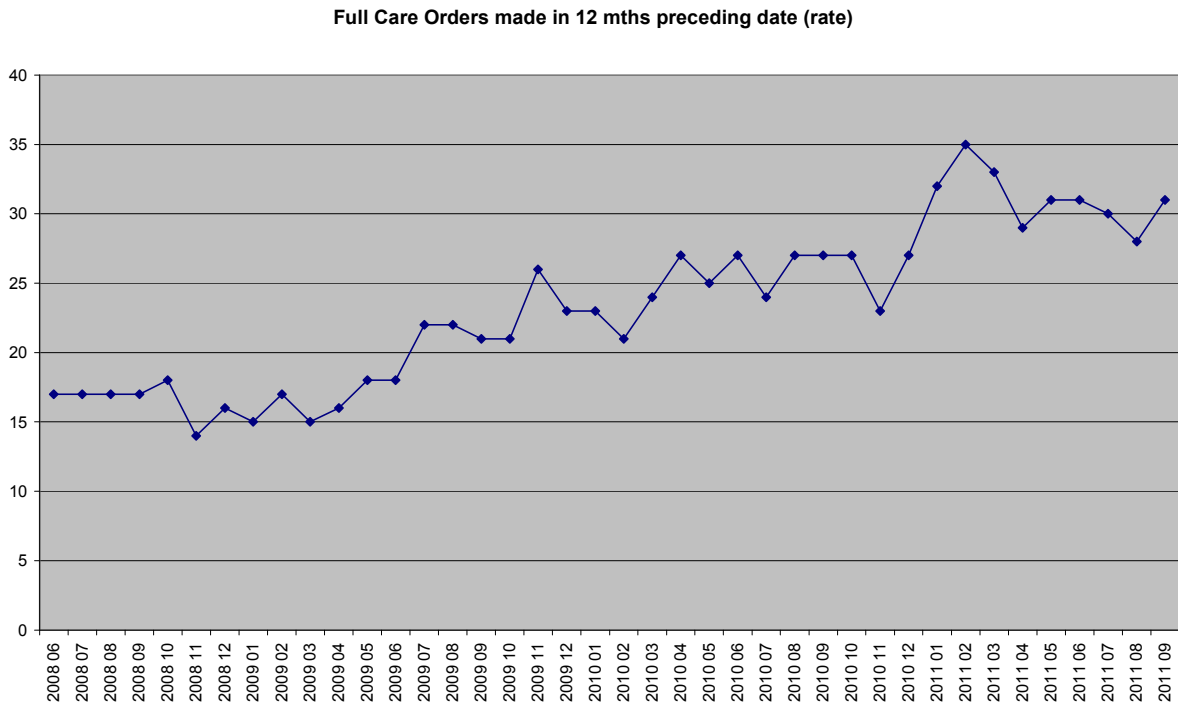


14. Permanence outcomes adoption and special guardianship by age & entry to care

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.



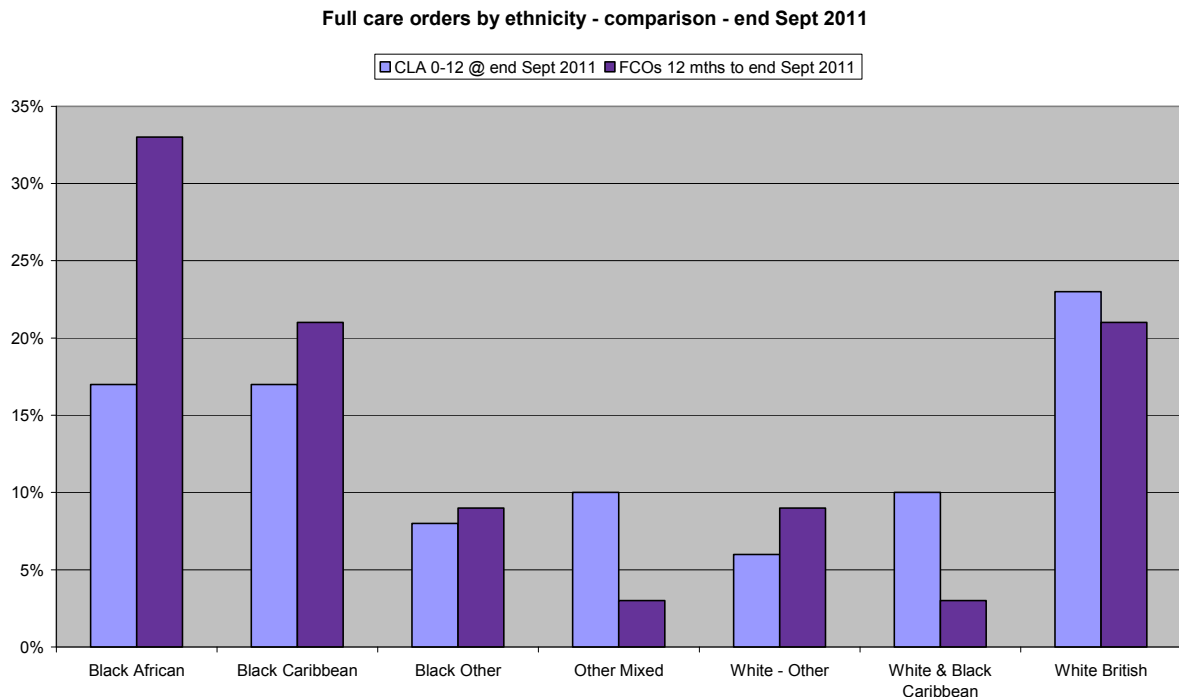
15. Permanence outcomes, full care orders and long term foster care



The rate of full care orders being made on children has seen a generally 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 the last 12 months was 10 years 4 months when the order was made. Of the 33 made in the last 12 months 27 are in foster placements. 60% are boys. The CLA 0-12 figure is 58%.

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. Of this group 63% were placed in foster care. The average age of this group is 10 yrs 10 months old. 54% are boys against 58% for the CLA 0-12 age group as a whole.

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 catalyses 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**

The CLA Health Steering Group advised by the Agency Medical Advisor Dr Anthony Tam has identified a learning need in relation to **how children are effected by blood borne viruses**. The Permanence Tracking Panel has also noted that there are isolated cases of delay in family finding for children while further medical tests are undertaken where this arises later as a concern. It is agreed that further learning across the system would help deliver better outcomes for children.

Implementation of new statutory guidance has continued with the Adoption Focus Half Day providing learning on this as well as various training events including a programme of system wide training. It is noted that the September Adoption Panel saw its first trans-racial placement under the new guidance that was managed with great care, thoroughness and sensitivity. This case will be noted as a good practice exemplar in service meetings.

The **Family Justice Review** is expected to report and it is hoped it may set in motion changes that will reduce delay for children through Family Justice System a which the interim report heavily criticised for failing children. The debate around this has been important and generated interest within the service and its findings must be promoted to awareness raise about key issues.

A **contact working group** has been established in collaboration with the CLA Contact Service, social workers and managers in the CLA Teams and Southwark Legal Services. Its aim is to provide better evidence and support for social workers to make more child centred contact plans. This is based on a body of research that has accumulated over the last 2/3 years. It is noted that contact has been a concern of the Adoption Panel Chair and this initiative hopes to make an impact on the outcomes for children by having better thought through contact plans with possibilities for less contact and better quality contact where it can be directly related to the child's best interests.

In June/July 2011 a study was undertaken of Southwark **children whose care plan had changed from adoption to long term foster care** since the implementation of the Adoption & Children Act 2002. This group numbered 18 children. An audit was undertaken, the data compared and contrasted with the group of children who have been successfully adopted. The views of the family finding social workers in the Adoption and Permanence Team were gathered about the findings of each audit. This wasn't an academic or exhaustive study but it was sufficient to provide some general conclusions about this group and the work that went on to find them an adoptive family as well as thoughts about how they family finding system might be developed.

The full report is available for more detail but in summary the study found that where adoptive placements hadn't been found around 2 thirds of children remained in the same placement as the end of care proceedings. Their needs are high and some placements are not without strain but these children have generally been given stability – one of the most important predictors of positive outcomes for children in care. Additionally practically all siblings have been enabled to live together in stable arrangements. What is missing is their legal permanence through adoption rather than matched long term foster care.

There are a small number of cases where the outcomes for the children are more concerning. In some of these cases family finding was always ambitious. To have a number of children whom we have been unable to find adoptive families for can say a

number of things. Firstly that it is a sign of a healthy system that we are still aspiring to place children with difficult needs. Secondly, and in a way the flip side of this is that we should not be complacent about this and challenge ourselves more to scrutinise what we did in those cases. 3 of those children are in “unstable” placements and they entered the care system relatively early to the age of children who generally comprise the unstable group.

The study concluded there is a need for improved tracking and scrutiny of the smaller number of harder to place children. This is a relatively small number that deserve a higher profile around family finding scrutiny and ensuring their needs are being well met within their placement and network.

There is no evidence for any systematic drift or complacency around family finding and planning and delivering permanence for children. There is considerable evidence for the reverse but there is a requirement for a sharper visible focus on family finding in the child’s record and the social work team for the child, the family finding team and IRO service will need to reflect on how each can adapt to this challenge while not getting bogged down in excessive and repetitive recording. There is no evidence that children who aren’t adopted then “bounce” around the care system or that ethnicity is a significant factor in this group of children. There is evidence that a small number of cases with children with very complex needs are still a challenge to the child care system to ensure their needs are fully met and our practice in these cases with the benefit of hindsight could and should have been different.

The conclusion was that family finding while being healthy has in the study undergone a medical. It has passed its tests generally well but there is residual concern that some treatment is needed to support long term health to meet the challenges of new statutory guidance and political imperatives around widening our approach to adoption particularly around harder to place children.

This study has been shared and discussed with social workers, managers, agency decision maker and Adoption Panel at the well attended Adoption Focus Half Day 7th July 2011. It was also the main topic of Southwark’s Permanence Forum on 5th October 2011. The Permanence Forum is a key gathering of CLA Team Managers, Adoption managers and Quality Assurance Manager and IROs with a purpose to discuss key topics to reach consensus and develop agreement for improvement.

Arising from this a Family Finding Standard has been developed and will be promoted throughout the service. An audit tool has been agreed and will become a form on ICS. The audit process is now directly linked to the quality assurance of family finding and key standards that have been developed. The Permanence Tracking panel will monitor implementation of key aspects of family finding standards. The IRO service is to review its own recording and approach to improving the focus and scrutiny on family finding. In the main the remaining actions are the implementation of above.

19. Organisational Development

Plans for the next 6 months are as follows:

The family finding standards and family finding audit tool and process must be implemented and embedded within the service

Audits must be completed on all children are waiting more than 6 months for an adoptive placement

The Permanence Tracking Panel should review its functioning to consider how to create greater purchase on family finding.

More detailed understanding of black African children on full care orders and their needs should be set out in the final year report.

Learning from disruptions and good practice with hard to place children must be delivered to CLA and Adoption and Permanence Team.

Learning around impact of children of blood born viruses and other key health matters must be delivered across CLA, Adoption and Permanence Team and Adoption Panel.

Learning around issues raised and recommendations of Family Justice Review should be promoted across the service

Learning promoted and key tools and guidance for social workers and managers to make evidenced based, child centred contact plans.

Children's Specialist Services Divisional Management Team to consider this report and additional actions.

Alasdair Smith
CLA 0-12 and Adoption Service Manager