

*ADOPTION SERVICE
ANNUAL REPORT*

CLA Business Unit

2012/13

Adoption performance has received considerable scrutiny in the last 6 months. On the whole performance is consistent but there are clear areas for improvement particularly in respect of: numbers of children adopted: timescales to achieve adoption notably for BME children.

There has been a reinvestment in capacity in the Adoption Service alongside development of an Improvement Plan that is in its early stages of implementation.

2. Background Information

The adoption of children from care receives a high profile nationally promoted by the Department of Education. Southwark's performance came under scrutiny from the DfE in December 2012 and Southwark voluntarily undertook an independent peer review in February 2013 to assist informing its improvement work.

This report fulfils obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report 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 20 March 2013. Plans for children are dynamic and develop every day and the picture will have changed at the point this is read.

Within this report there is particular emphasis on adoption due to the considerable scrutiny this area has received nationally reflected in our more detailed analysis and understanding of performance in this area.

3. Adoption - children

The government measures and compares local authorities by way of an annual adoption scorecard. It uses 3 year average figures as a more accurate guide to performance. This report looks at performance for the scorecard 2010-2013. Southwark's performance for this period can be measured but not compared with other LAs as comparative data is not released until November 2013.

3.1 The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (A1) shows an improvement for the 3-year average of 40 days with a total average of 735 days. There is considerable improvement in the year (an average of 598 which is 168 days less compared to 2011/12).

All remaining the same nationally, this would improve our London ranking by 3 positions to 15th and our national ranking by 10 positions to 28th.

There is concern about how the term *placed for adoption* and *a child moving in with its adoptive family* can be used inter-changeably. The DfE detailed guidance note setting out how the figure is calculated measures from entry to care to date child placed for adoption. For a significant number of children, those placed with and adopted by foster carers or family members, the date of moving in is in almost all cases much earlier than the date when the child was placed. The DfE recognised this in the 2009-2011 scorecard released by

introducing a further measure A10. Southwark's performance in this area is very good. A1 cannot be looked at in isolation to A10. (see further below).

- 3.2 *The average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (A2)*** has shown improvement by 70 days in 2012/13. However, the 3-year average shows a slight increase by 41 days reaching an average of 214 days. The main reason for this is that the 2009/10 figure, which was very low (84) will no longer impact on the 3-year average. The overall numbers of foster carers who have adopted (AX below) has also dropped and as the time to match them is treated as 0, less foster carers adopting effects this area by increasing the average number of days.

So while the year performance 2012/13 shows improvement, the 3 year average shows a decline in performance taking it above the threshold set by the DfE (190 days).

Of the 20 adopted children this year boys are more likely to take longer to be matched. Nearly half (5 children) of the white & black Caribbean children adopted, took longer than the national average to be matched.

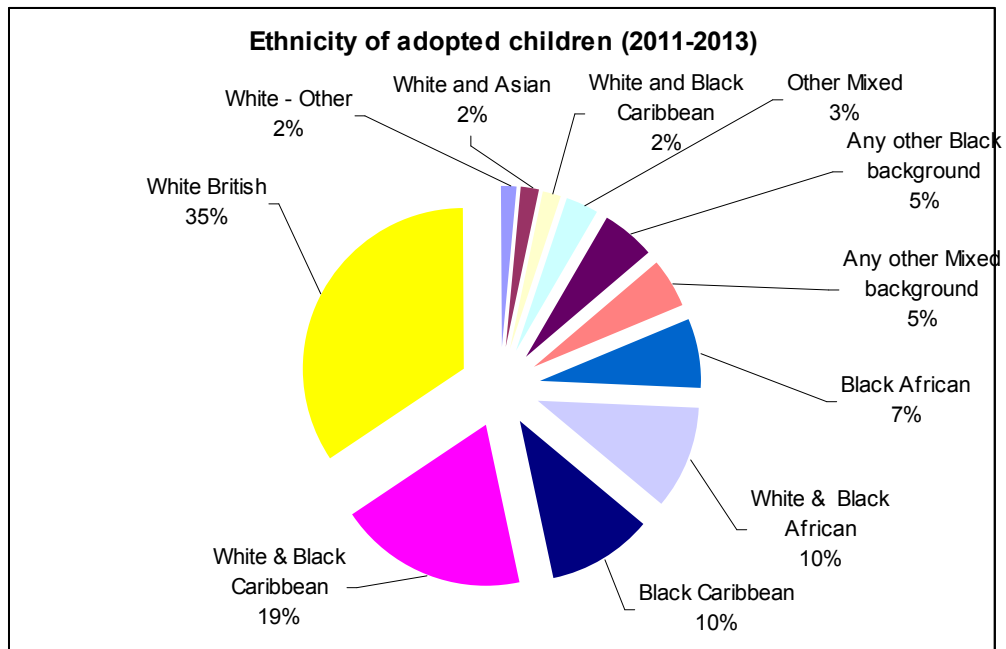
- 3.3 *The percentage of children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (A3)*** has shown improvement of 4.3 percentage points for the 3 year average. The yearly position in 2012/13 shows more improvement at 59.5% compared to 48.0% in 2011/12. However, the improvement in proportion is more reflective of the smaller cohort and less children actually waited less than 21 months (9 less children for the 3 year average but only 2 less children in the year – 47 in 2012/13 compared to 49 in 2011/12).

A cohort analysis shows no difference in gender, however, black children are more likely to wait longer than 21 months compared to white children.

- 3.4 *Adoptions from care (number adopted and percentage leaving care who are adopted) (A4)***

The total number of adoptions from care in 2012/13 is 20. This shows stability in the volume and proportion of children been adopted in Southwark. However, this remains below the national average of 12%.

In the 3-year period, slightly over half (52%; 30 children) adopted were boys and 48% (28 children) were girls, which is representative of all children ceasing to be looked after in the period. Over one third (20 children) adopted were white British followed by 19% (11 children) of white & black Caribbean children adopted. Six black Caribbean children and 6 white & black African children were also adopted.

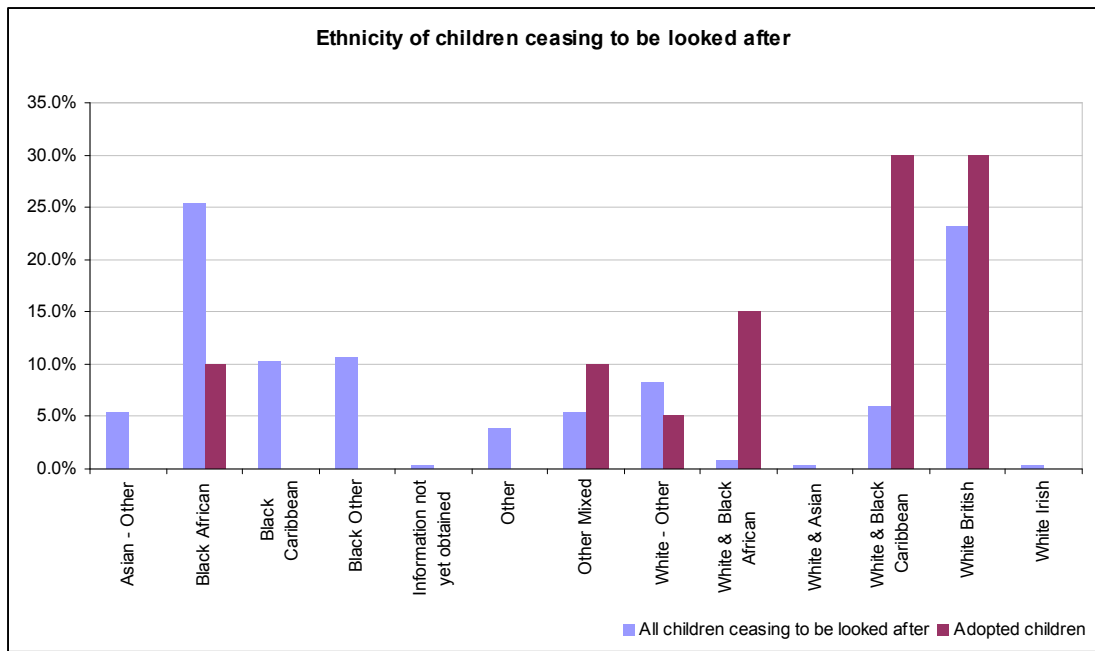


3.5 Number and percentage of children for whom the permanence decision has changed away from adoption (A5) currently this is showing 7%, with 6 children where the plan has been reversed in 2012/13. This figure needs further scrutiny due to considerable data cleansing in the last 6 months.

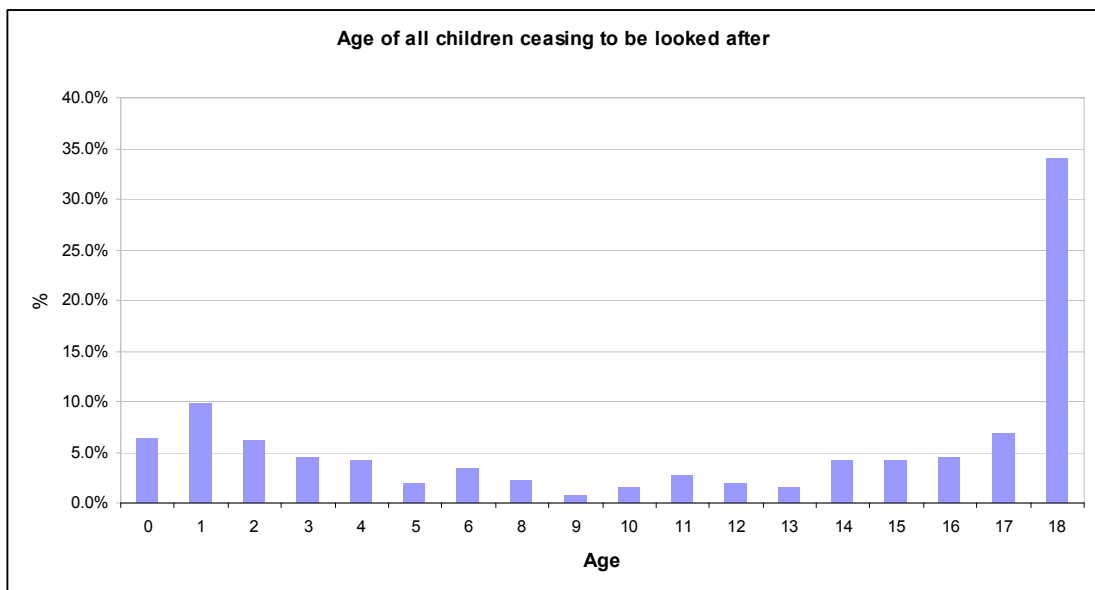
3.6 Number and percentage of black and minority ethnic children leaving care who are adopted and number and percentage of children aged 5 or over leaving care who are adopted A6 & A7 show lower numbers adopted in these 2 groups.

Both measures remain stable with the 3 year average at 6.6% for BME and 1.5% for those aged 5 or over.

In 2012/13, of the 20 adopted children 13 were of a BME background and 180 BME children ceased to be looked after in the year. However, when we compare the ethnicity of adopted children to those ceasing to be looked after it is clearly evident that there is over-representation of white British children and under-representation of black African children.



Similar to last year, 2 children adopted were aged 5 or over raising the 3-year average to a total of 9 children (1.7%). Over one third of children ceasing care are aged 18.

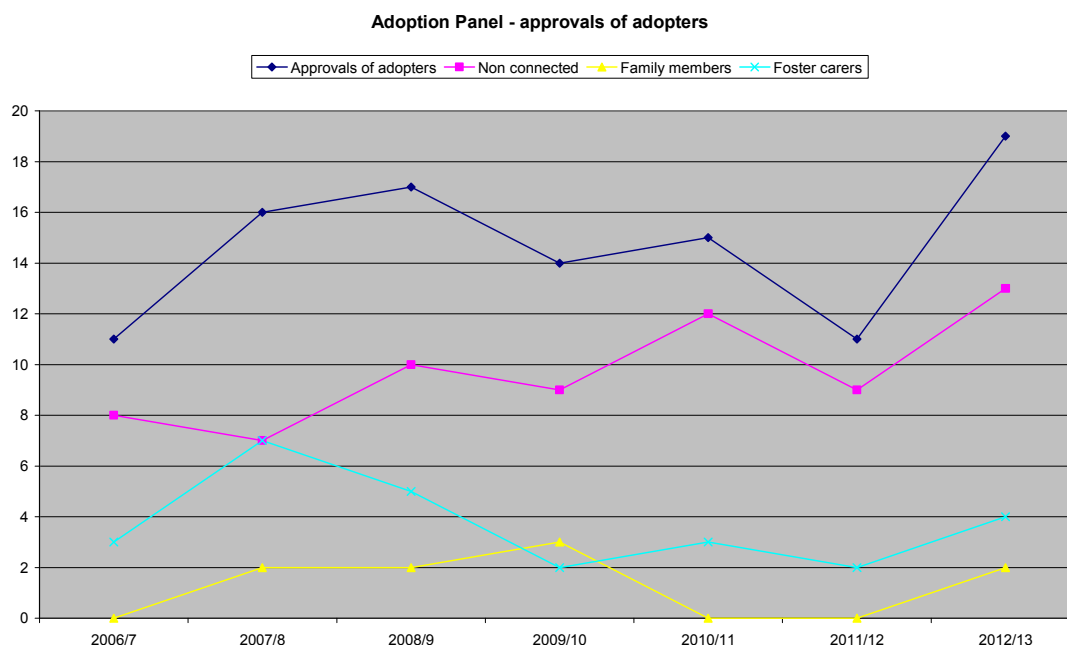


3.7 Number of children awaiting adoption (A9) Currently there are 42 children awaiting adoption. This puts Southwark in the second banding (28 to 47) of high performance for the adoption gateway map and with Haringey, Lambeth, Newham and Hillingdon compared to being the highest borough in London. The visibility of children waiting for adoption has been improved greatly by development of tracking reports showing more clearly who these children are and how long they have been waiting to allow more effective tracking and targetting of activity to prevent further delay.

3.8 The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family [A1] adjusted for foster care adoptions (A10) Southwark's performance in this area was very strong in the 3 year period 2009-2012 putting it in the quarter nationally. With the reduction in numbers of foster carers adopting this year this is set to increase a little although it is estimated that during 2013/14 at least 7 foster carers will adopt children which is a significant increase.

4. Adoption – adopters

19 new prospective adopters were approved in 2012/13. This is a 70% increase in availability of adopters. Of those approved 6 are foster carers, 2 of whom are friends & family carers. This is the highest figure of approvals in 8 years although.



Considerable work is needed to enable better tracking of adoption assessments to meet ambitious plans of the Adoption Scorecard for 2014 for all assessments of prospective adopters to be completed within 6 months.

4.1 Who adopted Southwark children?

Adopters of adopted children - which agency	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11
Southwark	11	12	12
Consortium LA	0	0	0
Consortium VAA	3	0	0
Other LA	5	5	3
Other VAA	1	4	2

9 of the above adoptive placements (8 families) were purchased externally. 5 from other local authorities at £13,138 each and 4 (2 single and 1 group of sibs) 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. In 2013/14 local authorities will be expected to pay the same fee for placements with other LAs.

Adopters of adopted children - how recruited	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11
Adopted Sibling	2	1	0
Adoption Register	3	2	1
Advert/Magazine	2	1	2
Family Member	0	2	4
Regional Event	0	2	2
Southwark Foster Carer	1	4	4
Southwark Recruited Direct	7	8	4

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.

Southwark Foster Carers continue to make up a significant proportion of adopters. They comprise 33% of those assessed by Southwark who adopt Southwark children in both 2010/11 and 2011/12. For the 2 years this is 21% of all Southwark children adopted.

In 2011/12 Southwark traded 1 households of approved adopters to another local authority generating income of £13, 138. 1 household was traded the previous year and 2 households were traded in each of the previous 2 years generating around £50K.

4.2 Enquiries, responsiveness and recruitment. There have been 208 adoption enquiries in the last year to date. This is about the same level as 2011/12 (207). Enquiries are defined as a person contacting Southwark to discuss their interest in becoming an adopter.

In November 2012 (National Adoption Week) this event was repeated but with wider advertising. This was co-ordinated by the Consortium administrator with considerable help from the Lambeth Communications manager. A full page of editorial in the Evening Standard together with an advert in the Metro as well as the SMS and advertising on individual agencies home pages ensured that over 120 people attended. Again, Lambeth was the venue chosen. The event was felt by all to be very positive and at least 3 families were followed up. Although this wasn't a Southwark event it did mean that it showed joint working and Southwark's profile was considerably raised.

The Adoption Statement of Purpose 2012/13 sets out the process and frequency of information meetings where enquires hear more about adoption and meet adopters and adoptees. In the last 12 months 6 Information Meetings have been held mostly in Peckham Library on Saturday mornings. Further

informal coffee mornings were held in the summer of 2011 and an extra evening event in East Dulwich.

The 2012/13 Recruitment Strategy has been delivered and evaluated and a new strategy has been devised for 2013/14. The current strategy must be regarded as partially successful given the 70% increase in approval of adopters. However with the high number of children waiting for adoption it does not meet the needs of all Southwark children in need of adoption and a more ambitious and creative strategy is being finalised for 2013/14.

4.3 Adoption disruptions. There was one disruption of a child placed for adoption in 2012/13. There were none the previous year.

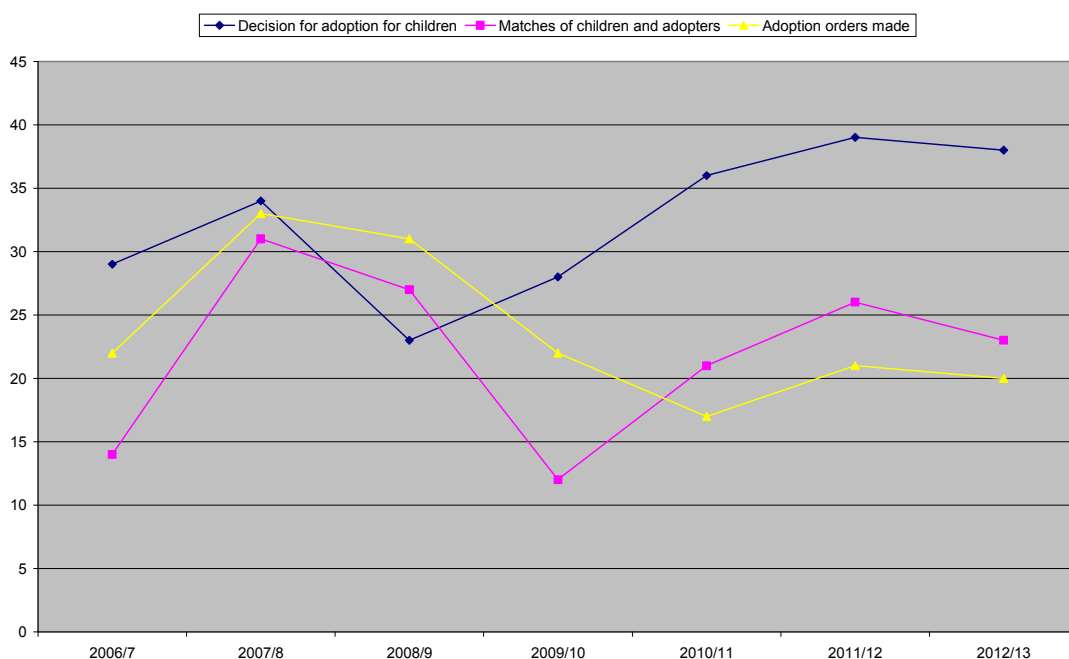
4 adoption placements have disrupted in the years 2006 to 2013. 3 were placements with voluntary adoption agencies and one with another local authority. This is a disruption rate of 2% and likely to be lower

5. Adoption Panel activity and related outcomes

Adoption Panels recommend prospective adopters for approval as adopters; and matches for approved adopters with children as well as whether adoption is suitable for relinquished children. The final decision, based on the panel's recommendations is made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) (Head of Service for the CLA Service). Until September 2012 such panels used to recommend: children for whom adoption is in the child's best interests. That decision is made by the ADM without the benefit of scrutiny from the panel.

Southwark's Adoption Panels meets on the third Thursday of the month. 3 additional panels were held in the course of the year due to volume of work and the need to minimise delay for children.

All Adoption Panels are independently chaired and the report of Southwark's Independent Chair is set out in full in Appendix 1.



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.

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 7 month 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 to lower levels of adoption in 2010/11. The rise in care proceedings from 2009 has seen a rise in adoptions despite experience of the family justice system that such a care plan is harder than ever to achieve. Trends in adoption performance are most significantly influenced by levels of care proceedings which are at a very high level currently.

The independent peer review noted the Panel Chair's comments thus: *The Panel Chair spoke positively of the panel in Southwark, which he found to be competent, offering scrutiny and consistency of approach across cases. He highlighted a number of good practice examples, which included: an annual conference on adoption, draft later life letters at the matching stage, successful annual adopter events and CAMHS input. He did however also highlight a number of challenges facing Southwark as it moves forward: ensuring adequate staffing levels; an ethos in the Adoption Team that will need to support the new shorter timescales required for adopter assessment and the child placement process; decisively expanding adopter recruitment, improving family finding timescales and changing the approach to those children traditionally seen as harder to place.*

6. Adoption, Special Guardianship and Residence Orders

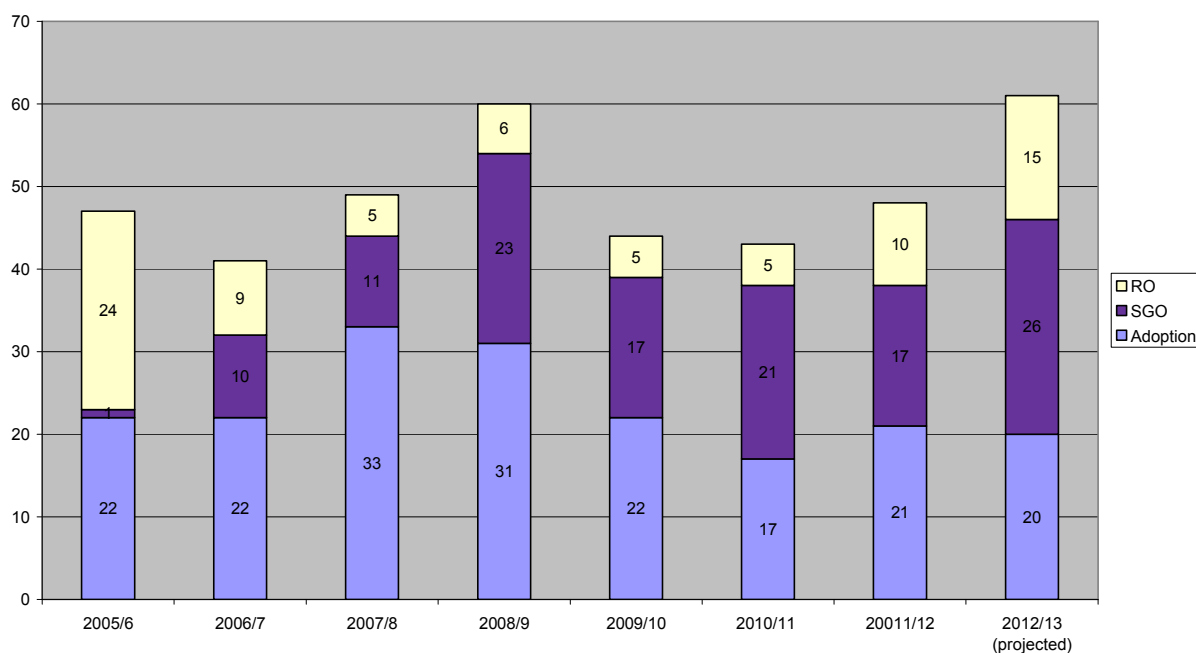
Overall in 2012/13 Southwark's performance for permanent outcomes beyond parental care was the best in 8 years of running these figures. The closest year in terms of volume 2008/9 was significantly effected by foster carers adopting.

Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) were introduced by the Adoption and Children Act 2002. It was intended to provide another option for legal permanence for children who cannot grow up with their birth families. A SGO gives the special guardian legal parental responsibility for the child which is expected to last until the child is 18. But, unlike Adoption Orders, these orders do not remove parental responsibility from the child's birth parents, although their ability to exercise it is extremely limited.

In practice, this means that the child is no longer the responsibility of the local authority, and the special guardian will have more clear responsibility for all day-to day decisions about caring for the child or young person, and for taking important decisions about their upbringing, for example their education. And, importantly, although birth parents retain their legal parental responsibility, the special guardian only has to consult with them about these decisions in exceptional circumstances

In considering permanence for children adoption must be considered alongside SGO and ROs. Historically the government measured adoption and SGO together as an indicator of permanent outcomes for LAC. Currently there is no requirement for a certain percentage of children to reach permanence through adoption or SGO although there is now a scorecard rating for percentage of LAC adopted.

Key permanence outcomes leaving care 2005 to 2013



A Residence Order (RO) is an order issued by the Family Proceedings Court, and details which parent or carer the children should reside with. This order normally provides details of when and where the children can be visited by the parent who has failed to gain residency. Once the order has been granted, Parental Responsibility for the children goes to the person with whom the children will be living.

ROs have increased significantly in the last 2 years. These are mostly BME children who are placed with relatives, abroad. A handful are used as an interim stage in consideration of an application of an SGOs during care proceedings. 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. In these 2 years 22 foster carers adopted children (2 were family members who looked after the children as foster carers). In 2011/12 this numbered 4 and 2012/13 this is just 2 the lowest in 8 years. Thus adoptions by strangers rose if overall adoptions reduced a little. Adoption and foster care adoption is estimated to rise significantly in 2013/14.

A comparison study between SGOs and adoption conducted for children with that permanence outcome from 2006 to 2012 showed how critically SGOs were a more likely permanence route for BME children than adoption in Southwark. For children of mixed ethnicity there was little difference between adoption and SGO as an outcome. With respect to age it appears from the study both orders are predominately used for young children, with 69% of those adopted and 65% of SGOs being under 5 years old when the order was granted. Consideration of SGO performance for 2012/13 supports this general finding. (*Permanence Analysis – Adoption and Special Guardianship Period : April 2006 to March 2012 (6 years) Author: Jenny Skirrow*)

7. Performance Improvement Activity

An Adoption Improvement Plan was devised in October 2012 and has evolved ever since. The Peer review undertaken in February 2013 summed up the approach thus:

In recent months an adoption task force has been established, comprising managers across the service and underpinned by an improvement plan and the recent appointment of an Adoption Improvement Manager.....the diagnostic team recognises that the plan is an evolving document and that work to embed improvement is in the early stages.

It also commented

There was a consistent view from all those we spoke to that social workers and managers take a child-centred approach, focused on achieving the best outcomes for all children and recognition of children's need for permanence

In discussions with social workers and managers, there was recognition that more attention needed to be given to adoption and that there were now increased resources and a higher profile being given to adoption.

The Improvement Plan is appended to this document as *Appendix 2*. Its key areas are

Reforming Custom and Practice with an aim to work better as a system to ensure more children are adopted from care and move in with their adoptive families as soon as possible.

Permanency planning with an aim to improving planning so fewer children awaiting adoption and more children adopted from care, and are able to move in with their adoptive family in a timelier manner

Family finding with an aim that all children in care have a decent chance of finding an adoptive family, including those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are older, and can move in with adoptive families as soon as possible

Case tracking and management overview system with an aim that all children are closely followed on their journey to maximise their opportunities of permanent placement as soon as possible.

Innovation and challenge with an aim to explore new and different ways to creatively improve performance on adoption.

*Alasdair Smith
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20th March 2013*