Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: Monday 13 November 2023
Time: 10.00 am

Membership

Councillor Sue Markham (Chair)
Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell
Councillor Brett Beetham
Councillor Caroline Phillips
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse
Valerie Corcoran
Jackie Channell

Items on the agenda: -

1.   General

    (1) Apologies

    (2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

    (3) Minutes of the previous meeting

    Minutes from the meeting held on the 16th October 2023.

2.   Voice, Influence & Change Team - Updates

    Debs McGarvey (Quality and Impact Service, Team Leader - Voice, Influence & Change) to present information in relation to a survey that has been launched from the Participation Leads Network.

3.   Report from the Virtual School Head

    Report for the Autumn Term 2023.

4.   Annual Adoption Reports

- ACE Annual Report
- Report of the Adoption Panel
- Warwickshire Adoption Report

5. **Fostering Reports**

- Private Fostering Report
- Fostering & Alternative Carers Support Team Annual Report

6. **Development of the Work Programme and Items on the Forward Plan**

Items from the Forward Plan relevant to the remit of the Panel.

7. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on 15th January 2024.

Meetings are not webcast and are not open to the public.

Monica Fogarty
Chief Executive
Warwickshire County Council
Shire Hall, Warwick

Disclaimers

Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

Members are required to register their disclosable pecuniary interests within 28 days of their election of appointment to the Council. Any changes to matters registered or new matters that require to be registered must be notified to the Monitoring Officer as soon as practicable after they arise.

A member attending a meeting where a matter arises in which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest must (unless they have a dispensation):

- Declare the interest if they have not already registered it
- Not participate in any discussion or vote
- Leave the meeting room until the matter has been dealt with
- Give written notice of any unregistered interest to the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the meeting.

Non-pecuniary interests relevant to the agenda should be declared at the commencement of the meeting.

Meetings are not webcast and are not open to the public.

The public reports referred to are available on the Warwickshire Web for information
https://democracy.warwickshire.gov.uk/uuCoverPage.aspx?bcr=1

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Corporate Parenting Panel

Monday 16 October 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members
Councillor Sue Markham (Chair)
Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Caroline Phillips
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse

Officers
Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Nigel Minns, Executive Director for People
Judith Newell-Rollins, Specialist Practitioner
Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting Service

Others Present

Valerie Corcoran, Designated Nurse Children in Care for NHS Coventry and Warwickshire Integrated Care Board

1. **General**

   (1) Apologies

   Apologies were received from Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell.

   Apologies were also received from John Coleman, Director of Children & Families Service.

   (2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

   None

   (3) Minutes of the previous meeting

   The minutes from the meeting held on the 18th September 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

   There were no other matters arising.

(4) Restricted Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes from the meeting held on the 18th September 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

There were no other matters arising.

2. Performance Data

Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting presented the report to the Panel with the following highlights –

The number of children in care has decreased in the last month. The Panel noted that there had been a significant rise in previous months but most of the children entering care have been Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). It was confirmed that a significant number of USAC are coming into Warwickshire from Kent as part of the national transfer scheme. These children are part of planned moves that are prepared for and that places are prepared for. There are a number of USAC who arrive in Warwickshire (via lorry for example) and places for these children have to be found. It was noted by the Panel that this is a national issue.

There has been an increase in the number of Special Guardianship Orders and Adoptions.

There has been an increase in the use of agency foster care. The majority of these placements have been for larger sibling groups who, as a result of being kept together, have been place out of county.

There has been a reduction of six children in residential care. These children have moved back in to foster care placements or have returned home.

Placement orders, that allow Warwickshire County Council to place children for adoption, have increased. It is likely that this is as a result of the previous delays in the process following the backlog created during the pandemic. Performance in this area is now back on track.

In relation to children in care being in unsuitable accommodation (for example, sofa surfing, staying with friends or in a B&B or a custodial sentence) it was noted that these situations arise for a range of reasons such as the breakdown of relationships; if a care leaver has moved in with a partner and the relationship has subsequently broken down. The Panel noted that leaving care at 18 to live independently is a young age to start living alone. The council's House Project supports care leavers. Nigel Minns, Executive Director People Directorate stated that some of the choices made by young carers are not what officers would deem suitable, but officers would class their choice as unsuitable accommodation. For example, UASC may choose to live with friends and that it what suits them, but not from an officer's point of view.

In relation to placement stability, the Panel was informed that work I continuing to improve this area. There has been an improvement in performance over the last month. The Panel noted that the figures for long term placement stability can be misleading; more children are returning home which is positive but will still be counted as a placement move.

The Chair requested confirmation in relation to the Initial Health Assessment (IHA) figures for June 2023 as the figure was different in the report presented today from the figure reported in last months' meeting.

3. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report

Judith Newell-Rollins, Specialist Practitioner presented the report to the Panel stating that overall, performance is good but there are some areas for improvement.

An overview of the report was given to the Panel confirming that Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) ensure that the responsibility of corporate parenting officers and the welfare of children in care is being met. It was confirmed that presently there are 14 IROs in Warwickshire.

It was confirmed that there are currently 188 children in care in Warwickshire who are the subject of protection plans. It was noted by the Panel that comparable data is currently unavailable as there is no data as up to date as the Independent Reviewing Service would like. The current figure is higher than IROs would like it to be but it is lower than it has been.

Moving forward IROs are looking to increase overall participation in the reviews, particularly from the children in care themselves. Former children in care are now helping to develop this process and there is support from apprentices across Warwickshire, many of whom have a background in care.

It was confirmed that the high number of children currently under protection plans means that it isn't always possible to engage purposefully with them all but options such as financial incentives are being used. A text message service is also being used as another option for getting young people involved.

It was confirmed that invitations to conferences may not always be suitable for young people.

Following a question from Councillor Marian Humphreys in relation to the national shortage of foster places, it was confirmed that there are not enough, good enough, places for children, especially those with significant needs (emotional and social). In cases where there are significant needs, IROs work closely with Warwickshire officers and receive regular updates.

IRO's are aware of the current recruitment process in Warwickshire for additional foster placements as well as the introduction of Warwickshire based children's homes.

The Panel was pleased to receive confirmation that the IRO's consider that Warwickshire County Council is doing all that it can at the moment and that officers are all working incredibly hard and always taking into account the impact on the children in care.

Valerie Corcoran, Designated Nurse for Children in Care, asked for clarification in relation to the number of un-regulated placements. It was confirmed that the majority of placements in Warwickshire are now regulated but due to the complex needs of some children, it isn't always possible. The Panel noted that this is a national issue. Unregulated placements are short term and heavily monitored and managed so that children can be moved to a regulated placement as quickly as possible. The key is to ensure that every child is in the right placement.

Moving forward, the Independent Review Service will continue to increase participation with young people alongside Family Group Conferences. This will include work to further develop close working partnerships on safeguarding and enabling families to be involved in creating the right formulas for change.

Judith Newell-Rollins finished by stating that IROs are doing a greater job that a few years ago and the children of Warwickshire are benefitting. The Chair thanked Judith for the report and added that the report had allowed officers and members to see that, as a local authority, Warwickshire is doing well and has the right things in place to continue improving.

4. Development of the Work Programme and Items on the Forward Plan

The updated work programme was agreed by the Panel.

5. Any Other Business

None

6. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Monday 13 November 2023 at 10.00 am.

The meeting will be held in Committee Room 2, Shire Hall.

The meeting rose at 10:55

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Chair

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Corporate Parenting Panel

16.10.23

Agenda Item 3

Warwickshire Virtual School

Autumn 2023 Report
Part 3, 2022-23
Summer 23 updates and 2022-23 Virtual School service delivery
2022-23 CiC outcomes

Contents

* Warwickshire uses the term Children in Care in preference to the DfE term Looked-After Children, so the acronym CiC will be used throughout this report

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1.1 Preface

Warwickshire Virtual School Head's report is written in three parts, based on one part per school term, written retrospectively:

Part 1 – Spring term

Part 2 – Summer term

Part 3 – Autumn term

The report contains information on the work of the Virtual School, predominantly focussing on how it promotes the education of CiC. Unvalidated academic outcomes for CiC are reported in part 3; validated outcomes in part 1.

1.2 Current Context

Celebrating Success

The Virtual School prides itself on its solution focussed approach, working with service providers and stakeholders to promote the education of CiC, previously in care and children with a social worker (on an ever six model) as part of the extended duties.

Virtual School successes this year include:

- Seamless change in attendance collection and PEP (Personal Education Plan) recording. Timely training and support for school staff and other professionals ensured Warwickshire's 100% PEP review rate was maintained.
- Training and developing the Post 16 workforce. Warwickshire colleges and a Birmingham college have engaged in comprehensive training to improve and enhance their understanding of working with care experienced students.
- Supporting colleges to increase resources to build capacity and provide an improved level of support for CiC. This is a direct result of the Virtual School promoting their understanding via training.
- A group of eleven settings across Warwickshire have signed up to our RADY project (Raising Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters).
- Achieving and maintaining 100% PEP review rate at Post 16. CiC who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment, Training) have additional PEPs to ensure appropriate support.
- Strong partnership with Prospects career service enables CiC who are NEET to have personalised support.
- Resourcing and upskilling secondary settings to improve inclusivity. This work focusses on settings with the highest number of CiC and those issuing the highest number of suspensions.
- Widening the comprehensive, popular, and highly regarded training offer for settings. A partnership with AC Education has facilitated a series of webinars, which any education staff working with CiC, previously in care or with a social worker, can attend.
- Working with Equal Education to deliver the National Tutoring Programme to 40% of the CiC cohort.
- Further developing the university aspirations programme with partners from Think Higher. The programme continues to grow in popularity and has been extended to include Post 16 CiC with the aim of directly impacting post 18 choices.
- New partnerships to extend enrichment opportunities, key in promoting good SEMH (Social Emotional Mental Health), a prerequisite to academic success.

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Performing Perfectly lead on arts and Think Active on sports, in conjunction with the West Midlands Children in Care Foundation.

- Key Stage Two outcomes are above the national cohort. Comprehensive work with primary settings, undertaken by Education Advisers, to ensure academic interventions complemented SEMH work.
- Monitoring visits to support designated teachers and improve their skills and capacity to advocate for CiC.
- Successful recruitment of an additional Enrichment Coordinator to facilitate more arts and sports opportunities.
- Successful recruitment of two Education Advisers to develop the service in response to the extended duties.
- Involvement in SEND transformation projects, to influence the educational journey of CiC.
- Exceptionally high level of challenge and support for settings who suspend, reduce the education offer or fail to promote higher outcomes. The team working directly with schools and settings are all qualified teachers and school leaders and they command high expectations and demand positive and inclusive responses.
- Focus on education picture at point of entry to care. Prompt conversations with key professionals ensure PEPs, PP+ (Pupil Premium Plus) and appropriate educational interventions are in place.

Understanding challenges

The Virtual School works with partners to reduce risk factors, but the biggest challenges this year have been:

- Difficulty identifying suitable education placements for CiC with EHCPs, particularly within Warwickshire, due to high demand for specialist education.
- Increasing number of UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) and oversubscribed college courses.
- Attendance, particularly Key Stage 4. Warwickshire's CiC absence rate has again risen, with 30% CiC being classed as persistent absentees and for CiC in their final year of school, an alarming 57% were persistently absent, significantly impacting on their achievement.
- Use of suspension as a sanction continues to increase and there was one permanent exclusion the Virtual School were unable to convince the school to rescind.
- The EYFS cohort struggled with their first year in school, with most being unable to achieve many of the Early Learning Goals within the Early Years curriculum. For the first time, there were several suspensions within this cohort and all except four experienced placement moves, impacting on their ability to settle and focus on academic milestones.

Ongoing projects and service delivery

- Challenge and support for WCC services regarding how CiC and CWSW are supported and prioritised in our systems.
- Working within Education Services teams and leadership to facilitate identifying SEND provision more quickly.
- Escalation process for CiC to identify intervention where attendance is causing concern.

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- Specific focus on the attendance of the extended cohort with Warwickshire Attendance Service.
- Research into improving the attendance of children with a social worker in Warwickshire secondary schools on behalf of the Virtual School has begun. This work largely started in the summer and will finish in the spring term 2024, with the intention of providing evidence-based solutions to support all our schools.
- Warwickshire is leading on establishing a Virtual School Deputies' Network to grow expertise, promote future leaders and develop Virtual School policy and practice.
- With a focus on bringing together designated teachers and safeguarding leads, the training event 'Understanding Children with a Social Worker' has proved overwhelmingly popular, and the final performances are taking place over the coming months.
- Transition planning as always, was a key aspect of Virtual School work in the summer term.

ATTAINMENT OF CHILDREN IN CARE

NB All data is provisional and unvalidated. Validated data will be in the Spring 24 report.

2.1 Early Years Foundation Stage   *Table A1, 2*
2022-23 outcome: 21.7%
5 out of 23 achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD)

17% were not CiC at the end of term.

2.2 Year One Phonics   *Table A3,4*
2022-23 outcome: 42%
8 out of 19 achieved the expected standard in the phonics test.

This is particularly positive: at the end of 21-22, the end of the EYFS, only 22% were working at the expected standard, so 78% started Year 1 working below the expected standard.

2.2 Key Stage One   *Table A5,6*
2022-23 outcome: 26.1%
6 out of 23 achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths.

There are no recorded EYFS outcomes for this cohort (Covid).
9% were not CiC at the end of term.

2.3 Key Stage Two   *Table A7,8*
2022-23 outcome: 46.4%
13 out of 28 achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths.

This is particularly pleasing as it is 10% higher than the national cohort.

2.4 Key Stage Four   *Table A9,10,11,12*
2022-23 outcomes: 11% achieved a standard pass in the basics.

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17% achieved a standard pass in English (grade 4 and above)
6.5% achieved a strong pass in English (grade 5 and above)

22% achieved a standard pass in maths (grade 4 and above)
4.3% achieved a strong pass in maths (grade 5 and above)

7% were not CiC at the end of term.

2.5 Post 16   *Table A13*

There were 154 CiC in the Post 16 cohort at the end of the summer term. Half of the cohort entered care in the past two years, 30% within the last twelve months; 20% were NEET on entry to care.

Most of the cohort, 72%, were in Education, Employment or Training (EET), with 28% NEET. Over one third of the NEETs had college places secured for September 2023.

Of the 154, 85% sustained their EET status across the year, 5% higher than the national cohort.

The Virtual School continues to focus on supporting colleges to improve retention rates for CiC. Unless starting college courses in the first half of the Autumn term, it is more difficult to remain in a positive destination. Most courses run to an academic year with just one entry point. Provisions such as the Prince's Trust are great for developing employability skills and supporting re-engagement, but are short term only, leaving large parts of the academic year with limited options. Working with Prospects and other careers advisers is crucial in such instances. The Virtual School promotes and prompts early identification and referral to the Prospects service.

3.1 Cohort overview   *Table B1,2*

Cohorts vary from month to month, but the Virtual School work with each CiC equitably, regardless of their length of time in care. Some CiC require much Virtual School resource, the impact of which is not necessarily captured via nationally reported measures.

Prompt and comprehensive actions are taken by the Virtual School when a child enters care. Transitions out of care are determined according to individual needs.

Cohort info for 2022-23
Preschool: 98 CiC in total; 17 new to care; 28 left care
Statutory school age: 603 CiC in total; 142 new to care; 89 left care
Post 16: 295 CiC in total; 63 new to care; 140 left care

3.2 SEND   *Table B3,4,5,6*

Many children enter care with unmet and unidentified Special Educational Needs. The Virtual School works with partners to ensure prompt identification of needs and ensure appropriate support is in place. The impact of SEMH needs is particularly significant with CiC: achievement at the end of one Key Stage does not correspond with

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achievement at the end of the next where SEMH needs are high or have increased. The Virtual School supports educational settings to determine and address SEMH needs, whilst ensuring resulting strong focus on academic progress. At times, CiC must move to specialist settings as their level of SEMH needs increase. Where SEMH needs are the most significant area of need, academic achievement is often consequently very low. Levels of attendance and the use of suspensions also significantly impact on CiC with such needs.

Levels of CiC with identified SEND are significantly higher than the levels for all children; this is in turn reflected in their levels of academic achievement.
Statutory school age CiC with recorded SEND 2022-23 increased by 3.8% to 24.1%, 11% higher than for the whole of Warwickshire.
Statutory school age CiC with EHCPs 2022-23 increased by 2% to 30.3%, 26% higher than the rate for all children in Warwickshire.

All EHCP provision is the responsibility of the SEND services where the young person resides. However, the Virtual School works closely with all professionals to ensure termly PEPs track and support EHCP targets.

3.3 Enrichment   *Table C1,2*
A visit to the West End and a theatre day made up the arts enrichment offer. Key Stages 4 and 5 were invited on a day trip to watch the multi-award-winning musical Hamilton. A workshop afterwards included a competitive timed costume change for the cast members and an insight into the many careers that are related to theatre. Hosted by Women and Theatre, Years 5-9 had a day of creativity to help develop skills, have fun, and make new friends.

The high-quality university programme continued. Year 7 celebrated their final sessions at the Thinktank, Birmingham. The interactive science museum offered a huge scope of activities and exhibits, and the cohort took part in a Forensics Workshop and an Energy Show. For Year 8, the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences put on a Sports Science session which raised the debate 'What is Physical Fitness and how do we measure it?' For the last session everyone was entertained by the 'Comedy at Work' team allowing the cohort to get involved in confidence boosting workshops. Year 9's penultimate session was Disaster and Emergency Management delivered by a specialist academic. The final celebration session was hosted at the Warwick University Sports Hall, with everyone playing a variety of sports and afterwards receiving goody bags, which are always a winner!

For the UNIty cohorts, the last two masterclasses of the year were Fashion and Cyber Security/Ethical Hacking at Coventry University. The year concluded with a two-night residential in Scarborough which included paddle boarding, a boat cruise and a visit to the Sea Life Centre, as well as visiting Scarborough University to participate in masterclasses.

In addition, all cohorts had the opportunity to attend a two-night residential at Whitemoor Lakes, an outdoor activity centre. There were over 20 different indoor and outdoor activities with plenty of opportunities to learn new skills, conquer fears and have lots of fun!

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3.4 Training

A comprehensive training package continued to be delivered, with in person whole and half days, webinars and online learning opportunities. In the summer term:

- Designated teacher network meetings. Teachers come along to share good practice and learn from each other.
- The RADY approach. Challenging Education presented their attainment raising program for disadvantaged youngsters. A group of eleven schools have signed up to work on this project in the Autumn term. Schools will be supported through a series of modules, focussing on different aspects of RADY. Impact is measurable from the very beginning of the program.
- Trauma Informed Attachment Aware Schools network meeting to focus on updates and a problem-solving approach to challenges identified in settings.
- Five webinars were hosted by AC Education, aimed at all staff working with CiC, previously in care, or other children with a social worker. These aim to inform knowledge and understanding, whilst challenging policy and practice within settings.

3.5 Staffing *Table C3*

Recruitment for the four new posts took place, with three leading to successful appointments for the autumn term:

- An additional Post 16 Education Officer – vacant post
  The Post 16 cohort is very challenging: the cohort is huge; the impact of Covid is very evident in retention rates; there are a large variety of options and pathways open to 16–18-year-olds, each of which are navigated quite differently.
- An additional Enrichment Coordinator – post filled
  This will enable the Virtual School to participate in a much wider range of arts and sports activities organised across the West Midlands.
- Two new Education Advisers for Children With a Social Worker – both posts filled
  This will allow for dedicated, full-service development in response to the extended duties.

SCHOOL INFORMATION

4.1 Ofsted Grading 2022-23 *Table D1*

69% of Warwickshire CiC attended Good or Outstanding schools at the end of the year, in line with the national cohort. Due to changing inspection judgements, 7% of Warwickshire CiC were in Inadequate schools, with 6% of these being Warwickshire settings.

One CiC was placed in an Ofsted Inadequate school during the autumn term 2022 at the request of parents as the child was returning to their care. The Virtual School liaised with the host local authority and was satisfied that the school would be able to support the child appropriately.

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Virtual School policy remains that when moving schools Good or Outstanding schools are always prioritised.

4.2 Attendance and suspensions   *Table D2,3,4*
Overall attendance for 2022-23 was 88.4%.
Attendance for primary school CiC was 95.5% (+0.7% from last year).
Attendance for secondary school CiC was 83.1% (- 3.5% from last year).

Attendance for Reception to Year 8 was above 90%, with four of the year groups above 95%. The attendance of CiC in Years 9-11 was especially low. Over half of Year 11 were persistent absentees, with 8% having not attended at all.

A new local authority focus group has been established to ensure timely interventions to support improving attendance. The Virtual School will highlight CiC where attendance is classed as 'severely persistent' and these CiC will be discussed individually, with actions recorded, until all professionals are satisfied they may be removed from the meeting.

Reducing suspensions remain a priority for the Virtual School. The latest recorded suspension rate was in-line with national at 9.43% (number of Warwickshire CiC receiving at least one suspension).

Whilst the Virtual School successfully supported settings to rescind two permanent exclusions, one CiC was permanently excluded from a secondary school, outside of Warwickshire. Despite the many hours of work that Virtual School staff and the child's social worker dedicated to this, the acting headteacher went ahead with the permanent exclusion. The CiC did not need to be permanently excluded, but the school did not respond to advice and support from the Virtual School. When the headteacher finally did try to rescind the exclusion, due to the impact on the child, the Independent Review Panel (IRP) declared it too late. Both this and the governors panel focus only on process and consequently they upheld the exclusion.

4.3 Personal Education Plans (PEPs)
The Virtual School has very effective systems in place to ensure professionals are aware of their role in initiating, developing, reviewing and updating PEPs each term. These systems ensured that **all** preschool, school age and Post 16 CiC had PEPs every term.

4.4 Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)   *Table D7,8*
For the termly PEPs, schools select the funding allocation required for the planned interventions within that term. Schools can access up to £1500 per child per term. Higher amounts of PP+ per CiC were requested in each of the three terms, compared to 2021-22.

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The Virtual School closely monitors PP+ spend and impact, to advocate and facilitate bespoke support and intervention and promote the best outcomes.

One-to-one tuition was commissioned from a specialist tutoring company. Table D8 details the programme delivered and the numbers of CiC benefitting. In addition, several CiC, across the age ranges, benefitted from additional blocks of tuition, which are not detailed in the table. Funding will continue for one more year and the Virtual School has committed to offering the same programme as for 22-23.

CHILDREN PREVIOUSLY IN CARE
5.1 Revised duties
Warwickshire Virtual School continues to be viewed as a beacon of good practice for its service delivery to promote the educational achievement of children previously in care through the provision of information and advice.

The success of the service delivery is evident:
- Referrals remain high across all key stages, from parents and carers, Social Care colleagues and education settings.
- Information sessions for parents and carers were well attended and received very positive feedback.

CHILDREN WITH A SOCIAL WORKER
6.1 Extended duties
Revised guidance was published in June 2022. This remains a non-statutory duty, but Warwickshire Virtual School is keen to provide the strategic oversight that this cohort of children needs. Intentionally, any impact of the educational journey and achievements of this cohort, could reduce the number of children entering care, and for those that do enter care, improve their outcomes as they may have better starting points.

Provisional data available to the Virtual School highlights a gap between both the achievement and the attendance of Warwickshire children compared to the national cohort.

Deena Moorey
Virtual School Head, Lead Commissioner

For questions or further information email: deenamoorey@warwickshire.gov.uk

Useful links:
https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/virtualschool https://www.wmvscicfoundation.org.uk

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Warwickshire Virtual School

Autumn 2023 Report

Part 3, 2022-23

Appendices

All tables are referenced in the main report

Warwickshire
County Council

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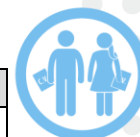
APPENDICES
*Tables with **BLUE** headings represent the statistical cohort*
*Tables with **ORANGE** headings represent the whole cohort, regardless of time in care*

NB outcomes in italics are provisional and unvalidated

APPENDIX A – Outcomes

Table A1 – Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes

GLD*	2021	2022	2023
Warwickshire CIC	-	21.1%	21.7%
National CIC	-	40%	40%
Difference	-	-18.9%	-18.3%
Each Warwickshire CiC represents	-	5.3%	4.3%

*Good Level of Development, the expected level of development at the end of the EYFS

Table A2 - CiC achieving GLD compared to those who did not:

GLD	SEN	Attendance <90%	In-year school move
GLD achieved	20%	0%	0%
Not achieved	27%	83%	44%

Table A3 – Year One Phonics outcomes

WA*	2021	2022	2023
Warwickshire CIC	-	60%	42%
National CIC	-	60%	61%
Difference	-	In line	-19%
Each Warwickshire CiC represents	-	5%	5.3%

*Working at or above standard

Table A4 - CiC achieving standard compared to those who did not:

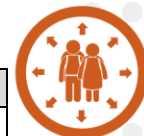| WA*	Achieved GLD in EYFS	SEN	Attendance <90%	In-year school move
Expected standard	50%	0%	0%	63%
Below expected standard	0%	36%	27%	36%

*WA = working at the standard

Warwickshire County Council

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Table A5 – Key Stage One outcomes

RWM*	2021	2022	2023
Warwickshire CIC	-	37.5%	26.1%
National CIC	-	30%	31%
Difference	-	+7.5%	-4.9%
Each Warwickshire CiC represents	-	6.3%	4.3%

*RWM = Reading, Writing and Maths at the expected standard

Table A6 - CiC achieving RWM* compared to those who did not:

RWM	SEN	Attendance <90%	In-year school move
RWM achieved	33%	0%	83%
Not achieved	41%	6%	47%

*RWM = Reading, Writing and Maths at the expected standard

Table A7 – Key Stage Two outcomes

RWM	2021	2022	2023
Warwickshire CIC	-	28.6%	46.4%
National CIC	-	32%	36%
Difference	-	-3.4%	+9.6%
Each Warwickshire CiC represents	-		3.6%

Table A8 - CiC achieving RWM compared to those who did not:

RWM	ARE* in KS1	SEN	Attendance <90%	In-year move KS2
RWM achieved	62%	15%	0%	62%
Not achieved	20%	60%	7%	30%

*Achieved Age Related Expectation

Table A9 – Key Stage Four outcomes

The Basics*	2021	2022	2023
Warwickshire CIC	-	16.1%	0%
National CIC	-	14%	
Difference	-	+2.1%	
Each Warwickshire CiC represents	-	1.6%	2.2%

*English and Maths GCSE at grade 5 or above

Table A10 - CiC achieving a *standard* pass compared to those who did not:

En+Ma Grade 5	ARE in KS2	SEN	Attendance <90%	In-year move KS4
Standard pass	80%	60%	20%	0%

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Not achieved	24%	66%	68%	17%

Table A11 – Attainment 8

Attainment 8	2021	2022	2023
Warwickshire CIC	-	23.0	
National CIC	-	25.8	
Difference	-	-2.8	

Table A12 – Progress 8

Progress 8	2021	2022	2023
Warwickshire CIC	-	-1.02	
National CIC	-	-1.28	
Difference	-	+0.26	

Table A13 – Post 16 destinations end of summer term 2023

College	41%
School	18%
Apprenticeship	1%
Training	3%
Employment	4%
Other	6%
Unknown	0
NEET	28%

APPENDIX B – Cohort Information

Table B1 – Cohort numbers 2022-23

	Sept 22	Jan 23	Apr 23	Aug 23
Pre school	73	65	63	48
School age	457	461	484	510
Post 16	255	213	181	154
Total	785	739	728	712

Table B2 – Number of UAS, all ages summer 2023

	Apr 23	May 23	Jun 23	July 23
New UAS	5	2	3	16
TOTAL	97	90	93	108

Table B3 – Designation of schools attended by CiC summer 2023

	CiC	Compared to previous term
mainstream	74.7%	↓
special	11.2%	↑
ISP	7.1%	↓
other	7.1%	↑

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Table B4 – CiC with SEND summer 2023

	CiC
National CIC with SEND*	27.2%
Warwickshire CIC with SEND	24.1%
Difference	-3.1%
All Warwickshire*	13%

*LAIT March 2023

Table B5 – CiC with EHCPs summer 2023

	CiC
National CIC with EHCP*	30.2%
Warwickshire CIC with EHCP	30.3%
Difference	+0.1%
All Warwickshire*	4.1%

*LAIT July 2023

Table B6
 – SEND overview by year group summer 2023
Arrows indicate comparison to previous term

	SEND (inc EHCP)	EHCP	School type
Rec	7.4% ↑	3.7% ↑	100% mainstream 0 special
Y1	16.7% ↓↓	4.1% ↓	100% mainstream 0 special
Y2	33.3% ↑	15.2% ↑↑	94% mainstream 6% special
Y3	30.8% ↓	7.7%	96% mainstream 4% special
Y4	44.4% ↓	29.6% ↑	93% mainstream 7% special
Y5	44.1% ↓	23.5%	82% mainstream 12% special 3% ISP 3% other
Y6	40%	25.7%	83% mainstream 11% special 6% ISP
Y7	55.6% ↓	42.2% ↑	74% mainstream 18% special 7% ISP 2% other
Y8	59.2% ↓	44.9%	61% mainstream 18% special 16% ISP 2% other
Y9	52.8% ↓↓	35.8% ↓	59% mainstream 9% special 17% ISP 4% other
Y10	54.5% ↓	33.8%	69% mainstream

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			9% special 9% ISP 13% other
Y11	41% ↓	31.3% ↓	56% mainstream 19% special 6% ISP 22% other
TOTAL	43.9% ↓	28.6%	See table B5

APPENDIX C – Virtual School Information

Table C1 – Raising Aspirations Program

Explorers	• For Year 6 • Introduction to the university program • Hosted by Coventry University • Four days in the Spring term
UniGo!	• For Years 7, 8, 9 • Days hosted at Coventry University and the University of Warwick • Year 7 focuses on introducing the programme; Year 8 developing skills; Year 9 preparing for Further Education, Higher Education, routes into employment • Student mentors work with each CiC
UNIty	• For Years 10, 11, 12 • Includes a residential • Hosted by the University of Warwickshire • Longer sessions, whole day immersive activities • Focus on Higher Education events delivered by institutions

Table C2 – Enrichment

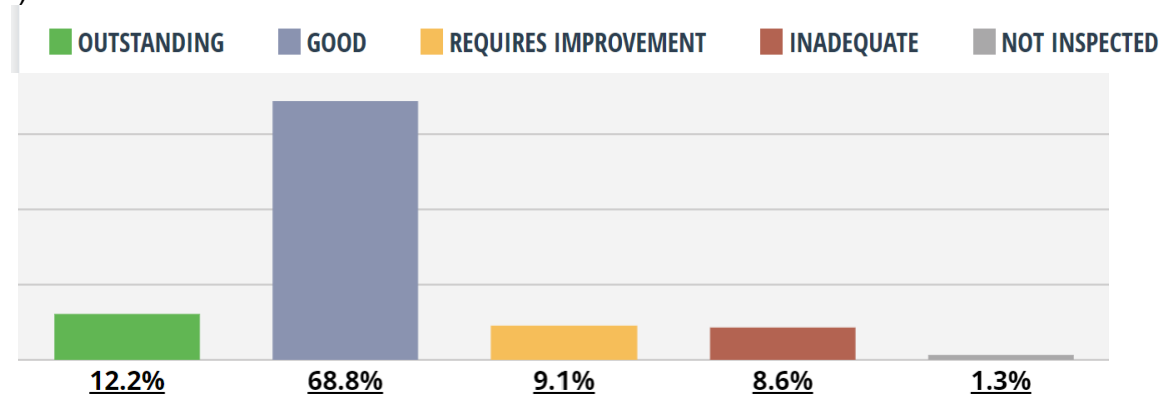| Virtual School Awards	• Annual, generally September • Nominations from education settings, social workers, IROs etc • Certificates and medals presented to acknowledge achievements and promote positive self-image
Arts	• Delivered through the West Midlands Children in Care Foundation • Managed by Performing Perfectly • Working with Women in Theatre and the Arts Council
Sports	• Delivered through the West Midlands Children in care Foundation • Managed by Think Active

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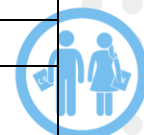
Table C3 – Virtual School Staffing Structure for Sept 2023

Role	Post status	working weeks	hours per week	Salary scale/point	budget
VSH	permanent	52	37	Hay	core funding
Senior Education Adviser	permanent	52	37	Soulbury 10-14	core funding
Education Adviser, CIC	permanent	41	32	Soulbury 3-6	core funding
Education Adviser, CIC	permanent	41	37	Soulbury 3-6	Section 31
Education Adviser, CPiC	permanent	52	30	Soulbury 3-6	Section 31
Education Adviser, CWSW	fixed term	52	37	Soulbury 3-6	Section 31
Education Adviser, CWSW	fixed term	52	37	Soulbury 3-6	Section 31
Post 16 Education Officer	permanent	41	37	Scale G	core funding
Post 16 Education Officer - VACANCY	fixed term	41	37	Scale G	Section 31
Early Years Education Officer	fixed term	52	12	Scale G	Section 31
Enrichment Coordinator	permanent	41	30	Scale G	core funding
Enrichment Coordinator	fixed term	52	30	Scale G	Section 31
VS Officer	permanent	52	22.5	Scale F	core funding
VS Officer	permanent	52	30	Scale F	core funding

APPENDIX D – School Information

Table D1 – Ofsted grading for schools attended 2022-23
i)Warwickshire CiC

OUTSTANDING	GOOD	REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT	INADEQUATE	NOT INSPECTED
12.2%	68.8%	9.1%	8.6%	1.3%

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ii)National CiC

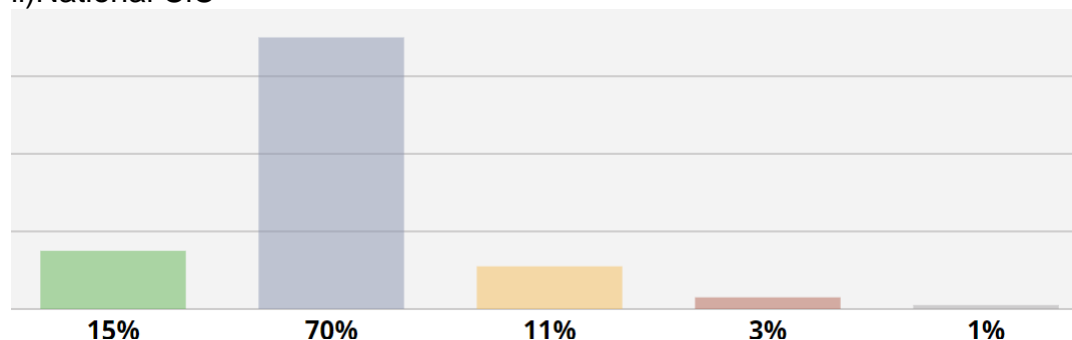| | 15% | 70% | 11% | 3% | 1% |

Table D2 – Attendance 2021-2022

	Overall absence	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence	Persistent absence	Severe persistent absence
Warks CiC	11.6%	7.4%	4.2%	29.5%	6.4%
Difference to 2021-22	+1.1%	+0.9%	+0.9%	+5.1	+1.9%
National					
Difference					

Table D3 – Attendance by year group 2022-23
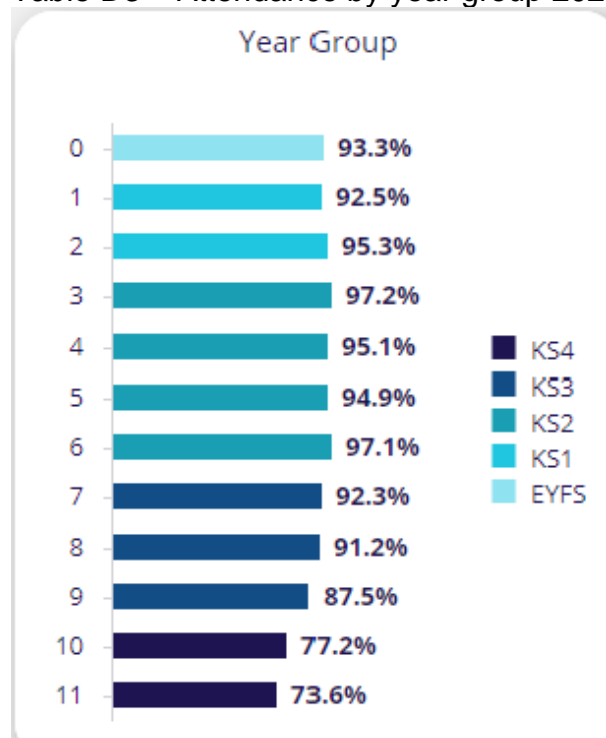
Table D4– Annual Suspensions, LAIT data

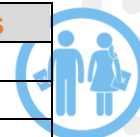|	Warwickshire CIC	National CIC	Difference
2017	15.00	11.45	+3.55
2018	10.36	11.27	-0.9
2019	8.52	11.35	-2.83
2020	9.43	9.38	+0.05
2021	12.6		

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Table D5 – CIC spending time not on a school roll spring 2023

	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23
Newly off roll	5	0	8
Put on roll	3	7	1
Total off roll*	15	8	14

*totals vary due to children entering and leaving care

Table D6 – in-year school moves by key stage spring 2023

	EYFS	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4	Totals
2019-20						101
2020-21	10	10	18	26	19	83
2021-22	4	14	26	22	10	76
Aut 22	3	13	8	9	6	39
Spr 23	2	6	6	7	4	25

Table D7 – PP+

	Payments to schools via PEPs	Average PEP related spend per CIC
Aut 20	£229,465	£520.33
Spr 21	£256,700	£554.43
Sum 21	£264,500	£566.38
Aut 21	£282,400	£619.30
Spr 22	£295,000	£699.05
Sum 22	£244,900	£540.62
Aut 22	£270,500	£654.96
Spr 23	£314,500	£748.81
Sum 23	£287, 400	£630.26

Table D8 – National Tutoring Programme

	Eligible cohort	Uptake
Aut 22	Y5, Y6, Y10, Y11	79 CiC
Spr 23	Y1, Y2, Y7, Y8	44 CiC
Sum 23	Y3, Y4, Y9	29 CiC

For questions or further information email: deenamoorey@warwickshire.gov.uk

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Adoption Central England

Annual Report
2022-2023

Adoption Central England Annual Report 2022-2023

1. Introduction

1.1 Coventry City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and Worcestershire County Council joined with Warwickshire County Council (the host) on 1 February 2018 to form Adoption Central England (ACE). The service was joined by Herefordshire Council on 1 July 2019. ACE is a local authority shared service and was the seventh regional adoption agency to become operational in the country.

1.2 This is the fifth annual report providing a summary of activity and developments within ACE that covers the 5-year period up to 31 March 2023.

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It can be read alongside the ACE Adoption Panel Annual Report 2022-2023. (Appendix 1).

2. Background Information

2.1 The overarching aim of ACE is to *'provide an innovative and relationship focussed service for children, adoptive families and others affected by adoption. This is by offering lifelong support based on up to date practices and interventions and supported by modern technology.'*

2.2 ACE works in close partnership with the local authorities and other services to:

- Ensure that a wider pool of prospective adopters is ready to meet children's need to be loved, nurtured, protected, and understood
- Ensure that adopters understand, accept, and can meet children's needs and provide a secure relationship within which they can thrive
- Increase the levels of adoption for children waiting to be adopted
- Reduce the length of time those children wait to be adopted
- Improve/ensure attachment and trauma informed post adoption support services to adoptive families.

2.3 In March 2018 the ACE Executive Board supported the recommendation that ACE should become a service underpinned by **Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP)**. This approach ensures that relationships and emotional connection are at the heart of services and all aspects of the organisation are informed by DDP principles. In January 2021 ACE became the first adoption service to be DDP certified.

2.4 Since 1 November 2019 ACE has delivered the regional adoption support service for birth families – **Family Connexions**. Other services provided include non-agency (stepparent) adoption information, counselling and court assessments and birth records counselling for adopted adults.

2.5 ACE supports the development of professional practice around adoption and since July has delivered a range of training opportunities to social workers and related staff including foster carers. The training offered is listed below and the annual report is submitted as Appendix 2:

    (i) Permanence through adoption
   (ii) Child Permanence Reports
    (iii) Maintaining relationships and identity in adoption
    (iv) Preparing children for adoption and life story work and books
    (v) Care planning - considering the permanency options
    (vi) Supporting foster carer to prepare child for adoption and understanding the adoption process
    (vii) Early Permanence through Fostering for Adoption

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(viii) Family finding, matching and supporting children in their adoptive home.

3. Staffing

3.1 ACE delivers services through a Hub and Spoke model. The Hub activities are concerned with the recruitment, preparation, and assessment of prospective adopters. The same staff are involved in matching children with adopters and provide support for 12 months after the adoption order is granted. Their work includes the support to arrangements where children are placed on an early permanence - fostering for adoption basis where the Hub social workers fulfil the fostering support responsibilities. They also plan and coordinate opportunities for adoptive families to meet. The Spokes, in the north/central and south are located within the local authority areas. They offer a duty service, undertake assessments of need for adoption support, process and commission therapeutic services through the Adoption Support Fund, work directly with families who require social work services, provide birth records counselling to adult adoptees, complete non-agency adoption assessments for the court and offer opportunities for adopted young people to meet.

3.2 The structure chart and governance arrangements are summarised as follows:
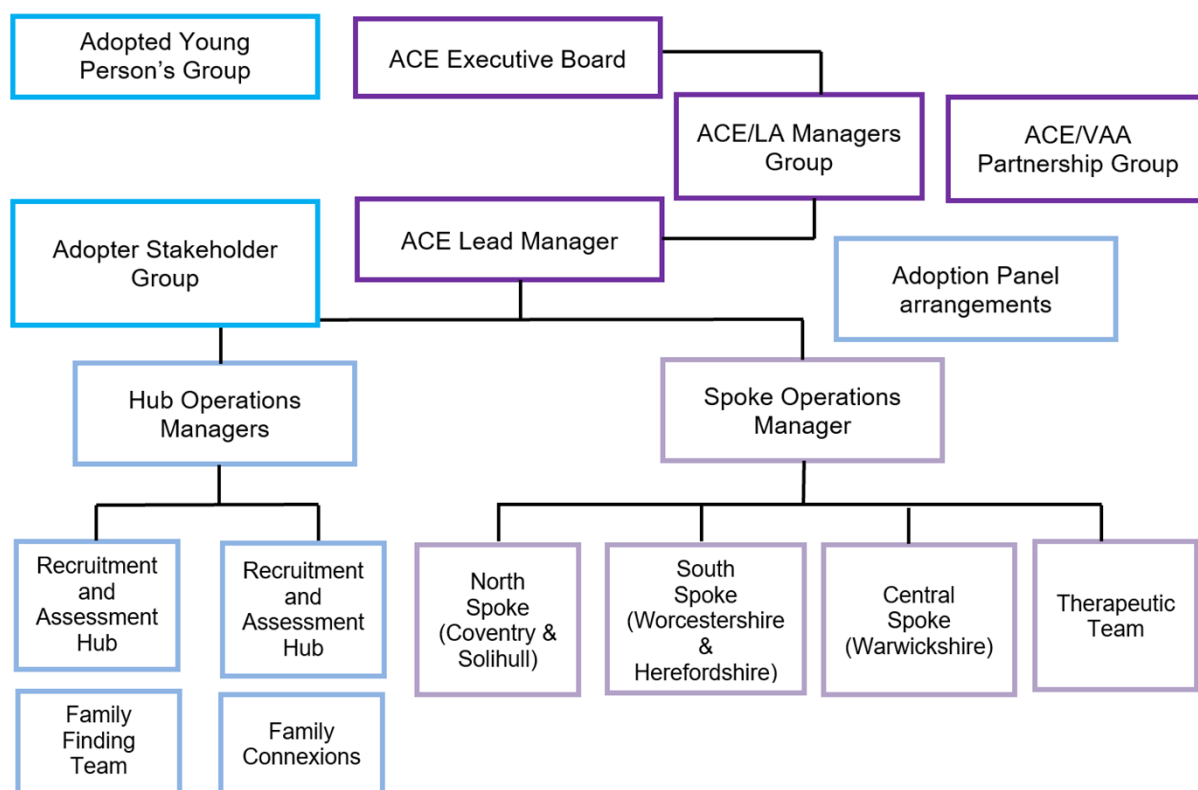
3.3 The establishment for ACE is 73.91 FTE and as on 31 March 2022 there are **97** people working in ACE as follows:

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Roles	Establishment	Appointed	Comment
ACE Managers incl. training manager	9.95 FTE	9.43	0.5 vacancy
Hub social workers	15.26 FTE	15.06	1.61 mat. leave
Family Finding Team - social workers	3.4 FTE	3.4	-
Family Connexions – social workers	3.33 FTE + 0.81 social care worker	3.33	-
Spoke social workers	19.1 FTE	13.57	4.61 vacancies
Therapeutic Team – social workers incl. Therapeutic Life Story Work Practitioners	3.61 FTE	3.41	0.2 vacancy
Family support workers supporting the Spokes	2.62 FTE	2.62	-
Social Worker – Adopter training lead	0.81 FTE	0.81	-
Business support and related roles	13.25 FTE	13.91	0.81 vacancy 0.6 mat. leave
Adoption Panel Advisors – social workers	1.49 FTE	1.49	-
Total	73.63	67.03	6.12

3.4 The service has three small specialist teams:

The **Family Connexions Service** has 3.33 FTE social workers and 0.81 FTE family support workers. The aim of the service is to provide a range of support services including information to birth family members when adoption has been formally identified as the plan for the child. This service also hosts the Letterbox Scheme.

The **Therapeutic Team** delivers therapeutic interventions to families who have high levels of assessed needs, and this can be on an individual or group work basis. The workers frequently work alongside other social workers either within ACE or from the local authorities. Two social workers have the Diploma in Therapeutic Life Story Work which complements the interventions delivered through the Therapeutic Team.

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The **Family Finding Team** is a small group of ACE social workers who work very closely with the child's allocated social workers in efforts to secure adoption for children with priority needs.

3.5   ACE has a dedicated part time social work post to lead on adopter training. This includes the adopter preparation programme and post approval training, the majority of which is delivered by ACE. The post approval training programme in place and under review or development covers:

- Talking and Telling about Adoption – The importance of identity, and Life Story Books
- Eat Sleep and Play
- Psychological Health in Adopted Children and Adolescents
- Self-Harm Workshop
- First Year Together (under review)
- Parenting with PACE (under review)
- Maintaining Relationships (in development).

3.6   ACE is responsible for the coordination and delivery of adoption panel functions which remain online. This work is supported by 1.5 panel advisors and 1.5 panel administrators.

3.7   The business support functions are supported by a part time data analyst who works closely with the local authorities, and an Adoption Support Fund finance officer who processes all the financial transactions that underpin the provision of therapeutic interventions to adoptive families across the region. The Contracts Manager supports the arrangements for the **Framework Agreement for Therapeutic Interventions.**

3.8   The current year has been particularly challenging due to higher than usual staff vacancies and periods of absence. It has not been possible to backfill these positions due to financial restrictions which has resulted in the reprioritisation of work, managers backfilling, and social workers undertaking adopter assessments and Spoke duty functions as additional hours. There have also been challenges in progressing the necessary references required for prospective adopters in the Stage 1 process.

3.9   In October 2021 the service inaugurated its **Clinical Psychology Service** through the appointment of a part time clinical psychologist. This service is commissioned until March 2024 and aims to:

- Improve early and longer-term placement stability.
- Improve adoptive parent/child relationships.
- Offer timely support to adoptive parents to feel able to manage

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challenges and risks.

- Improve prospective adopter understanding of children's needs and enhance the matching process.
- Enhance the confidence and skills of ACE staff to understand and support adoptive families.
- Contribute to the effective delivery of services through co working and training with ACE staff.

3.10   The first annual report on this service is attached as Appendix 3.

3.11   Staff introduce and model for prospective adopters, information about attachment and developmental trauma and the key DDP principles. The DDP attitude of PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy) is demonstrated throughout this process. Staff work in ways that focus on maintaining openness with families and enhancing family relationships, safety, and connection. As a DDP certified service the 80% target set for ACE social workers to be trained at DDP Level 1 has been exceeded. As on 31 March 2023, **71** (91%) social work and related staff had DDP level 1 training and **14** (19%) staff are trained at DDP 2. These staff lead on embedding and mentoring staff within the ACE service on DDP principles and practices, including the adoption panel membership. One social worker is progressing the DDP practicum. The DDP ethos and practice within the service is supported by the commissioned DDP consultant/trainer for 23 days a year.

3.12   Additional services provided through ACE include:

ACE Individual and Couples Counselling Service (see Appendix 4) that offers the opportunity for individual adopters and for couples to re-connect with their own lived experiences where they are currently experiencing difficulties. The counselling will explore how the couple's relationship has been impacted by adoption and the sessions focus on what individual adopters or couples need and how they can express and communicate their needs to others.

Space2Talk (see Appendix 5) aims to provide space for adoptive parents to talk about themselves, their emotional well-being and everything that comes with being an adoptive parent to other adoptive parents who are trained and supported to provide this service. Volunteers encourage adoptive parents to explore experiences and challenges that they may be facing. Volunteers do not offer solutions to these problems; they encourage and empower adopters to find their own solutions to the issues that the adoptive parents raise.

4.   Financial arrangements

4.1   ACE is funded through a funding share calculation for each local authority against average outturn data over a 3-year period. The proxy indicators used to calculate respective contributions are (i) local authority children adopted (ii)

number of looked after children 0-4 years (iii) number of looked after children 5-9 years.

4.2   Some elements of the ACE budget receive an annual inflationary increase but not the interagency budget which was drawn upon significantly during this period. From the outset of the year, it was evident that the budget would be insufficient to meet the needs of the service and consequently the service reserves were drawn upon and a Financial Review was completed. This work is set to continue during 2023/24.

4.3   Due to the financial circumstances of ACE the decision was made to pause the proposed development of the Enhanced Support Care Scheme (respite), end the financial support to sibling placements of three or more children. ACE also withdrew from a national initiative to develop arrangements for maintaining relationships in fostering for adoption placements. Staffing decisions were also affected.

5.   Performance

5.1   The performance of ACE against the **ACE Service Improvement Plan 2022-2023** is summarised in Appendix 6. This identifies 28 actions of which 13 related to specific performance related activities, with the remaining being innovative or developmental in nature. From these, 14 areas of activity were either completed or achieved and by their nature 13 areas are ongoing. The main areas highlighted for ongoing consideration relate to overall timeliness of adoption planning and placements, the usage of interagency placements and the development of the enhanced support (respite) scheme.

5.2   In summary, key performance measures to note are:

- Of the 120 children placed for adoption 85 (71%) were placed with ACE approved adopters,
- Levels of adopter enquiries fell short of the RAA average, however the number of enquirers entering the process at stage 1 has increased,
- 72 households were approved as suitable to adopt which is similar to the previous year and the percentage of prospective adopters approved within 6 months of registration of interest has increased but falls short of the target of 75% set,
- 26 households were approved from underrepresented groups, exceeding the target for Black and minority ethnic households, falling short for families from LGBTQ+ households,
- The target was exceeded for those adoptive households willing to consider fostering for adoption which is mirrored by the increase in children who have benefited from early permanence placements,

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- The number of households able to consider the needs of priority children was less than required,
- Placement performance timescales is better than the provisional 3-year England average timescale of 198 days, although variation between ACE local authorities is noted,
- There has been a significant increase in the number of children placed on an interagency basis, reflecting the increase in children with adoption plans and the sufficiency shortfall of ACE approved adopters for those children waiting,
- 3 children experienced a placement disruption during this period whose circumstances are contained in the attached report (see Appendix 7) which reflects learning and makes practice recommendations.

5.3   The number of children who are coming forward with a plan for adoption since 2020/21 has seen a year on year increase as follows:

2020-21	129
2021-22	148
2022-23	152

This represents a **15%** increase.

5.4   Also more children are benefiting from fostering for adoption allowing them to experience placement stability sooner with 24 (20%) children being placed under this arrangement in 2022-23, an increase from 17 in the previous year and exceeding the target of 20.

5.5   Overall, this reflects positively on the ambition that local authorities have for children to be adopted, but this has created a sufficiency pressure during a period when less people are coming forward to adopt. This is reported in research conducted by Adoption UK and is similar to the experience of other regional adoption agencies.

'9 out of 10 prospective adopters say the cost-of-living crisis is affecting their decisions about adoption, according to a December 2022 survey by the charity Adoption UK. 87% of prospective adopters said cost of living increases were a significant factor in the decisions they were making about becoming an adoptive parent – for example, the number of siblings they could consider parenting. Sibling groups already spend 11 months longer in care than single children before being adopted.'

5.6   ACE approved **72** adoption households during this period which is consistent with the previous year, and many have been earmarked for matching with ACE children. Whilst enquiries have been lower than expected (475) the conversion rate of those moving on to stage 1 of the process has increased at

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27%, reflecting that enquirers are positively choosing to progress their adoption journey through ACE.

5.7 To increase potential placement opportunities, ACE has developed a collaboration with regional adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies in the Midlands forming the **Midlands Together Collaboration**. More children have secured families regionally which allows easing of arrangements for adoption support in the longer term.

5.8 Areas for attention during 2023-2024 will be:

- To increase adopter enquiries, approval and assessment timeliness.
- To reduce the reliance on interagency adoption placements to less than 20% of placement.
- To maintain low levels of adoption disruptions.
- Continue to focus on fostering for adoption and the development of services and support around such arrangements.
- Continue to attract prospective adopters from under-represented groups with a particular focus on the LGBTQ+ communities.
- To minimise delay for children and explore how adoption timeliness can be improved.
- To establish consistent practices and decision making across the 5 local authorities in respect of fostering for adoption thereby increasing further the number of children who benefit from such arrangements.

6.   Adoption Support

6.1 Adoption support remains an area of importance within ACE and the workload and referral rate has been similar to the previous year. The number of contacts to the service was **250** with **117** assessments of need completed.

6.2 As on 31.3.2023 there were **625** allocated support cases. **239** adoptive families with higher levels of need and complexities were supported at tier 3/4 and **234** families at the lower-level tiers 1/2 where intervention and support is primarily delivered from an external therapeutic provider. **55** families were awaiting allocation on this date and held within the duty process due to staff shortages.

6.3 In October 2022 an independent **Adoption Support Brief Service Review** was undertaken based on a blueprint for adoption support services published in 2019. The purpose was to provide a benchmark and an audit tool against which agencies could review and adjust resources and systems to make service improvements and achieve whole system change. The blueprint sets out 17 requirements of a high-quality adoption support system which covered
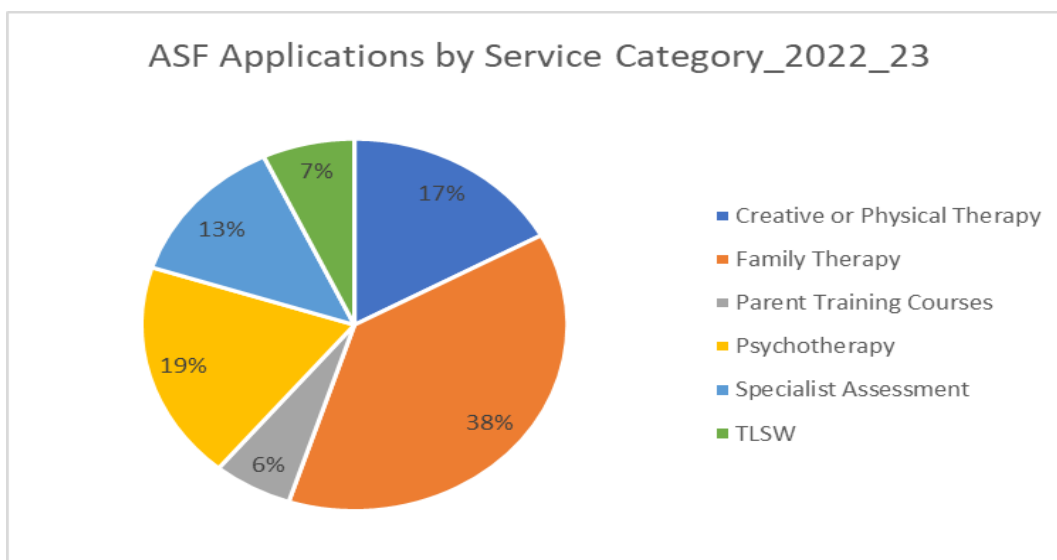
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the four primary themes – strategic, communication and engagement, systems and process and service delivery. The review concluded that:

'The RAA has a clear vision with shared values and structures and processes already in place. There are always challenges as demands on services increase and the environment in which the RAA operates changes, but ACE has evolved into a creative, internally stable, outward looking organisation, retaining connections with, but an identity separate, to the local authorities funding them. They provide excellent value for money and their adoption support service is one of the most developed in the country. Measured against the evaluation tool from the Blueprint, ACE matches or in many areas exceeds the exempla services in relation to the provision of adoption support.'

6.4   The service also provides Birth Records Counselling to adopted adults and **209** counselling enquiries were received during this period.

6.5   There has been a gradual increase in non-agency adoption notifications following a decline during the pandemic. There have been 172 contacts about non-agency adoption during this period which resulted in 97 enquiries and a subsequent 47 initial counselling sessions which is equivalent to 24 days intervention from the Hub service. **25** new notifications of intention in respect of non-agency (step parent) adoption came through during this period with **21** non-agency adoption assessments allocated and a further **21** applications pending allocation.

6.6   Applications to the national Adoption Support Fund have remained high and during 2022-2023 the following applications were made:

Type of application	Amount	Number of applications	Number of children	Number of families
Individual family applications	£1,238,045.26	318	346	302
ACE Therapeutic Team	£108,708.81	54	163	121
Therapeutic Group applications	£44,248.83	13	118	94

6.7   The ACE **Framework Agreement for Therapeutic Providers** was extended and now has an approved list of **49** accredited providers.

6.8   The types of support most frequently required by adoptive families are:

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ASF Applications by Service Category_2022_23

- Creative or Physical Therapy — 17%
- Family Therapy — 38%
- Parent Training Courses — 6%
- Psychotherapy — 19%
- Specialist Assessment — 13%
- TLSW — 7%

This shows that interventions focused on working with adopted children through their adoptive parents are significant (42%) with direct work with children through various therapeutic interventions making up the majority of applications to the Adoption Support Fund.

6.9   The Therapeutic Team offered the following interventions during 2022-2023:

- Therapeutic parenting and sensory integration
- Non Violent Resistance - NVR
- Parent child attachment play - PCAP
- Toddler Bonding.

6.10   Further support is available to adoptive families pre and post adoption through the **ACE Clinical Psychology Service** as detailed in Appendix 3. This is an invaluable addition to the range of support services available to adoptive families in the region. Feedback from adoptive families and professionals has been extremely positive as evidenced by the following:

'It really flipped the coin for me… it was very helpful to see the other side view [the Psychologist] brought and I have taken that away as a positive instead of my sad feeling that my daughter is struggling.'

'It was helpful to talk things through with a professional and hear some practical ideas about different strategies that can be tried and support that can be offered… [the Psychologist] also recommended a book which I have purchased and think it will be relevant for my work with all the family's I support.'

'This is an excellent service for both social workers and families which helps all parties to reflect on situations that can be challenging to families.'

6.11   The **Adopters Newsletter** has been produced on a quarterly basis and sent to over 850 households and ACE managers continue to meet with the Adopters Stakeholder Group at quarterly intervals.

7.   Services to birth relatives – Family Connexions

7.1   Family Connexions provides a range of services to birth family members who can be supported in the following ways:

- 1 to 1 emotional and relational support, offering opportunities to have their experience accepted, understood and to have access to advice during and after the adoption process
- An explanation of the adoption process
- Support with the practical aspects of the adoption process, including support with letterbox contact and/or meeting with adopters. Practical guidance is combined with support around emotional impact.
- Advice regarding future life planning including signposting to other universal support service.
- Group sessions for birth parents and extended family members across the ACE region
- Support with any direct contact or reunification plans requested by the adopted child and their adoptive parents.

7.2   The service is well embedded. As at year end the workload from across the region was as follows:

Local authority	No. of referrals	No. of current cases being worked	Groups while waiting 1:1
Coventry	5	77	10
Solihull	3	33	5
Warwickshire	6	100	4
Worcestershire	7	95	3
Herefordshire	4	49	0
Out of ACE	0	2	0
Total	25	347	29

7.3   The Family Connexions team works, alongside the Spoke adoption support teams, to continue their collaborative working in supporting adopted young people to re-establish contact with birth family members.

8.   Quality assurance and inspection

8.1   ACE has a range of quality assurance arrangements in place that includes:

- Case file auditing by managers introduced February 2021.

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- Learning from complaints and representations.
- Robust staff recruiting practices including induction.
- Regular supervision and annual appraisal of all staff.
- Opportunities for staff exit interviews.
- Quarterly performance management reports presented to the ACE Executive Board.
- Feedback to ACE and local authorities on the quality of reports presented to the adoption panel - see Adoption Panel Annual Report.
- Framework Agreement for external providers delivering therapeutic services to adoptive families.
- User feedback through the Adopters Stakeholder Group, training events, adoption panel.
- Managerial oversight of reports and countersigning.
- Feedback from local authority partners and other stakeholders through various forums.
- Timescales monitored for key activities in the adopter journey from enquiry to approval.
- Observed practices.
- The Adoption Support Fund Review Panel.
- Reviews of the DDP Action Plan including staff surveys.
- External validation through local authority OFSTED inspections.

8.2 This was the second year for case file auditing and the **Case File Audit Report** noted that fewer audits were completed during this period. 18 were completed of the scheduled 24 due to competing workload priorities and other demands on managerial time and availability.

8.3 Testament to the quality of social work practice in ACE from the 10 adoption support audits 8 were judged as outstanding or good and from the 8 Hub audits 6 (75%) were considered outstanding or good.

'Family matched and transitions in process - SW keeping in mind needs of all involved, including birth son. Clear record of contact maintained throughout transitions.'

'Most key documents evident and good case recording enabling understanding of adopters, and their children, experience and decision making.'

'There was good practice where the family's first language was not English. Due to significant delays in Stage 1 (Covid related), it had been some time since the family had attended the preparing to adopt training (virtual), so SW ensured she re-visited key elements of this during the assessment. More assessment sessions were therefore needed and after each session or key

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conversation SW had emailed the family, summarising the discussions, to ensure they had the information to process at their pace.'

'SW clearly applies the principles of DDP in their communication with the applicant.'

'Communication with both parents clearly evident and demonstrates the social workers connection to both parents, regardless of them living in sperate households.'

'Child's voice is present.'

'DDP was explored during discussion with social worker, and they have clear knowledge and understanding of the principles and how they have supported parents to understand the child's inner world.'

'The DDP principles are weaved in with regards to holding of the family and validating their experiences and lots of acceptance of the children by the adopters.'

8.4 Areas for attention in 2023/24 will be to ensure that the MOSAIC record is fully populated, that adopters receive the assessment of need in a timelier way and for documentation related to family finding, matching and transitions are uploaded to ESCR and finally for there to be stronger evidence of reflective and analytical supervision.

8.5 During 2023/24 the long-awaited adjustments to the MOSAIC workflow processes are due to commence which should assist. However, managers struggle with the time and capacity to populate the workflow more fully with the summary of their supervision sessions and managerial oversight.

8.6 During the past year ACE has been part of two **OFSTED** inspections that took place for Coventry City Council in June 2022 and Solihull MBC in November 2022. There was no qualitative reference to ACE in the Solihull report, but the Coventry inspection reported:

'Timely decisions are made to secure permanence via adoption. The local authority and the regional adoption agency, ACE, have worked hard to improve information presented to panel. As a result, children and adopters are well matched. Transitions for children are well planned and managed and adopters continue to receive support after the child is placed. Adopters are provided with therapeutic training …'

8.7 The ACE **Adopter's Annual Survey** 2022 was sent out in November to 824 households who receive the ACE Newsletter. ACE was pleased to receive **107**

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responses, a 30% increase on the previous year. Survey respondents were from across the ACE region . Approximately 54% of the respondents were families currently receiving an adoption support service, 20% of households were with the Hub teams and 26% of families were not receiving services at the present time.

8.8 Overall positive comments and representations were made about services received from ACE. Some of the comments received were:

'When we first adopted …. We did not know enough to appreciate how much therapeutic parenting was needed to how it impacted on our family. After research, attending courses and receiving support through the ASF we can confirm that therapeutic parenting is imperative to support adopted children who may have suffered any sort of trauma. We would not have survived as a family if we had not implemented and kept revisiting how to parent in a therapeutic way.'

'*We cannot fault the support and services we received from ACE. We would highly recommend the team.'*

'We have found the stay and play groups and walk and talk most valuable for connecting with other adoptive families.'

'We appreciated the support and kindness the social worker and psychologist provided particularly around the issue of our child making contact with biological family.'

8.9 Whilst no specific themes emerged from the survey a range of comments were made about the timeliness of the support through the Adoption Support Fund, a request for additional training on PACE (therapeutic parenting), also references to parenting teens and for speedier allocation for adoption support. Requests were made about ease of access to training courses, signposting to resources for teens and improving confidence in the letterbox arrangements.

8.10 These issues have been addressed. There are plans to widen the scope for the Parenting with PACE post approval training and a course has been developed on 'Maintaining Relationships and Letterbox.' Further adjustments have been made to the ACE website particularly as 68 (63%) respondents told us that they had accessed the website – 40 for general browsing and 28 for specific information. The website alongside the ACE Newsletter is a key means whereby ACE maintains contact with adoptive families across the region.

9. **Practice Improvements**

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9.1   In the past year ACE has worked with colleagues to update Practice Guidance in respect of **Consensual Adoption** and **Foster Carers who wish to Adopt**.

9.2   Agreements (including that from the court) were also obtained for ACE to pilot a revised **Child's Permanence Report** with the aim to improve its relevance and to include a trauma informed perspective. It is hoped that this will be cascaded across the ACE region pending an evaluation and consideration by the ACE Executive Board.

9.3   ACE has delivered on its commitment to extend the range of training opportunities available to local authority social workers and foster carers as detailed in Appendix 2 and has continued to offer this service.

9.4   The number of groups for adopted young people across the region has extended to 3 with between 30-40 young people attending. ACE will be exploring how adopted young adults can support the *voice and influence* agenda going forward.

9.5   ACE participated in the only known research study on the impact of online adoption panels – '**An evaluation of an online adoption panel from the perspective of panel members, social workers and prospective adopters'**, led by Dr Peter Unwin, Principal Lecturer in Social Work, University of Worcester and Kate Moon, Agency Panel Adviser, Adoption Central England.

9.6   The overall conclusion was:

'*The above findings indicate that the overall online experiences of prospective adopters, panel members and social workers have largely been positive, this positivity increasing as systems became more embedded within the organisation. The technology itself has developed … Also, many of those attending panel have developed confidence and skill in managing themselves in a virtual environment …'*

Further

'*…no evidence has emerged since the onset of online adoption panels that the nature of their recommendations has changed in any significant ways. Panels are not run for the benefit of panel members, social workers or prospective adopters but for the child/ children seeking permanency. Evidence from the present research suggests a healthy panel system which is able to have appropriate debate, and one which has sophisticated its technological approach as all players have become more conversant with the online world.'*

9.7   The study offered recommendations some of which have been put in place by ACE for developing the practice of an online adoption panel meeting including consideration of when an in-person panel would significantly support those attending, social workers offering to be in the same room as adopters when

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attending panel, and regular in-person training sessions for panel members to support informal networking and mentoring.

10. Diversity and Inclusion

10.1 ACE has had an ongoing commitment to deliver a safe, sensitive, and inclusive service and has continued with its **Black Lives Matters Conversation Group**. The service has developed further its inclusivity statements of intent and has encouraged training and development opportunities through team discussion, learning and awareness. Moving forward the focus will be broadened to include a wider range of marginalised groups with a high level action plan in development. There will be an ongoing focus on recruitment of adopters from under representative groups. It is recognised that therapeutic interventions are typically ethnocentric with a bias to white families and ACE will be considering how to better support black and minority ethnic families and whether there is a specific need for a support group for transracially adopted young people.

11. Disruptions

11.1 The **Report of disruptions in adoption placements 2022-2023** is found in Appendix 7. Three disruptions took place during this period representing 2.3% of the placements made. Three further learning reviews took place where children were not placed. The findings emphasise the importance of having up to date information about the child's needs, recognising the impact of trauma and how this affects a child's capacity to attach. Support plans need to consider current and future potential needs and prospective adopters need a realistic appreciation of how children respond during periods of transition. The importance of the professional team working closely together to support and ameliorate the risk of disruption was emphasised alongside the importance of managing endings appropriately considering the needs of all those affected.

12. Complaints, compliments, and representations

12.1 ACE received three complaints during this period. In 2 complaints there were similarities where the complaints were partially upheld, and apologies offered. Both related to issues with a Children's Team also and in both situations the complaints raised concerns that issues to do with the child's needs were not fully covered in the child's adoption documentation. There were also subsequent delays in assessments and access to further support or the family's experience of forthcoming support was not positive.

12.2 The third complaint concerned prospective adopters' dissatisfaction with delays in the stage 1 process.

12.3 The following is a summary of the compliments received about the service.

Catherine and Hayley S – Birth Records Counselling service...This has been very thorough, informative and worthwhile. Dealt with sensitively. Great support offered and followed up, contact kept throughout – thank you.

Lisa R – You made such an effort to put us at ease and even though the process itself can be intrusive, I never felt uncomfortable. We have always felt we can call and ask your advice – which is a testament to how professional and approachable you are. You were brilliant at preparing us for the various stages. You understand us a couple, empathising during the difficult times and celebrating at the happy times. We have been so lucky to have you as our Social Worker

Nicky L – The circle of discovering my natural parents is now complete –

Hayley S - Business Support, was so nice and listened. I did not feel judged. Hayley was patient and I'm glad I reached out

Rosie – Thank you for being the first person to help me track my life down and being there for me every step, I really appreciate you helping me get my past life and getting me answers so I can move forward

ACE Adoption Panel – As I won't be doing any further ADMs for Warwickshire, I want to thank you for the excellent support you have provided to Warwickshire. The ACE Panel are conscientious and support of timely decisions for children.

Charlotte H – I just wanted to say how much I appreciate the support you are giving us. Having you check in with us with such compassion and also saying 'you are doing great' really does mean a lot!

I would like to thank Jemma for her thorough ACE input and the openness of the team for reviewing opportunities for these children.

Sharron - Just wanted to share T's school photo with you to show how happy and well rounded he is and show what a difference you made to all our lives.

Nicky and South Team – Can I take this opportunity to thank your team (and Sally S) for the support this intervention has given to us both.

We have just finished the 3 day training course with Emily and Rachel – it was fantastic! They both made it really enjoyable and we felt like we learnt a lot from it . Eager to move to stage 2 now.

Jackie B has been brilliant in the last 12 months – she's an exceptional Social Worker who really understands whet we have been through, Jackie pulled people together from all the services. When she was off Lara stepped in – she knew everything that went on before and picked up the ball running – she was great and held everything together. - I just wanted you to know

Hayley H – Thank you for all your help in the lead up to the end of stage one, everything has run very smoothly, everybody we have been in contact with at ACE has been so helpful – thank you.

Emma H & Sarah F – The NVR course was invaluable, informative, and very clearly explained. There were many useful, practical, and innovative ideas. We all benefited from the touches of humour which were frequent and made everyone feel comfortable, relaxed, and happy to ask questions. It was exceptionally well structured and timed. The 1-1 sessions as well as the group sessions helped me enormously and things at home have really improved due to following the advice given. The best course I have been on – wish I could do it again as I'm sure evervone does.

Helen G – It was a real pleasure to meet you and you were just so caring in the way you listened to us.

Louise H – What an inspiring meeting chair you are Louise even in difficult circumstances you managed a challenging and emotional meeting with passion and kindness

Jess H - We felt well supported by our Social Worker Jess, and the rest of the ACE Team. We were fortunate to have a very smooth matching process and transition. We will access any further support and information as needed. We hope to adopt again in the future through ACE.

Melissa R - What would we have done without you? We just can't imagine. You were quite simply the cavalry! You galvanised so many people into action and commitment to supporting adoption by us for M. You went far and above your professional obligations and gave much of yourself in doing so. We can never really know the extent of all that you did for M and us but your efforts played a huge part in keeping our little family together. You really did keep us going at times. We hope that you know that we will be forever grateful to you. We can only repay you by being the best parents we can be for M and that we promise is our lifelong aim.

Yi Pei – thank you for all your help with he non-agency consultations and your keen eye when things aren't quite right – much appreciated!

Sue – The information from my birth records came in a folder, all in order with plastic sleeves in between each page, making the information easy to read and understand – very professional.

Comments from Panel – Sheleen had helpfully and sensitively explored issues around culture, faith disability, inclusion, resilience and therapeutic parenting and there was evidence of a supportive professional relationship with the applicants

Carol & Jack – In terms of finance and contracts – you guys are always very responsive, helpful and everything is done quickly. I have every confidence, taking on cases, that I know they are going to be appropriate referrals and your Social Workers take the time to have a chat first, which is hugely beneficial. The time taken between discussion and ASF applications being agreed is within ASF realms and I am updated where delays occur or approval is received. A big thanks to ACE!

Lisa L – From our 1st meeting with Lisa we all felt at ease. She was kind, caring, thoughtful of our past experiences and most of all she was human.... Lisa took time to introduce herself and explain her knowledge, experience and the whole adoption process. She explained what she needed from us in the most respectful manner and made the whole journey and absolute pleasure. Lisa helped us every step of the way. When our little boy was placed with us this support remained. We then went on to complete our family with the addition of our daughter with Lisa again by our side. Lisa is not only an incredible Social Worker, she is an incredible person that needs full recognition for all she does.

Smera organised a child appreciation day with the prospective adopters and included me in this, giving them the opportunity to ask questions. There seems to have been a lot of thought and preparation in creating some stable foundations and assurances for the prospective adopters. It is good to see that Smera has used the approach to create a social story using characters that the children can connect with to help prepare them for their next transition. It is wonderful that the 3 brothers will now be able to live together.

We have found the 'Stay and Play' groups and 'Walk and Talk' most valuable for connecting with other adoptive families – thank you

We spoke to the Therapeutic Team about our concerns – They were amazing!!

We cannot fault the support and services that we received from ACE - We would highly recommend the team.

We would definitely recommend ACE to anyone considering adoption in central England.

13.   Staff Development and Support

13.1   A full service event took place on 10 January 2023 which was the first opportunity since the coronavirus lockdown for the staff group to get together. It provided an opportunity for ACE staff to reconnect and to be updated about the range of services delivered through the team.

13.2   External training accessed for some team members has included:

- BUSS Level 2
- IAC Conference on Adoption Reconstruction
- Access to Information for Post Commencement Adoptions
- RAA profiling webinar for family finder
- Trauma Informed Practice and Leadership
- Seeking connections research project
- The Voices and Stories of adopted people – Identity and relationships.
- West Midlands Early Permanence Practice Events

13.3   Additionally alongside colleagues in the Special Guardianship Support teams across the region, ACE team members attended the course programme delivered by the ACE Clinical Psychology Service. These cover, Neurodiversity in children who are adopted, psychological interventions and understanding mental health in adopted young people, psychological perspective on self-harm.

13.4   DDP practice is embedded through DDP learning sets and consultations, and ACE staff have access to the comprehensive training and development programme through Warwickshire County Council, the host agency.

13.5   Some ACE staff are also attending the practice educator development programme which allows them to have social workers in training placed in ACE.

14.   Overall impact and future plans

14.1   ACE is an established regional adoption agency now entering its 6^{6h} year. It has:

- A brand identity and relaunched its website recently.
- Achieved DDP certification, maintains and promotes DDP informed practices.
- Embedded early permanence – fostering for adoption.
- Continued to place most children with ACE approved adopters.
- Widened the range of support services available to adoptive families including the ACE Clinical Psychology Service.
- Maintained diversity in its recruitment of adoptive families.

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- Developed a comprehensive post approval training package for adoptive parents.
- Continued to engage with adopters as key stakeholders including an annual survey.
- Strengthened quality assurance through various processes and arrangements.

14.2   During 2022/2023 the service costs exceeded the allocated budget, and the ACE Executive Board addressed this issue through the agreed arrangements. The interagency placement budget was a particular pressure brought about by the increase in children with adoption plans and shortfall in ACE approved adopters. Measures were introduced during this period whereby the ACE Executive Board members makes the decision whether to pursue an interagency placement. This will be an ongoing area of service pressure in 2023-2024, however the early indications are that adopter recruitment is on the rise with the majority of children still being placed and supported through ACE.

14.3   The ACE Executive Board has determined the strategic priorities for 2023-2025 which are:

Concurrency
A proposed scheme is developed and delivered in partnership with a VAA partner to increase the number and percentage of early permanence placements. Different from fostering for adoption this scheme can support children and families where the primary plan is reunification with the parallel plan being in place for adoption, where reunification is unsuccessful.

Maintaining relationships, identity, and contact
Through local authority *champions* to engage with University of East Anglia cultural change and training programme leading to maintaining relationships arrangements in adoption being better supported and reviewed, and the extension of training to all relevant staff.

Adoption Breakdown
To conduct a survey of circumstances where adopted young people no longer live with their adoptive families and based on the findings to hear the voice and experience of adopted young people and their adoptive parents. To plan a regional learning event to consider the wider implications for practice and support.

14.4   The main ACE service development areas for 2023-2024 are:

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(i)   To further support local authorities in embedding early permanence through fostering for adoption accessing support from the Midlands Together Collaboration Project on Early Permanence.

(ii)   To have an ongoing focus on adoption timeliness – improving the timescale between placement order and matching.

(iii)   To increase adopter recruitment in line with the ACE Adopter Sufficiency Strategy (see Appendix 8).

(iv)   To develop the adoption support database and implement the requirements of the nationally agreed adoption support dataset.

(v)   To extend ongoing training to family and friends to enhance placement stability.

(vi)   To address and clarify responsibilities in respect of the Post Commencement Regulations 2005 as they relate to access to adoption records.

(vi)   To explore avenues to address the mental health needs of adopted young people.

(vii)   To participate in the nationally commissioned Letter Swap pilot – a digital database for the exchange of correspondence post adoption.

(viii) To work alongside local authority partners to achieve the Early Permanence Quality Kite Mark.

(ix)   To respond to the learning arising from the Cumbria Learning Review into the death of a child in an adoption placement.

(x)   To progress the arrangements for adoptive parents to support adopter training events.

(xi)   To develop the voice and influence strategy regarding adopted young people engagement.

(xii)   To work towards ACE's ongoing certification as a DDP informed service.

15.   Conclusion

15.1   The period under review has not been without its challenges due to the financial pressures on the service and staffing. The ACE Executive Board has been supportive and agreed the enhanced funding for a 12 month period pending further review during 2023-2024.

15.2   The region has seen an increasing number of children with ambitious plans for adoption with the majority of placements being made with ACE approved adopters. Early permanence through fostering for adoption is well embedded

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in most local authorities in the region. The early indications are that adopter recruitment is on the increase although the cost of living crisis is having an impact.

15.3   Adoption disruption is low and the quality assurance processes and adopter survey evidence that ACE is providing an effective, comprehensive and well regarded service despite recent challenges.

Brenda Vincent - Head of ACE

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Annual Panel Annual Report 2022-2023   Appendix 1

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Social Worker Adoption Training Programme Annual Report   Appendix 2
2022-2023

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Clinical Psychology Report   Appendix 3

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Annual Report - Space2Talk 2022-2023   Appendix 5

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Service Improvement Plan 2022-2023

Appendix 6

Outcome	Key Performance Measure	2022/23	3-year average 2019-2022	Activities	Progress
Family finding activity is successful, clear, purposeful, and monitored.	85%- 90%	(71%)	82.6%	The majority of ACE children are placed with ACE approved adopters. Of the 120 children placed for adoption 85 (71%) were placed with ACE approved adopters.	
	100	72	80	Sufficient adopters are recruited and approved to meet projected need. 72 households were approved as suitable to adopt which is similar to the previous year.	
	30 15 15	 17 9	 9 12	To increase the number of approved adopters from underrepresented groups. • Black and minority ethnic groups • LGBTQ+ households. 26 households were approved from underrepresented groups, exceeding the target for Black and minority ethnic households, falling short for families from LGBTQ+ households.	
Prospective adopters are prepared, assessed, and approved within timescale.	600	475	566	ACE receives sufficient enquiries to meet its recruitment target. Levels of adopter enquiries fell short of the RAA average.	
	120	127	96	Number of applicants commencing stage 1. However, the number of enquirers entering the process at stage 1 has increased.	
	75%	54%	2021-2022	Prospective adopters are approved within 6 months of registration of interest.	

			51% approved within 6 months	This has improved from previous year however falls short of the target for 75% of adopter stage 2 assessments to be completed within 6 months.	🟧
	35	49 (68%)	30	To increase the number of prospective adopters willing to consider FfA. The target was exceeded for those adoptive households willing to consider fostering for adoption.	🟩
Increase the levels of adoption for children waiting to be adopted.	60	48 (66 %)	70 (Includes FfA)	Number of approved households recruited for • Sibling groups, • Older children – 4 yrs.+, • B & ME children, • Children with a disability/developmental uncertainty. The number of households able to consider the needs of priority children was less than required.	🟧
	20	24	21	To embed and increase the number of fostering for adoption placements. Fostering for adoption is well embedded and an increase on the previous year of 17 is noted.	🟩
	121 days	179 days	189 days	The average time between placement order and deciding the match to an adoptive family – Adoption Scorecard indicator A2, children to be placed within threshold timescale of 121 days. Performance is better than the provisional 3 year England average timescales of 198 days although variation between ACE local authorities is noted.	🟧
	12%	29%	17%	Less than 12% of children placed for adoption are placed on an interagency basis. There has been a significant increase in the number of children place on an interagency basis, reflecting the increase in children with adoption plans and the sufficiency shortfall of approved adopters for those children waiting.	🟥

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	2%	2.5%	2.6%		Of children placed ACE has fewer than 2% adoption disruptions. 3 children experienced a placement discretion during this period.	🟧
				-	To introduce measures to monitor the timeliness between the adoption decision for a child and matching. (National minimum Adoption Standards introduce a 6-month timescale.) This is implemented and reported to local authorities through the adoption panel quality assurance process.	🟩
Adoption support is timely and appropriate.	90%			-	Adopter satisfaction with all aspects of the service remains high. As verified through the annual survey and reports through panel processes.	🟩
	80%			-	ACE completes assessment of need for adoption support within 35 days.	🟩
	75%			-	Birth records counselling - services to adopted adults in accordance with statutory requirements received within 3 months of request. The demand/need for support has exceed the capacity of the service.	🟧
	-			-	To explore assessment, support, and services where foetal alcohol syndrome is or maybe evident, are enhanced including the provision of information for adoptive parents. Information and advice available of pathways.	🟩
					To introduce the revised Spoke Duty process. Implemented.	🟩
Best practice and innovation are encouraged.	-			-	To strengthen relationships and partnership working to ensure that the mental health needs of adopted children are recognised and considered in service planning and delivery. There are ongoing challenges in respect of accessing psychiatric assessments and psychological therapies.	🟧
	-			-	To extend and deliver a range of training and learning opportunities for local authority social workers	🟩

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				In place since July 2022.	🟩
	-		-	To work across the West Midlands is further embedding and raising standards of practice around fostering for adoption. Guidance and training events delivered and going work on cost- benefit analysis and embedding practices.	🟩
	-		-	As a preventive service to put in place support through the provision of the Enhanced Support Scheme and extending support and training family and friends. Paused due to funding.	🟥
	-		-	To support measures that change the approach to contact in adoption including: • The development of Practice Guidance. • Skills based training on assessing and implementing contact plans for social workers. To be part of a broader national and regional strategy going forward.	🟧
ACE are committed to and have an awareness of DDP practice, principles of PACE and therapeutic parenting.	-		-	As a DDP certified service continue efforts to explore opportunities to extend the influence this model into other areas of practice. For example, in CPRs. Integral to practices in ACE and opportunities used to share learning.	🟩
To become a stakeholder led service.	-		-	To explore opportunities for adoptive parents to support the training and development of prospective and approved adopters. Progressing based on HR and existing arrangements within the local authority.	🟧
				To act on the findings of the ACE Annual Adopter Survey.	🟩

				Completed.	
				To implement measures to capture the views of children and young people about the services receive and to facilitate their contribution to service delivery. This is captured in reviews with plans to develop a broader 'voice and influence' strategy.	
				To extend adopted young people support groups across the region. Three groups meet.	
				To extend the birth parents support groups across the region. Networks are well established.	

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Report of Adoption Disruptions 2022-2023   Appendix 7

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ACE Adopter Recruitment Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2024   Appendix 8

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Report of the Adoption Panel

1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

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ACE Adoption Panel 2022-23

Introduction

Adoption Central England (ACE) has been established as a Regional Adoption Agency now for 5 years. The adoption panel within that plays an important part in the process of achieving permanency for children with a plan of adoption.

Over the past 5 years adoption panel members have been continually learning; taking on new systems and processes, increasing our knowledge of changing practice such as fostering for adoption, moving to on-line panels, and improving our own practice in assessing the paperwork, phrasing questions, and formulating our recommendations. Training courses have been informative and thought provoking, this past year the cultural humility training attended by panel chairs, the DDP training and the training day focusing on effective personal and professional judgment particularly encouraged us to reflect, question and improve the way we work.

The research paper into the effectiveness of on-line panels was really interesting and reaffirmed ACE's decision to continue on-line for the foreseeable future, with the majority of stakeholders preferring this format to in person meetings.

The annual report evidences the increasing use of fostering for adoption within ACE, with a higher number of prospective adopters recommended as potential FfA carers and more children placed under FfA this year. Having attended the regional workshop run by Midlands Together Collaboration on Early Permanence, it was pleasing to note that ACE is well embedded in its practice in this area, which is essential for children likely to have a plan of adoption, to reduce the number of placements and disruption for them. The quality of the FfA assessment within the AARs has improved significantly over time along with our learning.

Quality assurance is a key element of the adoption panel's role, with each panel member providing appropriate feedback on the quality of the key reports submitted, namely the Adopter Assessment Report (AAR), the Child's Permanence Report (CPR) and the Adoption Placement Report (APR). One hundred per cent of AARs were rated as either good or outstanding, this has now been the case for 3 years running and is a testament to the quality and dedication of our adoption social workers. There has also been a marked improvement in the quality of AARs and CPRs over the last year which is encouraging.

Feedback provided to panel by prospective adoptive parents and social workers who have attended panel is key to enable us to continue to learn; and reflect, refine, and improve the way we work, so please keep this coming. The ACE adoption panel is committed to continuous review of its practice to ensure we support the agency in achieving the best outcomes for children with a plan of adoption.

Charlotte Shadbolt

Panel Chair

ACE Adoption Panel 2022-23

Executive Summary

Summary of panel activity, 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

This is the **fifth** report of the panel at Adoption Central England since the formation of the Regional Adoption Agency in 2018. Panel meetings are held on Monday and Thursday mornings and consider 3 (exceptionally 4) agenda items, which may be the suitability of applicants to become adoptive parents, the viability of a match for adoption for a child or children proposed by one of ACE's five constituent local authorities, or a plan of consensual adoption for a relinquished baby. Since March 2020, meetings have been held exclusively online, using Microsoft Teams. As a single panel, the meeting is quorate with 5 members, but 6 members attend where possible, drawn from a Central List of 43 individuals. A fifth panel chair was appointed in December 2022. Five members resigned and two new members joined.

82 panel meetings took place in 2022-23, considering **190 agenda items.** The panel considered **72 'suitability to adopt' applications and** made positive recommendations first time for 70. One application was not recommended by panel but deferred by the agency decision maker (ADM) pending further assessment: the application was recommended when presented for a second time. In the second instance, the ADM disagreed with the panel and approved the application after receiving additional information from the assessing social worker. No agency recommendations against approval ('Brief Reports') were presented to panel in this period. Panel members noted a significant increase in the number of applicants willing to consider a fostering for adoption (FfA) placement, i.e., 65% compared to 44% in 2021-2. The number of applications from single applicants also increased significantly (13, compared to 6 in 2021-2) as did applications from Asian/Mixed Asian-White households (12, compared to 5 in 2021-2).

The panel considered **110 proposed matches for adoption, representing 129 children** – a significant increase on the previous year's 89 matches. Of these, 78 were matches with ACE-approved adopters, while 32 were matches with adopters approved by another agency.

The panel considered **consensual plans of adoption for 5 babies** from three local authorities: independent legal advice to the panel is provided by ACE's host local authority for these matters. In one case, the panel deferred a recommendation, advising that the local authority take further legal advice and gather more information for the Child's Permanence Report. The plan was brought to panel for a second time, when panel recommended adoption.

Quality Assurance

The panel fulfils its quality assurance role through the panel members individually completing feedback forms prior to the meeting. Members rate the quality of the three key panel reports – the Adopter Assessment Report (AAR), the Child's Permanence Report (CPR) and the Adoption Placement Report (APR), providing a score between 1 (Poor) and 5 (Outstanding) and their comments/reasons. Panel's feedback on each AAR is shared with the manager of the assessing social worker shortly after the panel meeting. The panel's feedback on matching reports – CPR and APR – is shared every 6 months with senior managers from the relevant local authority. The panel advisers also note and collate the reasons given for an adopter assessment not meeting timescales, and whether a match is presented to panel within the National Minimum Standard of 6 months after the child's adoption decision.

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Over the past year, panel members have rated **85% of Adopter Assessment Reports as either good or outstanding,** and none less than satisfactory. It rated **45% of Child's Permanence Reports as good or outstanding**, and 1% requiring improvement. **Adoption Placement Reports** were all rated at least satisfactory, **with 49% deemed good or outstanding.** Of note is the perceived improvement in the quality of CPRs from Coventry City Council (62% rated good or outstanding) which are typically prepared by social workers with substantial experience of adoption work.

The panel invites **feedback from prospective adopters** and social workers who attend, asking for their ratings on the quality of the experience, timekeeping and technical difficulty and reflections on the relevance of the questions asked. Response rates from adopters after their approval panel were 44%, falling to 33% after matching panel. All adopters who responded considered their overall experience of attending panel for approval as positive. Following matching, 91% stated their overall experience was positive, 6% were neutral and 3% negative.

Social worker feedback was received for 30% of cases, 82% of whom judged their panel experience to be either 'better than expected' or 'excellent/very positive', an improvement on 70% in 2021-22. Asked about the relevance of the questions, 84% felt that the questions put to them were relevant or extremely relevant, and 96% felt those put to the prospective adopters were relevant/extremely relevant. 89% judged the chairing of the meeting as 'good' or 'excellent'.

Agency decision makers at ACE and its five partner local authorities are asked to comment on panel's consideration of the case for which a decision is sought. In most cases, decision makers endorse the panel's robustness, sensitivity, challenge, attention to detail and process. Where the panel made a negative recommendation concerning the match of siblings with a couple, the ADM overruled, noting that the panel's decisions were over-reliant on verbal responses given at the meeting by adopters, and showed little triangulation with the reports. On another occasion the same ADM noted that the matters raised in panel's discussion of a case did not translate into questions. The ADM for ACE also agreed to approve an applicant where panel had not recommended, taking a different view on the level of concerns raised in the meeting.

Agency decision makers are invited to observe panel, and any requests to do so are prioritised over other observers. A number of ADMs observed a panel meeting in 2021-2 but take up this year has been low. The ADM at ACE routinely observes panel meetings ahead of a panel chair's appraisal and offers feedback.

Key points during 2022-3

The 'Recalibration of Panel' focus, introduced in 2021, has continued throughout the year, as panel chairs and advisers seek to ensure that the panel's scrutiny of adoption proposals is properly evidence-based rather than 'performance-based', remaining alert to the dangers of bias. The panel member conference in September 2022 encouraged reflection on the biographical and professional influences on panel members' decision making, while a tool to help panel members evaluate the quality of written evidence was produced in March 2023. Nine online 'bitesize' workshops have taken place during the year, covering topics such as Relinquished Babies (now known as 'consensual adoptions') Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and a new CPR template. These were complemented by two **in-person events**, recognising the value to panel members of meeting with one another face-to-face, away from a screen. The event in May 2022 considered the lessons from recent placement disruptions, while November's event included a presentation from ACE staff on outcomes for children matched during the year, a discussion of the Cumbria Serious Case Review and discussion of recommendations arising from the panel conference. Panel member

Newsletters are distributed most months, and an online conversation group was started in March 2023.

A research paper written by Dr Peter Unwin of Worcester University and Kate Moon, panel adviser, captured the findings of a small study of the effectiveness of online panels, conducted in the autumn and winter of 2021-2. The views of panel members, adopters and social workers were gathered through a survey and interviews, then analysed and key findings shared. The paper noted the high level of support for the new platform from adopters and social workers, alongside greater ambivalence from panel members concluding:

> "*No evidence has emerged since the onset of online adoption panels that the nature of their recommendations has changed in any significant ways. Panels are not run for the benefit of panel members, social workers, or prospective adopters but for the child/ children seeking permanency. Evidence from the present research suggests a healthy panel system which is able to have appropriate debate, and one which has sophisticated its technological approach as all players have become more conversant with the online world.*"

With **early permanence** being high on the agenda for adoption practice at a national level, the panel has continued to develop its voice in addressing with social workers and adopters their understanding and preparation for fostering for adoption (FfA), as well as its responsibility to consider adoption matches that have begun with a fostering phase as robustly as any other match. Panel chairs and advisers attended a regional workshop on early permanence convened by the Midlands Together Collaboration, and further training is planned for panel members in the coming year.

Panel has been represented by Katie Nabbs at the ACE **Black Lives Matters** group, and the panel advisers and chairs attended training in **Cultural Humility** in 2022. Of relevance to the panel role was 'The 3 Cs' approach to understanding diversity, which could equally apply to panel's remit and behaviour, i.e., 'Curiosity, Clarification, and - only where needed - Challenge'. ACE's newly revised Diversity Policy was shared with panel members, and the panel advisers continue to welcome applications to join the Central List from the range of communities and families served by the agency.

The effectiveness of the adoption panel and key issues are reviewed at **business meetings** with the panel chairs, Head of ACE, and panel advisers. These were held in July 2022, December 2022 and March 2023 and areas of concern discussed included the 'Somerset Judgement,' adopter reviews, feedback from Ofsted Inspections, the sufficiency of panel meetings, training and IT needs, and reflections on the flow and behaviour of those meetings. The number of panel meetings per month was reduced during the autumn from 8 to 6 but returned to 8 in January 2023 due to the logistical challenges related to the peaks and troughs of demand for panel slots: it being easier to cancel a date that was not required than convene a panel at short notice. In January, **Charlotte Shadbolt** joined Avriel Reader, Heather Tobin, Margaret Powell, and Stuart Watkins as a **fifth panel chair**, and the following month two panel chairs attended a whole service Away Day at ACE. Margaret, Avriel, and Stuart also contributed to Ofsted inspections of Children's Services at Coventry, Herefordshire, and Solihull during the year.

The **pilot of a panel preparation process** was agreed in December 2022 and started in March 2023. This aimed to facilitate better timekeeping at meetings but more importantly a greater focus during meetings on the pertinent issues through the collation of views and questions in advance – a method widely used in other panels. However, the pilot was quickly abandoned after 6 panels due to the additional pressure of advance preparation it placed upon panel chairs, coupled with the

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technical challenges of finalising questions through screen-shared documents. This pilot coincided with a revision and simplification of the quality assurance forms, and the introduction of a tool to help panel members evaluate the quality of reports: while the preparation process was discontinued, these other changes remain.

Panel advisers Katie Nabbs and Kate Moon continue to oversee all aspects of the panel function, with Katie leading on panel member recruitment/central list and advising Monday panels, and Kate on QA feedback processes and reporting, advising Thursday panels. The panel advisers have participated in learning reviews in the cases of two matches that disrupted, and both conduct panel member appraisals using feedback gathered from the chairs after each meeting. They are also members of the Permanence West Midlands Advisers Group. Panel administrators Claire Duncombe and Jacquie Keir continue to produce high quality minutes for distribution to decision makers usually within 3 working days of the panel meeting, with Claire also ensuring that two meetings a week are quorate, supporting with the appointment and payment of panel members and supporting the chairs and members with IT issues.

Practice Issues arising in 2022-3

- Medical advisors: it is noted that medical advisors appointed by some of the constituent local authorities have had no attendance at panel meetings, while the opportunity for prospective adopters to meet with medical advisors during matching and before panel has reduced.
- Quality of evidence in some panel reports, particularly the CPR, e.g., efforts to obtain photographs and information about siblings not shown, the final views of the Child's Guardian missing, and the findings of sibling assessments not included.
- The need to support panel members in making succinct, unambiguous, and well evidenced recommendations, in particular differentiating between approval and matching, and being clear about their role in early permanence proposals.
- Lack of evidence in the CPR for a baby presented for consensual adoption that the LA has taken legal advice around whether a Part 19 application for court direction is indicated.
- Explanations of delay in care planning for a child, with absence of clarity as to whether fostering for adoption was considered. (It is the duty of the local authority to consider FfA for all children with a plan of adoption.)
- Rationale for the choice of FfA carers as required by the Reg 22A report: further information and analysis is needed in some reports as to why the family selected is the right match for the child.
- Limited evidence in some adopter assessments that the additional challenges of parenting siblings has been fully explored.
- Similarly, some adopter assessments could evidence more strongly the applicants' understanding of a child's ethnic, cultural and identity needs.
- A significant number of local authority adoption reports presented lack the signature of a manager, which the panel views as an important marker of shared accountability for a life-changing plan of adoption for a child
- Panel would welcome more direction and guidance on understanding the impact on therapeutic parenting of adopters with known mental health issues – many have reported 'anxiety' and/or 'depression' or who are neurodivergent, with diagnoses of autism, ADHD, or other disorders.

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Panel Priorities for 2023-4

- To develop panel's role and voice in early permanence planning and matching

- To continue the ongoing training/learning programme for chairs and panel members, mindful of the need for peer support amongst newer members.

- Panel members to gain a more informed, contemporary understanding of aspects of adopter mental health and other neurodivergent conditions and their relevance to therapeutic parenting.

- Renewal of efforts to supporting panel members to make better evidenced recommendations which are triangulated with reports and alert to bias.

- To continue to embed Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy principles across panel practice, including the offer of DDP-informed supervision to panel chairs and members.

- To analyse in greater detail the composition of the central list membership through an equality monitoring questionnaire, to identify where further recruitment may be needed, and for panel to best reflect all groups of people within our communities.

- To address the balance of panel members to include more individuals with a professional interest in adoption (including social work members but also individuals working in mental health, education, voluntary sector) as well as, ideally, an adopted and care-experienced member or members.

- Streamlining quality assurance tools to reflect rating scheme used by Ofsted, in preparation for future inspections of regional adoption agencies.

- To promote mutual understanding and partnership working between ACE staff and the panel through meetings, joint training, and networking events, and to further explore how the work and expectations of the adoption panel can be relayed to local authority partners and other stakeholders through training and opportunities.

- To invite greater interaction with ADMs

- To review panel member expenses and method of reimbursement

Brenda Vincent   **Kate Moon**   **Katie Nabbs**

Head of ACE   **Panel Adviser**   **Panel Adviser**

July 2023

Appendix 1: Context, Constitution and Operation of the ACE Adoption Panel

Context

All adoption agencies are required by law[1] to have an adoption panel, the key role of which is to provide independent scrutiny of the proposals presented by an adoption agency. The panel is asked to determine whether all the issues have been appropriately clarified and whether the proposal is sound, and to make a recommendation to an agency decision maker (ADM) accordingly.

In April 2018, the Government's programme for the regionalisation of adoption services that heralded the creation of Adoption Central England (ACE) brought together the work of the adoption panels of Worcestershire County Council (now Worcestershire Children First), Warwickshire County Council, Coventry City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council into one single panel. With Herefordshire Council joining ACE in July 2019, the ACE adoption panel now considers adoption proposals for children from five local authorities, together with applications made to ACE from individuals and couples, residing in or close to those local authorities, who wish to adopt a child or children.

This is the <u>fifth</u> full year report of the ACE adoption panel since it became a single panel on 1 April 2018.

Constitution and Operation of the Adoption Panel

The Adoption Agencies Statutory Guidance requires that each adoption agency must maintain a 'central list' of persons whom it considers suitable to be a member of an adoption panel. Panel business can only be conducted if at least 5 members are present, including the chair and a social work representative: wherever possible, the ACE panel operates with 6 members. Panel members have secure online access to adoption reports at least 5 working days before the panel meeting and submit their individual feedback on the quality of those reports beforehand. Panel meetings are conducted via Microsoft Teams on Monday and Thursday mornings in most weeks and typically consider a maximum of 3 items (4 in exceptional circumstances).

Two ideas were piloted during the year: a reduction in the number of panels from 8 to 6 per month, and a mechanism whereby panel members submitted their views and questions on agenda items to the panel chairs and advisers in advance of the meeting (a process widely used elsewhere). Meetings returned to 8 per month as it was found to be easier to cancel a panel for lack of business than it was to assemble an extra one at short notice. The 'panel preparation' pilot was trialled in March 2023 but discontinued due to the additional work it required of the panel chairs before and during the meeting.

Membership

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[1] Principally, the Adoption and Children ACT 2002; Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005; Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011; Statutory Adoption Guidance 2013; Draft 2014 Statutory Guidance; National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2011 and 2014.

Forty-three individuals have served as panel members during the reporting period. Five members have resigned during the year, while two new members have joined.

It remains a challenge to recruit enough social workers to cover twice-weekly panel meetings, and particular efforts were made with partner local authorities to recruit adoption-experienced social workers from within their Children's Teams. Despite a number of initial expressions of interest received, and a further mailing, it was not possible to proceed with any interested parties, for reasons including their newly qualified status and/or capacity to manage the additional workload. One independent social worker joined the central list in 2022-23, with another due to join in the coming year. The panel is particularly indebted to two social workers within ACE – Emma Wooldridge and Parveen Nagra - who have stepped in at short notice on several occasions so that a meeting could go ahead.

The panel team remains mindful of the rich diversity across the area served by ACE and continues to welcome and fast-track applications from suitably qualified people, with or without disabilities, and who represent Global Majority and/or LGBT+ communities and families. Wherever possible, a panel convened to consider adoption proposals will incorporate the perspectives of adoptive parents, adopted people, and others with a personal or professional interest in adoption, drawn from Black Caribbean, Black African, Asian, White British and White European ethnicities; a number of panel members bring the perspective gained through their lived experience of same-sex parenting.

An area of concern for panel chairs and panel advisers is the availability of medical advisers to attend panel meetings, which has been limited; a medical adviser was present at only 26 of the 82 meetings, and there was no representation at all from medical advisers serving one of the local authorities. Related to this is the reduction or cessation altogether of in-person consultations between medical advisers and prospective adopters at matching. These matters have been escalated to senior manager levels within the local authorities by the Head of ACE.

All chairs and independent panel members are offered a modest fee for their participation and are required to attend at least one training event per year. Twenty-three panel member appraisals were completed during 2022-23 and conducted by the panel advisers using feedback collected from panel chairs after each meeting.

Appendix 2: Adoption Panel Activity, 2022-23

Proposals made to the adoption panel are presented in three key reports, which are read in advance by panel members. The reports are:

- **Adopter Assessment Report (AAR):** this report presents a case that the applicants are suitable to adopt and is prepared by an assessing social worker employed by ACE.

- **Child's Permanence Report (CPR):** this report makes the case that a child's plan for permanence should be adoption. It is prepared by the child's social worker and will have informed both the decision of the local authority's agency decision maker (the ADM) and the family court that adoption is the only plan for the child. The CPR also serves as a life story resource for the adopted child and their family.

- **Adoption Placement Report (APR):** this report presents the case that a particular child should be placed for adoption with a particular family and includes a plan describing how the child and family are to be supported, and what, if any, restrictions on parental responsibility are proposed. The child's social worker and the adoption social worker prepare this report.

Panel meetings in 2022-23

	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
Number of meetings	**82**	80	71	44	42
Platform	**Online**	Online	Online	In Person [2]	In Person
Maximum number of cases	**3-4**	3-4	3	5-6	6-7
Agenda items	**190**	173	169	185	184
Cancelled Panels	9 (11%)	16 (17%)	11 (13%)	6 (12%)	4 (9%)

Cancellations

- Panel dates are fixed and made known to social workers and managers for the year in advance. 6-8 panel agenda slots are available every month (except weeks containing a bank holiday or chairs meeting or training event) and spread across two meetings, held on Mondays and Thursdays.
- One panel was cancelled due to the sudden unavailability of social work member (essential for quoracy). Another panel was cancelled as no chair was available. One of the 8 cancellations was necessitated by the Queen's funeral.

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[2] Online panels commenced on 30 March 2020, following the implementation of national lockdown measures on 23 March, and have remained so since lockdown measures lifted.

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- Most panel cancellations – see feedback from adopters - are caused by the postponement of all the items previously booked in. In most cases the reason for postponement is the unreadiness of reports and/or the unavailability of social workers or prospective adopters to attend.
- A panel will go ahead with one item if the case cannot be moved to another meeting within a week.

Suitability to Adopt ('Approvals')

At meetings held between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, panel considered 'suitable to adopt' proposals, representing **72 households**. Families applying to ACE to adopt were drawn from the agency's constituent local authorities as shown.

Adopters' Local Authority	Number of households 2022-23	Number of households 2021-22	Number of households 2020-21	Number of households 2019-20	Number of households 2018-19
Coventry City Council	10	6	13	12	27
Herefordshire Council	2	13	3	6	-
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	2	2	6	7	11
Warwickshire County Council	25	23	21	33	27
Worcestershire Children First	20	21	19	31	20
Non-ACE local authority	13	10	15	7	7
	72	75	77	97	92

Of the 72 applications presented to panel:

- 70 applications were considered suitable to adopt by panel at their first presentation, and these were ratified by the agency decision maker.
- Panel did not recommend approval for two applications. In the first case, the ADM decided that the applicant was suitable to adopt after receiving additional information from the assessing social worker. In the second case, the ADM initially upheld the panel's

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recommendation, then amended the decision to deferment pending the receipt of further assessment information. At the second time of presentation to panel, the applicant was recommended as suitable to adopt.

- There were no agency recommendations *against* approval – known as 'Brief Reports' – presented to panel in this period**.**
- Statutory Guidance 3.52 states that 'Stage Two [of the adopter application] should take four months unless there are exceptional circumstances.' Stage Two starts when then agency receives notification from the prospective adopters that they wish to proceed and ends with the decision-maker's decision on their suitability to adopt. Data collected at the panel stage notes that **approximately one-fifth (22%) of applications met this timescale with 46% of applications were presented to panel in 6 months or less.**

Timescales	Stage 2 exceeded timescales	Stage 2 completed within 4 months
Reasons	56 (78%)	16 (22%)
Delays continuing from Stage 1	13	
Delayed allocation	9	
Social Worker absence	8	
Adopter-led reasons	7	
Related to medicals	7	
No reason given	6	
Further assessment needed	4	
Social worker's workload	2	
Availability of panel slot	0	

Of the 72 applications presented:

Profile of Adopters		2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
First applications		57	62	56	80	61
Subsequent applications		15	10	19	14	22
	Single adopters	13	6	7	8	11
	Opposite-sex couples	51	55	60	-³	-
	Same-sex couples	8	11	8	-	-
Ethnicity	White British or White European households	56	62	64		-
	Asian or Mixed Asian/White households	12	5	9		
	Black Caribbean or Mixed Black Caribbean/White Households	4	1	1		
	Other ethnicity	0	4	1		
Offer	Foster carers	2	3	5	8	9
	Willing to consider FfA	47	32	26	-	-

Matches for Adoption

At meetings held between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the ACE adoption panel considered **110** agenda items concerning matches for a total of **129** children. Two agenda items concerned different matches for the same child: the first match ended, and the child was matched for a second time. Positive recommendations were made in all but one case: here, the ADM for the child overruled panel's negative recommendation citing panel's overreliance on answers given in the meeting and a lack of triangulation with the adoption reports which they felt addressed most of the panel's reservations.

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³ - denotes data not collected by Panel Team during this reporting year

Child's Local Authority	Number of matches (% meeting NMS 17.7)[4] 2022-23	Number of matches 2021-22	Number of matches 2020-21	Number of matches 2019-20	Number of matches 2018-19
Coventry City Council	37 (30%)	20	25	22	-
Herefordshire Council	9 (67%)	9	16	8	-
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	14 (36%)	10	7	8	-
Warwickshire County Council	22 (27%)	16	23	19	-
Worcestershire Children First	28 (46%)	34	20	29	-
	110	89	91	86	85

Profile of proposed placement	Number of matches 2022-23	Number of matches 2021-22	Number of matches 2020-21	Number of matches 2019-20	Number of matches 2018-19
1 child	93	68	75	75	-
2 children to be placed together	15	17	12	7	-
3 children to be placed together	2	4	4	4	-
Total no of matches	110	89	91	86	85
Age of oldest child	0-12 months	29	28	36	-	-
	12-24 months	31	27	23		
	2-4 years	28	15	20		

[4] National Minimum Standard for Adoption 2014, 17.7: The adoption panel makes a considered recommendation on the proposed placement of a child with particular prospective adopters within six months of the adoption agency's decision-maker deciding that the child should be placed for adoption.

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to be placed	4+ years	**22**	19	12		
Total matches		**110**	89	91		
Type of adoption	Mainstream adoption	**85**	68	72	55	64
	fostering for Adoption[5]	**24**	16	15	25	15
	Foster Carer Adoption of child in their care	**1**	5	4	6	6
Total matches		**110**	89	91	86	85
Ethnicity of children (by placement)	White British	**86**	78	72	-	-
	Gypsy, Roma, Traveller	**3**	3	2		
	Any other White Background	**3**	1	2		
	Asian or Asian British	**1**	-	1		
	Black, Black British, Black Caribbean, Black African	**0**	-	-		
	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	**17**	7	14		
		110	89	91		
Matches with ACE adopters		**78**	-	-		
Interagency matches		**32**	-	-		

[5] Total does not include children placed under 'Connected Persons' arrangements.

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Consensual Plan of Adoption (formerly known as Relinquished Baby cases)

Child's Local Authority	Number of plans 2022-23	Number of plans 2021-22	Number of plans 2020-21	Number of plans 2019-20	Number of plans 2018-19
Coventry City Council	1	1	5	0	-
Herefordshire Council	0	0	1	0	-
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	0	0	0	0	-
Warwickshire County Council	2[6]	3	0	0	-
Worcestershire Children First	2	2	0	0	-
Total	5	6	6	0	4

Placement disruptions and placements that did not proceed to adoption.

The adoption panel has been informed of **3 Disruption Review** meetings, held when a child has been placed for adoption, but the placement breaks down before an application for an adoption order has been made. A further **3 Learning Reviews** were held in respect of children for whom the decision maker had agreed a match, but who did not proceed to placement: none of these were children placed under fostering to adopt arrangements. The panel is usually represented at these meetings by the panel adviser, with the panel chair also invited to attend where appropriate. The learning from these events is collated from the minutes by the ACE Head of Servicer into a separate report which is shared first with panel chairs and then panel members.

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[6] Panel recommended deferral of plan for one child, upheld by ADM; plan presented a second time and approved.

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Appendix 3: Panel Feedback on the Quality of Adoption Reports

"Adoption panels provide quality assurance feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of the reports being presented to the panel. This includes whether the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met, and whether there is a thorough, rigorous, consistent, and fair approach across the service in the assessment of whether a child should be placed for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the proposed placement".

Adoption: National Minimum Standards, 2014, 17:2

Adoption panel members provide individual feedback on the quality of adoption reports in advance of the panel meeting. When reviewing the **Adopter Assessment Report**, panel members rate its clarity, length, attention to detail, the extent to which the voices of any children in the home are heard, the sufficiency of the evidence and the depth of the social work analysis. Consideration is also given to the extent to which the core themes of Dyadic Developmental Practice are evidenced in the report. Feedback is provided to the assessing social worker via their manager shortly after the panel meeting.

Panel members also rate the coherence and detail with which a child's journey to permanence through adoption is described in the **Child's Permanence Report** ('CPR') while the **Adoption Placement Report** ('APR') is rated for the clarity with which the rationale for the proposed match is presented, as well as the detail and scope of the adoption support plan contained therein.

Aggregated bespoke feedback on the quality of the Child's Permanence Report and Adoption Placement Reports is shared with the agency's constituent local authorities both on request and in six-monthly reports to the local authority. Case-specific feedback is shared with local authority social workers and managers were agreed by the chair and panel adviser.

Panel feedback on the quality of the Adopter Assessment Reports (AAR)

Adopter Assessment Report	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-2019[7]
Number of reports evaluated.	**72**	77	77	91	35
Average rating (1: poor; 2: requires improvement; 3: satisfactory; 4: good; 5: outstanding	**4.02**	4.05	3.98	-	-
Where evidence of DDP informing assessment is satisfactory, good, or outstanding	**99%**	99%	96%	-	-
Rated as requiring improvement	**0%**	0%	0%	17%	26%

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[7] Feedback process implemented part-way through reporting period, from 26.11.2018.

Rated as good or outstanding	**86%**	94%	61%	57%	-
Rated as satisfactory, good, or outstanding.	**100%**	100%	100%	83%	74%

Panel feedback on the quality of matching reports

Child's Permanence Report (CPR)

All Local Authorities	2022-23 n=118	2021-22 n=91 reports	2020-21	2019-20[8]	2018-19[9]
Average rating (1: poor; 2: requires improvement; 3: satisfactory; 4: good; 5: outstanding	**3.86**	3.82	3.72	-	-
Rated as requiring improvement	**1%**	1%	9%	36%	42%
Rated as good or outstanding	**45%**	47%	41%	28%	-
Rated as satisfactory, good, or outstanding.	**99%**	99%	91%	64%	58%

Adoption Placement Report (APR)

All Local Authorities	2022-23 n=117	2021-22 n=91	2020-21	2019-20[10]	2018-19[11]
Average rating (1: poor; 2: requires improvement; 3: satisfactory; 4: good; 5: outstanding	**3.82**	3.74	3.67	-	-
Rated as requiring improvement	**0%**	2%	5%	35%	42%
Rated as good or outstanding	**49%**	42%	37%	28%	-
Rated as satisfactory, good, or outstanding	**100%**	98%	95%	65%	58%

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[8] Feedback on 73 out of 86 reports
[9] Feedback process implemented from 26.11.2018 and pertains to 24 matches.
[10] Feedback on 73 out 86 reports
[11] Feedback process implemented from 26.11.2018 and pertains to 24 matches.

ACE Adoption Panel 2022-23

By Local Authority, 2022-23	CPR % Reports rated good or outstanding	APR % Reports rated good or outstanding
Coventry City Council	62	51
Herefordshire Council	44	33
Solihull MBC	40	40
Warwickshire County Council	46	41
Worcestershire Children First	57	59

Appendix 4: Review of priorities 2022-23

Priority	Outcomes
To contribute where appropriate to ACE's Service Improvement Plan 2022-23 and its 5 key priorities, as in • To increase adopter recruitment and the timeliness of assessments with a focus on recruiting families for Black and ethnic minority children, sibling groups and children with health and developmental uncertainty • To improve placement timeliness through effective tracking and matching and embedding early permanence through fostering for adoption • Extending the range of adoption support services • Developing collaboration and partnership working with local authorities, health and education services, adoptive parents, adoption support providers and regional and voluntary adoption agencies.	• Panel team now collects data on the timeliness of adopter assessments, and reasons why timescales not met. • Panel members are updated re ACE priorities in twice-yearly presentations by ACE Head of Service, and outcomes for children matched during the year are shared by ACE family finders. • Panel chairs attended Cultural Humility Training during 2022-23 • Panel advisers and chairs attended Early Permanence Training, and EP is a topic regularly discussed in chairs' meetings and panel meetings. • Panel members are periodically informed of new developments in post-adoption support and ACE's offer to families. • Individuals from agencies with an interest in adoption observe panel meetings.
To continue to recalibrate panel to fulfil its statutory role as independent scrutiny of adoption proposals, through further development of the professional knowledge, skills and effectiveness of panel and its members, using training resources available and mindful of feedback from all stakeholders (adopters, social workers, agency managers, panel members, decision makers)	• Conference focusing on the Effective Personal and Professional Judgement of Panel Members held on 27 September 2022. • Feedback from stakeholders is requested after every panel meeting and key themes shared with panel chairs and members.
To develop panel members' understanding of early permanence, in line with national and regional priorities	• Ongoing: training event planned for May 2023. Chairs attended EP presentation in March 2023.
To develop panel members' cultural competence and understanding of diversity to inform their non-biased consideration of adoption proposals	• Ongoing: panel adviser attends BLM group in ACE; cultural humility training attended by panel advisers and chairs.
To keep panel arrangements under review, including chairing, sufficiency of panel slots, frequency, efficiency of meeting, Teams updates, and information leaflets	• Chairs' meetings held in July 2022, December 2022, and March 2023. • New panel chair appointed in January 2023 • Panel leaflets updated. • Further IT support provided to chairs
To contribute to the pilot of a new Child's Permanence Report template	• New template has been piloted and the final evaluation report will be considered in summer 2023.
To provide opportunities for panel members and social workers to learn together side-by-side	• Ongoing. In-person event in November 2022 brought together Hub staff and panel members.

ACE Adoption Panel 2022-23

To report to panel members on the outcome of matches	• Presentation delivered to panel members in November 2022.
To further develop professional relationships with ACE's local authority partners, including agency decision makers and operational managers	• Panel adviser attends LA Managers' meetings and provides feedback on quality of reports. Workshop with local authority ADMs planned for July 2023.

ACE Adoption Panel 2022-23

Appendix 5: Central List of Panel Members

As on 31 March 2023

*New member joining in 2022-3

Independent chairs

Margaret Powell, adoptive parent, Vice-chair of a fostering panel and member of the Independent Review Mechanism

Heather Tobin, adoptive parent, also member of a fostering panel, family time support worker and retired senior police officer,

Avriel Reader, also chair for another regional adoption agency, and retired Head of Children's Services

Stuart Watkins, also chair of a fostering panel and Home for Good, retired Service Manager in Adoption and fostering, Worcestershire County Council

Charlotte Shadbolt*, adoptive parent with chairing experience in school governance, and professional background in banking

Legal Advisor

Marieluise Horne, Solicitor, Children and Families Legal Services, Warwickshire County Council Legal Services

Medical Advisors

Dr Emma Thompson, Agency Medical Advisor for Worcestershire Children First, Paediatrician, Children, Young People and Families, Worcestershire Health, and Care NHS Trust

Dr Lucy Coker, Agency Medical Advisor for Warwickshire, Senior Trust Specialist in Community Paediatrics, South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust (membership on hold at time of writing)

Dr Vaishali Desai, Agency Medical Advisor deputising for Dr Coker, Consultant Paediatrician, South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust

Dr Viji Krishnamoorthy, Agency Medical Advisor for Coventry City Council, Paediatrician, C&W Partnership Trust

Dr Tanya Thangavelu, Agency Medical Advisor for Solihull MBC, Specialist Doctor, Community Paediatrics, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

Dr Sudha Arun, Agency Medical Advisor for Herefordshire, Paediatrician, Children in Care Team, Wye Valley NHS Trust Herefordshire

Social Work Members

Emma Wooldridge, Family Finding Social Worker, ACE

Eleanor Wynne, Permanency Social Worker with Coventry City Council

Parveen Nagra, Post-Adoption Social Worker, ACE

Liz Newman, Team Manager, Stratford Children's Team, Warwickshire Children's Services

Deborah Roden, Social Worker in Connected Persons Team, Warwickshire fostering.

Cornelia Heaney, Operations Manager Assurance and Practice Improvement - Children & Families, Warwickshire County Council *(stepped down in December 2022)*

Dr Peter Unwin, registered social worker, former foster carer, and social work academic.

Natalie Baldwin, Adoption Social Worker for another RAA

Caroline Stirk, Adoption Social Worker in another RAA, adoptive parent

Sharon Hurley, Registered Manager, Worcestershire fostering.

Clare Dainty*, Independent Social Worker and Form F assessor

Independent Members

Andrea Candlish, retired health visitor and regular carer of grandchildren

Bob Duthie, adoptive parent, former board member at Adoption UK, retired banker

Catherine Lloyd, adopted person, author, former leader and advocate in education, social care and mental health settings, panel member and board member for another adoption agency.

Charlotte Shadbolt, adoptive parent of four children, former banker. chair from January 2023

Chris Gilbey-Smith, adoptive parent, actor, and former lawyer

Dave Linton, independent member, local authority foster carer and member of fostering panels

Elaine Stratford, adopted person and QA manager for cancer service.

Faye Abbot, elected member, councillor at Coventry City Council

Janis McBride, retired primary head teacher, with fostering and adoption in family.

Joanne Russell-Miller, adoptive parent, and human resources manager

Judy Sharpe*, retired Children and Family Law solicitor

Lorraine Cooksey, adoptive parent, former manager in education sector, panel member for another regional adoption agency

Marion Mound, retired adoption social worker

Marian Humphries, elected member, councillor at Warwickshire County Council

Mark Bayfield, adoptive parent, and civil servant

ACE Adoption Panel 2022-23

Mark Connolly, adoptive parent, and former business improvement manager

Natasha Sutton, adoptive parent, and former teacher

Nigel Pendleton, adoptive parent and foster carer, Warwickshire County Council (stepped down in March 2023)

Patrick Fox, commissioning manager for Children's Services, adult services, and Approved Mental Health Professional, adopted person.

Rob Rogers, adoptive parent, educator, minister, and counsellor (*stepped down in January 2023)*

Sa'ddiya Mayet, intercountry adoptive parent, and business analyst

Sharon Bent, adoptive parent and retired police officer.

Taras Spyczak, adoptive parent, and business manager

Yasmeen Qazi, adoptive parent, investigator for LGSC Ombudsman, former lawyer, and social worker

Non-voting attendees

Kate Moon, Panel Adviser (30 hours)

Katie Nabbs, Panel Adviser (25.5 hours)

Claire Duncombe, Panel Administrator (full-time)

Jacquie Keir, Panel Administrator (part-time)

ACE Adoption Panel 2022-23

Appendix 6: Panel Member Training

Online Panel Member Conference 27 September 2022:

'Effective Personal and Professional Judgement for Panel Members' with Dr Arlene Weekes, social work academic and panel chair.

Dr Weekes presented the findings of her research, published in 'Adoption & fostering,' into 'The biographic and professional influences on adoption and fostering panel members' recommendation-making.

In-Person Panel Member Events

In recognition of the loss of face-to-face contact, potential isolation and challenge to collaborative working that online working has imposed on panel members, ACE offers two in-person events each year to panel members where a minimum of 12 members commit to attend. At an event held at Elmslie House in Malvern on **3 May 2022,** panel members considered the issues and learning from matches that had disrupted either during introductions or before the making of an adoption order. The event held at St Michael's Budbrooke (near Warwick) on **9 November 2022** considered the learning from the Cumbria Serious Case Review, as well as exploring the recommendations from the conference held in September.

'Bitesize' series

Sessions held online during 2022-3 and lasting for 60-90 minutes were:

- Relinquished Babies, with Jemma Fordham (Operations Manager) and Jessica Howkins (Social Worker, ACE), 6 July 2022
- DDP Supervision for panel chairs, 6 October 2022
- Reflections on Panel Member Conference, 19 October 2022
- DDP Supervision for new panel members, 20 October 2022
- New Template for the Child's Permanence Report, with Melissa Rose (Operations Manager), 13 December 2022
- Preparation for Panel, introducing guidance for evaluating adoption reports,8 February 2023
- Lunchtime Webinars celebrating 5 years of ACE, 6-9 March.
- DDP Supervision for panel chairs, with Dr Billy Smythe, 9 March 2023
- Conversation Group, with Catherine Lloyd talking about her book, 'A Child in the Middle,' 15 March 2023
- DDP Supervision for panel members, with Dr Billy Smythe, 30 March 2023

Appendix 7: Stakeholder Feedback on the effectiveness of the Panel

From Prospective Adopters

"The panel experience itself was well managed and I always understood what was happening. The chair and members asked relevant questions but made me feel at ease and so able to answer them. The recommendation and reasons were explained clearly so I understood them, I appreciated the option of a virtual panel, especially as I live some distance away."   *Prospective Adopter, following approval, July 2022*

"The Adoption panel was very friendly, put us at ease, made us feel relaxed and excused how emotional we got during the questions. They explained who they all were and their relevant experience. They were all very positive, outlined our strengths and explained everything clearly."

Prospective Adopter, following matching, August 2022

Prospective adopters are invited to complete a short online questionnaire about their experience of attending the adoption panel: a new question reflecting the online format was added in 2020.

	Approvals 2022-23 72 cases	**Matches 2022-23 110 cases**	Approvals 2021-22 77 cases	Matches 2021-22 91 cases	Approvals 2020-2021 77 cases	Match 2020-2021 91 cases	Approvals and matches 2019-20 185 cases	Approvals and matches[12] 2018-19 184 cases
Response rate	**43%**	**33%**	44%	40%	51%	42%	24 %	11%
Number of responses	**31**	**36**	34	36	39	38	44	
Attended on first date offered.	**74%**	**75%**	62%	61%	67%	61%	61%	

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[12] Paper questionnaire sent to applicants by post.

None, or very few technical glitches with online attendance	87%	100%	79%	86%	79%	95%	-	-
Panel ran early, on time or less than 15 minutes behind	71%	72%	71%	64%	77%	79%	43%	-
Thought questions were relevant	93%	94%	91%	92%	90%	95%	84%	93%
Overall experience of attending panel was negative	0%	3%	3%	3%	5%	0%	11%	-
Overall experience of attending panel was neutral	0%	6%	6%	3%	5%	3%	15%	-
Overall experience of attending panel was positive	100%	91%	91%	94%	90%	97%	74%	93%
Happy to attend a virtual panel again, or neutral	84%	97%	85%	83%	95%	100%	-	-

From Social Workers

"Panel experience was very positive. The panel members had clearly thoroughly read the reports provided and the questions asked of myself, and the couple were appropriate. The couple were offered reassurance by the panel chair throughout and this made it a positive experience for them. Experienced adopters on panel offered their advice on how best the couple can prepare for adoption and the applicants found this to be very useful."

(Feedback from Social Worker, February 2023)

Social workers attending the online panel either to present an approval, match or plan of adoption are invited to complete a short online questionnaire about their experience.

Questions to social workers	Approvals and matches 2022-23 190 agenda items	Approvals and matches. 2021-22 173 cases	Approvals and matches. 2020-2021 169 cases	Approvals and matches. 2019-20 185 cases	Approvals and matches. 2018-19 184 cases
Number of responses	57	62	31	40	25
Response rate (percentage of cases for which feedback submitted)	30%	36%	18%	22%	14%
Case started within 30 minutes of advertised time	86%	76%	87%	67.5%	52%
Thought questions to SW were relevant or extremely relevant	84%	81%	84%	85%	96%
Thought questions to applicants were relevant or extremely relevant	96%	81%	94%	87.5%	100%
Thought chairing of meeting was 'good' or 'excellent'	89%	92%	87%	-	-
Experience 'better than expected' or 'Excellent/very positive'	82%	70%	77%	-	-

From Agency Decision Makers

The template used by decision makers at ACE and its five partner local authorities asks

> ***Is the Decision Maker satisfied that the Panel considered the case appropriately?***

and invites feedback in writing on the panel's process, as it is described in the Minutes of the panel meeting. The ADM decision for each case is then shared with the panel on the secure panel portal for a limited period.

In most cases, the agency decision maker was satisfied with the adoption panel's consideration of the proposal placed before it. Typical comments included:

> *The papers and minutes of Panel evidenced appropriate and sensitive challenge in this case, and I am satisfied the Panel thoroughly considered the merits of the match and balanced this against identifiable risks appropriately* (ADM, Worcestershire, 24.01.2023)

> *As ADM, I am satisfied that Panel were robust and thorough in their decision-making process and I can confirm that I am in agreement with Panel's unanimous recommendation that [child] should be placed for adoption with [adopters]* (ADM, Coventry, 04.11.20220)

> *"I have considered an amended CPR and this whilst still has gaps has been updated to a level where I am confident to confirm [child's] match. Panel has been scrupulous with detail and recommendation and were correct to ask the ADM to have a more detailed assessment. Concise and clear recommendations given for the SW to follow."* (ADM, Herefordshire, 05.08.2022)

> *"I have read the panel minutes and recommendation to match, and I fully agree and endorse the panel's recommendation."* (ADM, Warwickshire, 01.12.2022)

> *I am satisfied that the questions raised by the panel about the match were answered and recorded within the minutes (ADM, Solihull, 03.11.2022)*

For one approval the ACE ADM noted that while 'it was appropriate to be cautious and the views of panel (and the panel experiences) are invaluable' they felt 'on balance' that the applicant had 'demonstrated her resilience and commitment to ensure the best for her child/ren.'

During the reporting period there was one occasion where the panel did not recommend a match of siblings with a couple. The ADM did not agree with the panel and approved the match, stating

> *"The decisions in the panel appear to be based on the verbal responses given on the day by the adopters. There is little triangulation with the reports that have been provided which I feel answer many of the reservations that panel raised and which I have cross referenced …" (ADM Solihull)*

The same ADM writing about a different case, noted that not all the issues raised in the panel discussion had been covered in the meeting.

The ACE Head of Service and decision maker at ACE has observed a panel meeting on several occasions during the year. Local Authority agency decision makers are also encouraged to observe an adoption panel meeting, but none has done so in 2022-3.

Annual Report of the Adoption Service 2022-2023 for Warwickshire County Council

Report Author:

Sharon Shaw – Head of Service for Corporate Parenting

Date: August 2023

Contents

1. Introduction

This is the Warwickshire County Council adoption service report for the period April 2022 - March 2023. It provides an overview of adoption activity and performance. Warwickshire delivers adoptions services with the regional adoption agency – Adoption Central England (ACE) which has been operational since 1 February 2018. This is in accordance with national policy that all local authority adoption services are required to be part of a regional adoption agency by 2020. This report is to be read alongside the ACE Annual Report and the annual report from ACE Adoption Panel.

As a local authority shared services hosted by Warwickshire County Council, ACE provides the following services:

- Recruitment, preparation and assessment of adoptive parents.
- Family finding and specific recruitment.
- Matching support and post order support to adoptive families for 12 months.
- Non agency adoption - the provision of information and court reports.
- Assessment of need for adoption support including requests to the Adoption Support Fund.
- Direct support to adoptive families including therapeutic interventions.
- Training for adopters and support groups.
- Independent Birth Parent Support Services -Family Connexions
- Training for social workers.
- Duty and advice service.

- Co-ordination of Adoption Panels across the region.

This arrangement allows for a greater strategic approach to adopter recruitment widening the potential pool of adopters for children. Adoption support services have been enhanced including the provision of therapeutic interventions that are delivered and coordinated more consistently and effectively across the region.

The local authority engagement with ACE is underpinned by a Hosting and Partnership Agreement and through the governance arrangements and partnership working there is the opportunity to ensure that the best possible outcomes are secured for children in a timely way and that adoptive families receive high quality support when they need this.

2. Local Authority Update

Over the past year, Warwickshire adoption service has made progress in the following areas:

- Identifying children where adoption is the appropriate plan, this has meant the numbers of children that require a change of plan has reduced.
- Fostering for adoption is considered for children where appropriate and this ensures that children receive stability and permanence at the earliest opportunity.
- We continue to be successful in placing sibling groups, ensuring that children have the opportunity to maintain their sibling relationship preventing them from experiencing further trauma by being separated from their brother or sisters. We have successfully achieved adoption for 2 sibling groups of 2 with adopters.
- We continue to have a positive working relationship with the Agency Decision Maker and ACE.
- We review the children who have been subject to a Placement Order, every 2 months and updates are provided to the Director and DCS. The Permanence Social worker meets reguarly with ACE to discuss family finding and highlights any drift with the ADM who requests that these are brought to ADM to be reviewed.

3. Service Activity

In summary, during 2022/23;

- 24 children (down by 12 from 2021/22) were subject of the decision that they should be placed for adoption.
- 21 children (down 1 from 2021/22) were made subject to a Placement Order by the court.
- 28 children (up by 12 from 2021/22) were matched with prospective adopters.
- 28 children (up by 4 from 2021/22) were placed with adopters.
- 15 children (Down by 19 on 21/22) were made subject to an Adoption Order by the court.
- 3 disruptions happened (up by 3 from 2021/22)
- 8 Change of Plans/ Review of Plans (down 3 from 2021/22) were completed which enabled alternative permanency options to be progressed.

Overall children's performance:

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of children adopted	28	34	15
Number of children placed with adopters	28	18	28
Number of children with an ADM (Agency Decision Maker) & awaiting match	29	37	24*
Number of disruptions	2	0	3

This does not include 3 children with a disruption in the year and one child waiting on a change of plan

The above figures indicate that in the last 12 months the number of children placed with adopters has increased from a relatively low figure for Warwickshire in 21/22. There has been a significant decrease in the number of Adoption Orders being granted, resulting in a large decrease in the number of children that were adopted. It is probable that the high numbers recorded in 21/22 were due to the courts catching up on the back log of court delays due to Covid. It can be assumed that if the children who are currently placed for adoption (28) are successfully adopted in the upcoming 12 months that the number of adoption orders granted next year will rise.

As shown below, there have been 21 Placement Orders secured in the last 12 months, which continues the year on year decrease from the 31 Placement Orders granted in

2018/19. National figures for adoption are not yet available for 22/23, however the figures at the end of 2022 showed a 2% increase from 2021 of children being adopted nationally, this has not been the case in Warwickshire with permanence through SGO (Special Guardianship Order) being higher than adoption orders for the last 4 years.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total No. of Placement Orders Granted	31	30	29	22	21

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Adoptions Orders	46	34	23	28	34	15
Special Guardianship orders	33	18	31	37	46	36

Last year there was a considerable decrease in the number of Agency Decisions being made, in 21/22 there were 36 ADM decisions made in 22/23 there were 24. The Permanency Social Worker meets regularly with the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) to identify children where there is a possibility of early permanence to ensure there is no drift in care planning and tracking plans. Children are then reviewed every 12 weeks at Through Care panel, and at 6 weekly intervals by the Permanency social worker between panels, this is in addition to the oversight of All about me reviews. The use of Family Group Conferences and a real emphasis on think family has meant that there are less ADM decisions required.

Data for Adoption Orders granted in 2022/23:

Age at AO (Years)	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
Under 1	2	13.33%
1 to 4	10	66.67%
5 to 9	3	20%
10 to 15	0	0%
16 and over	0	0%
Total	**15**	**100%**

Gender	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
M	9	60.0%
F	6	40.0%
Total	**15**	**100%**

Ethnicity	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
White British	15	100%
Total	**15**	**100%**

Sibling Groups?	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
No	11	73.33%
Yes*	4	26.67%
Total	**15**	**100%**

2 sibling groups of 2

Of the 15 children who were adopted between April 2022 and March 2023, 9 were male (60%) and 6 (40%) were female. This is similar to 21/22 where there were significantly more male children adopted than female children. The national data for this time period is not currently available.

It is evident from the chart above that the largest proportion (66.67%) of Warwickshire adoptions are for children aged 1 to 4 years old. In the year April 2022 to March 2023, 10 children adopted were aged between 1 and 4 years of age when the Adoption Order was granted and 3 were aged 5 to 9 years. 2 children under the age of 1 were adopted and there were no adoptions for children over the age of 10 adopted in Warwickshire in 2022-2023. Given the reduction in Adoption Orders being granted we have seen a reduction in all ages except under 1 year where in 20/21 there were no children of that age when the adoption order was granted.

CHILDREN & FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE

There continues to be a clear majority of White British children being adopted in Warwickshire, 93.3% however this is of no bias as this high percentage is in line with the high percentage of White British children who were made subject to a Placement Order the same year. Therefore, this shows the consistency in the ethnicities of children that have been placed for adoption and successfully adopted.

No. of Placement Orders by Ethnicity:

Ethnicity	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
White British	26	27	28	16	21
White and Asian	0	1	0	0	0
Any other Mixed Background	0	0	0	0	0
Any other White Background	1	1	0	2	0
White and Black Caribbean	3	0	1	2	0
Any other Asian Background	0	0	0	0	0
White and Black African	1	0	0	2	0
Any other Ethnicity	0	1	0	0	0
Total	**49**	**31**	**30**	**29**	**21**

Of the 15 children who were adopted in 2022/23, 6 individual children were adopted by their foster carers, 1 of these was a private adoption and the other foster carers were assessed by ACE who were FFA carers. This is a positive outcome for young people who have established secure relationships with their carers and do not have to experience a move providing them with consistent care. Warwickshire continue to support foster carers through this process where it is assessed as being in the child's best interests.

2 children were placed with interagency adopters as part of a sibling group and the remaining 7 children were placed with ACE adopters.

Foster For Adopt

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, 6 children were placed for fostering in Foster for Adoption placements. This is the same number as 21/22, when this is the right plan for children Warwickshire continues to use Foster for Adoption placements to minimise disruption and change for our children and these placements are

successful in securing positive outcomes for our children. Discussions as to whether foster to adopt is the right plan are discussed at both CDM (Childrens Decision Meeting) and Through care panel and has been used successfully when previous adoptions have disrupted to avoid children experiencing several moves.

Children Awaiting a Match

There are 25 children who have an ADM decision but have not been placed or matched in comparison to 39 last year. This includes 10 children who do not have a Placement Order and are still in care proceedings where active family finding will not be taking place. This does not include the two children who are in a Foster for Adoption Placement awaiting an ADM decision and formal match and have been discarded from this figure as they are both relinquished babies who do not have an adoption decision yet. The table below shows the breakdown of the status of children awaiting matches for the last 4 years.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Awaiting Match - No Placement Order	18	6	13	10
Awaiting Match - With Placement Order	18	16	19	12
In FFA Placement - Awaiting Formal Match (with Placement Order)	2	1	1	1
In FFA Placement - Awaiting Formal Match (No Placement Order)	1	2	2	1
In FFA Placement - Awaiting Formal Match & ADM Decision	0	0	2	0
Awaiting Change of Plan	7	3	2	1
Awaiting Private Adoption Order	0	1	0	0
Total	**46**	**29**	**39**	**25***

*This does not include 3 children that has a disruption in the year.

We have continued to maintain a consistent approach to ensure that when a change of plan is required there is no delay in achieving this and a process is in place to advise the Agency Decision Maker when children require a change of plan so that this can be completed in a timely manner. It is evident in the figures above that our approach ensures there are less children awaiting a Change of Plan decision.

CHILDREN & FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE

The number of children in Warwickshire who are awaiting a match has decreased by 10, this remains a relatively low number in comparison to the years before which supports the evidence that the number of children with a plan of adoption continues to decline, and when a change of plan is required this is managed generally in a timely way.

Data for children with a Placement Order but not yet living with their adopters

During 2022/23, 13 children had a Placement Order granted and were still awaiting a match (see breakdown table above). Please note, as of 31 March 2023, included in the 13 children is one child that was living in an FFA placement, one child was linked but had not yet attended matching panel, and 4 children where their Foster Carer is trying to secure permanence through long-term fostering or adoption. This leaves 8 children who we are actively family finding for at the end of 2022/23. The breakdown data of these children is shown below.

Age at 31/03/2023 (Years)	Children with PO not yet placed	%
Under 1	0	0%
1 to 4	10	76.9%
5 to 9	3	23.1%
10 to 15	0	0%
16 and over	0	0%
Total	**13**	**100%**

Gender	Children with PO not yet placed	%
M	7	53.8%
F	6	46.2%
Total	**13**	**100%**

Disability	Children with PO not yet placed	%
No	13	100%
Yes	0	0%
Total	**13**	**100%**

Sibling Groups?	Children with PO not yet placed	%
No	6	46.2%
Yes*	7	53.8%
Total	**13**	**100%**

* Includes 4 sibling groups of 2 however one of the sibling groups of 2 were being adopted separately.

Ethnicity	Children with PO not yet placed	%
White British	12	92.3%
White Other	1	7.7%
Total	**13**	**100%**

The data for children awaiting a match, above, shows a similar trend to the last two years. It is evident that the highest need for adopters is for male children and children between the ages of one to four years old and for sibling groups. Of the 13 children with Placement Orders 3 are recorded as being slightly older aged five to nine. This is a reduction in last year's figures but evidences that there is a continued need for targeted recruiting of adoptive parents that can meet the needs of older children with experiences of trauma.

Family Finding

Family finders from ACE are identified for the following groups of children:

- Sibling groups
- Black and minority ethnic children
- Children who are disabled or have other additional needs
- Children who are aged five or over at time of placement
- Children who have been waiting for some time.

ACE initially family find within their ACE approved adopters for 12 weeks following the making of the Placement Order. ACE continues to subscribe to 'Link Maker' from Spring 2021 ACE now use 'Link Maker' for all of their adopters and children waiting for a match. All Warwickshire children with a Placement Order are featured on 'Link Maker' following the making of this order. Alongside 'Link Maker' there is also a 'children who are waiting' booklet which is shared with adopters and discussed during assessment and training. The various matching forums have been successful in matching children with adopters.

Following this 12-week period, if funding has been agreed for an inter-agency search, alongside continuing to search within ACE, family finding expands to the West Midlands Collaboration. This is an arrangement with the Regional Adoption Agencies and Voluntary Adoption Agencies across the Midlands that when adopters cannot be found within the agency, the first search for interagency adopters is within the region. The West Midlands Collaboration is an agreement which facilitates interagency placements in a timely manner, ensuring appropriate and comprehensive support is in place for the families. ACE meet with the West Midlands Collaboration on a monthly basis to share information of children waiting for adopters and promotes family finding groups within the regional area.

Ace is working with RAAs (Regional Adoption Agency) across the Midlands Together Collaboration (MTC) and so children are profiled at national exchange events and local profiling events. In this year, no Warwickshire Children attended any of these events. Linking Meetings take place for all potential matches once the Social Workers have visited the prospective adopters. These meetings allow space for the Child's Social Worker, the Permanency Social Worker, and representatives from ACE to discuss, reflect and evidence the reasons for progressing or not progressing a match. This also provides an opportunity for the team to plan the next stages of the adoption journey for the child to prevent drift between linking and matching panel. These meetings are chaired by ACE.

A pre-meet between prospective adopters and children are considered and encouraged on every match before presenting the match to adoption panel. A pre-meet may involve interaction or just an observation, depending on the child's age and understanding.

Brothers and Sisters

'Together or Apart' assessments of brothers and sisters underpin and support decisions to place brothers and sisters together or apart and maintain meaningful relationships. Warwickshire has been successful in placing 2 sibling groups of 2 between April 2022 and March 2023. Both sibling groups were older children, one was 7-year-old twins and the second a 4- and 5-Year-old.

Warwickshire have agreed that ACE will make exceptional payments to support the placement of brothers and sisters together. This highlights Warwickshire's commitment and recognition of the importance of the relationships between brothers and sisters as this relationship can provide a source of continuity throughout a child's lifetime and can often be the longest relationship they experience. The number of sibling groups that were adopted this year has reduced from last year's figure and this is a key area for development next year as we propose to review the way we support and assess siblings, valuing the sibling relationship and maintaining this wherever possible by placing children together and when this is not viable promoting positive direct family time.

ACE provide a mandatory training module specifically on adopting siblings which all prospective adopters attend. This is run monthly and at this training, prospective adopters are shown profiles of sibling groups who are waiting for matching.

Interagency placements

An interagency placement occurs when a local authority places a child with an adopter approved by another agency (either local authority, voluntary adoption agency or another regional adoption agency). A fee is paid to cover the cost incurred by that agency in recruiting, assessing, approving and family finding that adopter along with an element of for adoption support. Interagency placements are often used for "hard to place" individual or groups of children.

In 2022/23, 28 children were placed in adoptive placements. Of those, 17 (60.7%) children were placed with ACE approved adopters. Of the 11 children remaining, this included 4 sibling groups of 2 children and 3 children without siblings. 5 of the children had been placed in FFA placements with non-ACE adopters. In 2021/22 18 children were placed in adoptive placements. Of the 18 children placed, 12 (66.7%) children were placed with ACE approved adopters. For the 6 children not placed with ACE approved adopters, this included 3 sibling groups of 2 children. Although the majority of children are placed with ACE adopters, we have been required to increase the use of interagency placements to meet the needs of our children, particularly sibling groups. As mentioned above, the creation of the West Midlands Collaboration offers more local support for interagency adoptions. Using ACE adopters is the preferred choice as it enables adoptive families to access the intensive support services through ACE and receive support from a familiar agency, however if this is not possible, placing children with adopters from within the West Midlands Collaboration also ensures there a comprehensive support package and valuable information sharing.

Disruptions

In the previous 12 months, Warwickshire has experienced 3 adoption disruptions, this is a significant rise on the previous year when there were 0 disruptions.
Disruptions occurred for
1 female aged 3 years
1 male aged 5 years

1 male aged 6 years

Disruption meetings were held for all of these children so that valuable learning could be shared.

Permanency Social Worker and Through Care Panel

Through Care Panel regularly reviews all children in care whose plan for permanency has not yet been achieved. A tracking system that includes the monitoring of pre-proceedings, and care proceedings through Child Decisions Meeting and progress of placement orders by Throughcare Panel is now well embedded.

The addition of a Permanency Social Worker enables regular, consistent oversight of care plans allowing for collaborative working between ACE and Warwickshire and information being provided to senior leadership for management oversight. The Permanency Social Worker who had been in post for three years left her post and for a period of 3 months we were without a social worker. We have now recruited to this post and the Permanency social worker provides monthly updates to the Senior Leadership Team to ensure there is management oversight and meets regularly with the ACE Family Finding Team and the Agency Decision Maker.

4. Service Performance

The scorecard showing Warwickshire's average performance is detailed on page 15, however it should be noted that this is now quite out of date and the provisional Coram data provides a better overview of the current national situation.

The three-year average of children entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is 451 days this is 31 days quicker than the national figure provided by Coram.

 The figure for Warwickshire children adopted between April 2022 and March 2023 from the making of a Placement Order to match is 239 days this is 41 days higher than the Coram figure of 198 days. Given that we had fewer sibling groups this year and the majority of children adopted were between the ages of 1-4 years it is imperative that this is analysed to understand what the delays have been and how we can avoid this if at all possible, moving forward.

The scorecards below show how Warwickshire monitor their performance against their own 3-year average and a national 3-year average:

DFE Adoption Scorecard Measure	Definition	Q4 2022/23 (01/04/2022 - 31/03/2023)	2020-23 England Average Provisional Coram-i Data pack	DfE Adoption Scorecard 3 Year Average (2017 to 2020)	DfE Adoption Scorecard 3 Year Average - ENGLAND (2017 to 2020)	DfE Adoption Scorecard 3 Year Average - Stats Neighbour Average (2017 to 2020)
A10: BLA-PFA	The average length of time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family, for children who have been adopted **in Q1-Q4 2022/23.** **The indicator is adjusted for foster carer adoptions, in that if a child was adopted by their foster carer, the time considered is stopped at the date the child moved in with the foster family.**	451 days	482 days	327 days	367 days	346 days
A2: PO-Match	Average time (in days) between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family, for children who have been adopted for children who have been adopted **in Q1-Q4 2022/23.**	239 days	198 days	126 days	175 days	162 days
A20: BLA-PO	Average time (in days) between a child entering care and a local authority receiving court authority to place a child, for children who have been adopted **in Q1-Q4 2022/23.**	388 days	n/a	229 days	256 days	238 days

CHILDREN & FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE

5. Service Plan 2022-2023

Under the Adoption Regulations, the local authority retains its responsibility for the provision of the adoption service in its area. In partnership with ACE the local authority plans to improve and develop its adoption practice in the following key areas:

- Promoting ongoing family time between brothers and sisters who do not live together in an innovative way which maintains positive family relationships. Review of brother and sisters' relationships and how these can be strengthened through work with Shelagh Beckett, Consultant Social Worker and specialist expert in sibling relationships and permanency for children in care.
- Offer permanency training to all social workers within Warwickshire, so that all workers are clear of the requirements, processes and outcomes for children, which will lead to children achieving permanency in a timely manner.
- All children to receive excellent quality Life Story Work and Later Life Letters in a timely manner from their Allocated Social Worker or with support from the Life Story Work Team and the implementation of Therapeutic Life Story Work for some children.
- Promoting a change in culture and approach to Family Time, considering direct and indirect contact with birth family as a norm and considering open adoptions as a care plan, particularly where the risk is low or can be managed, in a commitment to family values and restorative practice.
- Continue to promote Foster for Adoption, to ensure that permanence is considered at an early stage for children when this is appropriate.
- Consideration and investigation of Concurrent planning.
- Further analysis of the ALB data to ensure that learning from children whose adoption took longer than the national average targets is collated and disseminated with the aim of improving the time taken between obtaining a Placement Order and matching panel.

6. Appendices

1. ACE Annual Report 2022-2023
2. Adoption Panel Report 2022-23 (not received yet)

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CHILD FRIENDLY WARWICKSHIRE

Private Fostering Annual Report
1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023

Report Written by	
Lesley Thornton	Team Leader
Jo Smith	Operations Manager
Sharon Shaw	Head of Service

Report Endorsed by	
Nigel Minns	Executive Director for People 18/07/23
John Coleman	Director of Children and Families 18/07/23

Introduction

This report outlines private fostering activity between April 2022 – March 2023 and includes the key findings of the private fostering team. It also includes an Action Plan for 2023 - 2024.

The Private fostering leaflets has been attached below.

PDF	PDF	PDF	PDF	PDF
Private Fostering Children Young Peopl	Private Fostering Professionals Leaflet I	Private Fostering Parents Leaflet MAR2	Private Fostering Private Foster Carers I	Private Fostering Host Family Leaflet M

Recommendations

1. 1. The Executive Director for People, Nigel Minns & Director of Children and Families, John Coleman to note the content of this report.

2. Private Fostering Team Leaders to implement the Private Fostering Action Plan to address the issues raised and improve compliance with statutory guidance, regulations, national minimum standards, and good practice in private fostering.

3. The report to be shared with other groups to further develop awareness, understanding and multi-agency commitment to privately fostered children.

4. Report to be presented at Warwickshire Safeguarding Partnership Group or Partnership Executive Board.

Definition of Private Fostering

A private fostering arrangement is one made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 or under 18, if disabled or subject to the Unaccompanied Minors Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The young person must be cared for by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt or host.

A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child, or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster. a child. However, a person who is a relative as defined by the Children Act 1989, i.e., a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full or half blood or by marriage) or a stepparent (i.e., by marriage to a parent) will not be a private foster carer.

This report covers private fostering activity between the 1st of April 2022 - 31st March 2023, and is provided under the requirements laid down in the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, which requires an annual report to be provided for consideration by the Director of Children's Services including an evaluation of the outcome of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area.

Private Fostering Staffing Structure

Warwickshire's Private Fostering Service is located within the People Directorate, Corporate Parenting and sits under the Fostering and Alternative Support Carers Team.

In Warwickshire, private fostering sits under the Connected Person Supervision and Support Team within Fostering. The private fostering work is supported by one business support worker who maintains the private fostering statistical data.

The Team Leader ensures all private fostering notifications are progressed, i.e., private fostering assessments are allocated, and families are supported countywide. Family support workers offer support with Regulation 8 visits when necessary and carry out direct work with families.

Assessments

Child and Family Statutory Assessments are completed to determine the need for a private fostering assessment and are carried out by the Child's social worker or the Private Fostering social worker.

Children attending language schools within Warwickshire remain the responsibility of the nominated district team throughout their stay in England. The private fostering assessment and subsequent regulation 8 visits will be allocated to the Private Fostering social worker with support where possible.

In the last 12 months Private Fostering has expanded to include Assessments for Ukrainian Unaccompanied children or young people who wish to live in the UK under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Responsibility for the reg 8 visits lies with the Homes for Ukraine Team.

For those children who are already known to Children's Social Care (as a child in need or a child with a child protection plan) when they are identified as a privately fostered child, they will continue to be supported by their allocated social worker - the Private Fostering social worker will complete the private fostering assessment only and subsequent annual reviews.

The Registered Fostering Manager acts as the decision maker on the suitability of the arrangement. The dedicated Fostering Team Leader has the responsibility of ensuring the minimal standards are met, annual audit and the completion of annual reviews are carried out in a timely manner. In addition, through service development, they are responsible for ensuring that there is an awareness of private fostering across the locality.

National Minimum standards:

National Minimum Standard 1
The local authority has a written statement or plan, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.
Private Fostering arrangements within Warwickshire are set out in the statement of purpose, published on the Council's online procedures for children's services and available to the public on Private Fostering Statement of Purpose.pdf, Private Fostering Policy.pdf

National Minimum Standard 2 The local authority:
- **Promote awareness of the notification requirements and ensure that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification;**
- **Responds effectively to notifications; and**
- **Deals with situations where an arrangement comes to their attention, which has not been notified.**

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 sets out that anyone involved in making a private fostering arrangement (parent, carer or third party) must notify the appropriate local authority.

Parents and carers often fail to notify because they are unaware of the requirements and believe that this is a private family arrangement. We use Private Fostering week to raise awareness in Warwickshire alongside regular advertising and information sharing:

During March 2022 - April 2023, the Team Leader and Private Fostering social workers used a variety of internal and external avenues to raise awareness about Private Fostering as follows:

- Delivering private fostering presentations and training to the children's teams.
- We offered training to newly qualified social workers.
- Promoted Private Fostering Awareness week in John's Blog
- Delivering interactive presentations during the 'Fostering Good Relations Conference' (held within Warwickshire County Council) in March 22.
- Offered a consultation service
- Updated Private Fostering policy and procedures

We also operate a Connected Person Supervision and Support duty system which enables individual staff and partner agencies to seek further advice when needed, and establish clear links to Warwickshire's website, which actively promotes Private fostering and provides information about the process:

- Private Fostering e-learning training continues to be available on The Learning Hub
- There is mandatory training for all fostering Social Workers new to Warwickshire
- Notification on Core Brief and Warwickshire County Council blogs
- On FIS website & Twitter
- Posters and leaflets displayed at local community centres and libraries.

There is a continued need for communication and awareness raising of what constitutes a Private Fostering arrangement.
https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/privatefostering
This direct promotion activity has increased since the pandemic and is ongoing.
The updated Action Plan is appended to this report which identifies the ongoing awareness raising planned with consideration for managing this area in the future.

Table 1: Source of Private Fostering Enquiry

Source of Private Fostering Enquiry (2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23)
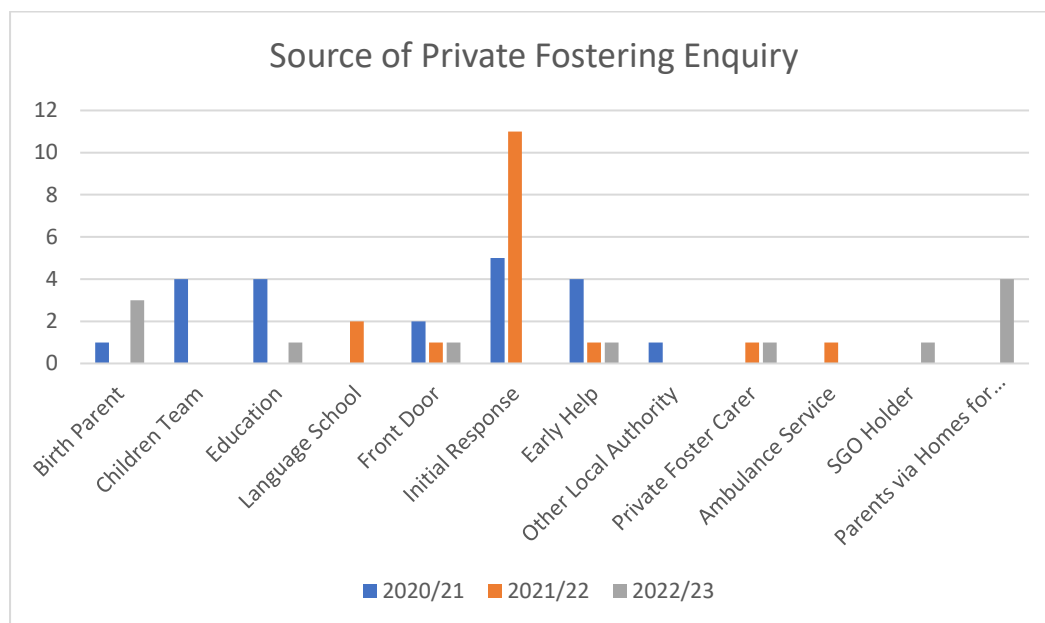
In comparison to 2021/22, there has been a decrease (40%) in the number of private fostering enquiries. The largest source during 2022/23 comes from the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. This scheme was opened to children and young people from July 2022 and the first referrals to Warwickshire came through in the second part of November. There has been an increase in referrals coming via birth parents and carers, this has generally been in situations where social workers are supporting children and families and the parents and carers are reporting new private fostering arrangements to the child's allocated social worker.

Table 2: Ethnicity of child in a private fostering arrangement

Ethnicity of Children and Young People (2022/23, 2021/22, 2020/21)
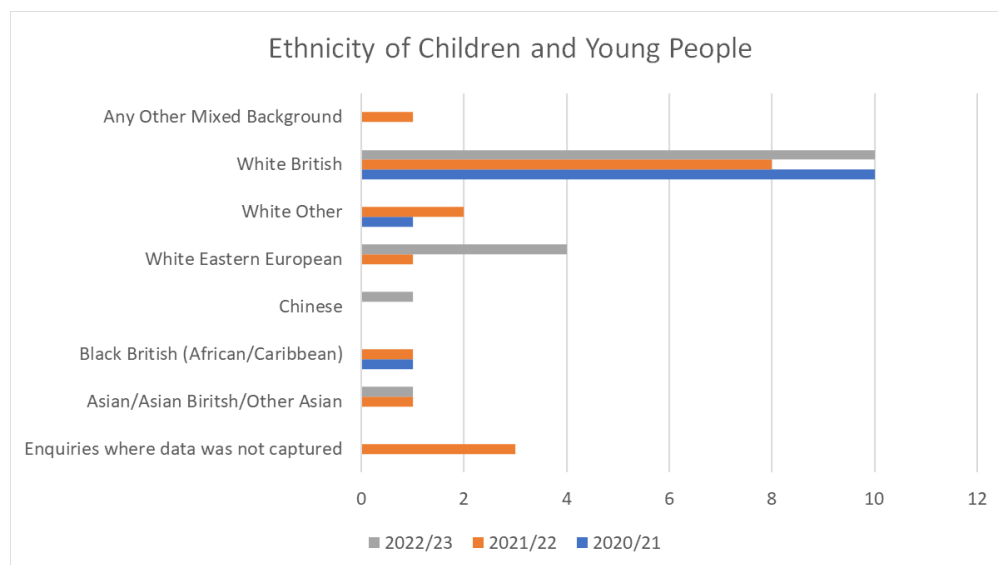
In the year 2022/2023 there were 10 new private fostering notifications resulting in 7 placements. This is a decrease of 7 young people on last year (which saw 17 enquiries resulting in 14 placements). Of all the children currently in a private fostering arrangement in Warwickshire 60% are identified as white British, followed by 25% identified as white/eastern European.

Table 3: Age of child
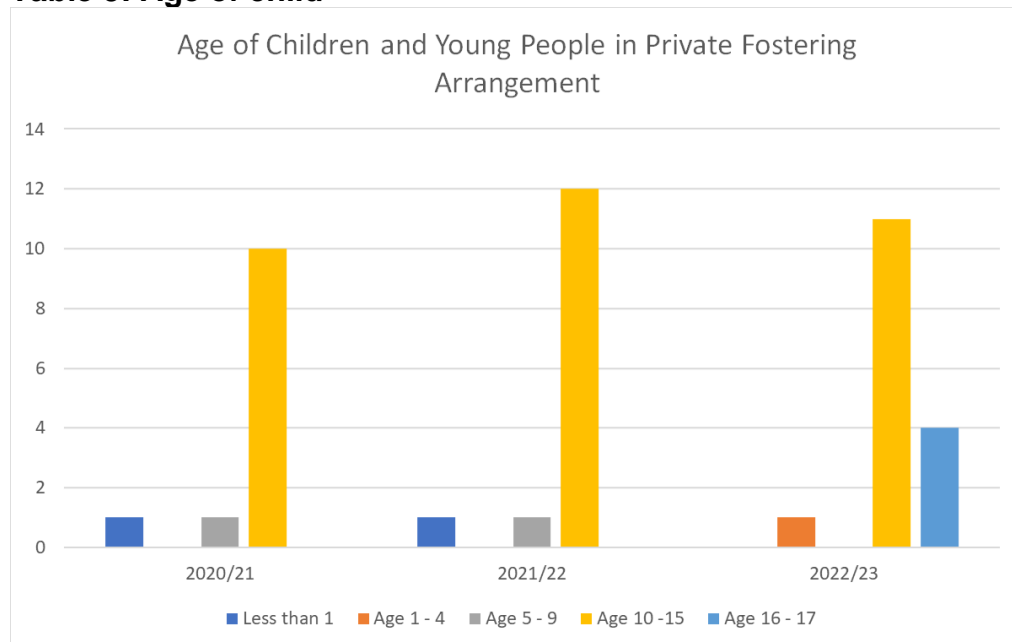
The majority of children (69%) assessed in private fostering arrangements were aged 10-15 years. This is consistent with the majority age range from previous years. This year we have an additional age range of 16-17 due to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme which supports children until they become adults.

In line with supporting permanency for the children within this arrangement, of the 16 private fostering arrangements that were open during 2022/23 one of the carers was supported by the authority to obtain a child arrangement order, and one began this process. A further 5 received and continue to receive support from 'Strengthening Families' and Safeguarding and Support Teams and are working towards the child returning to the care of a parent with Parental responsibility.

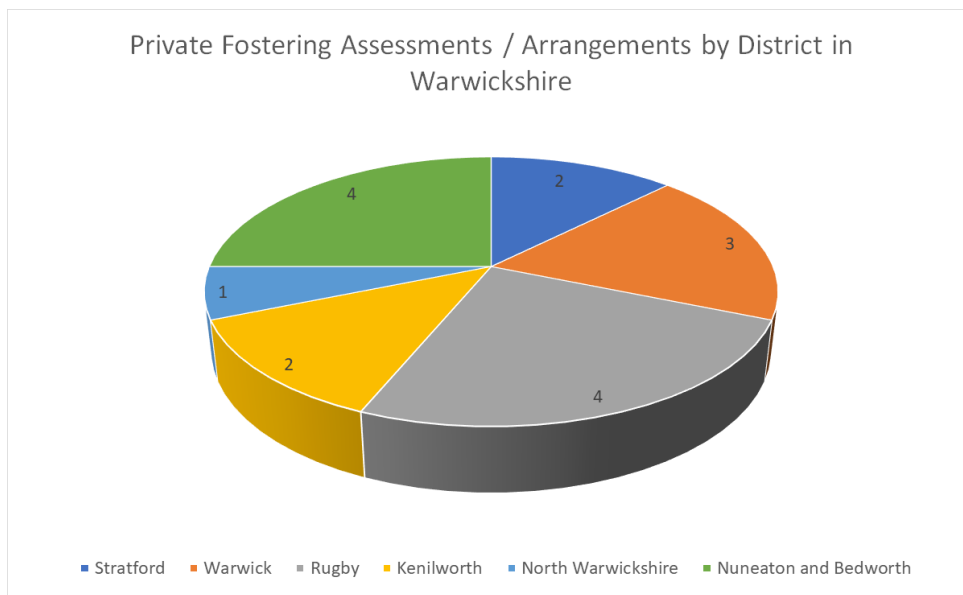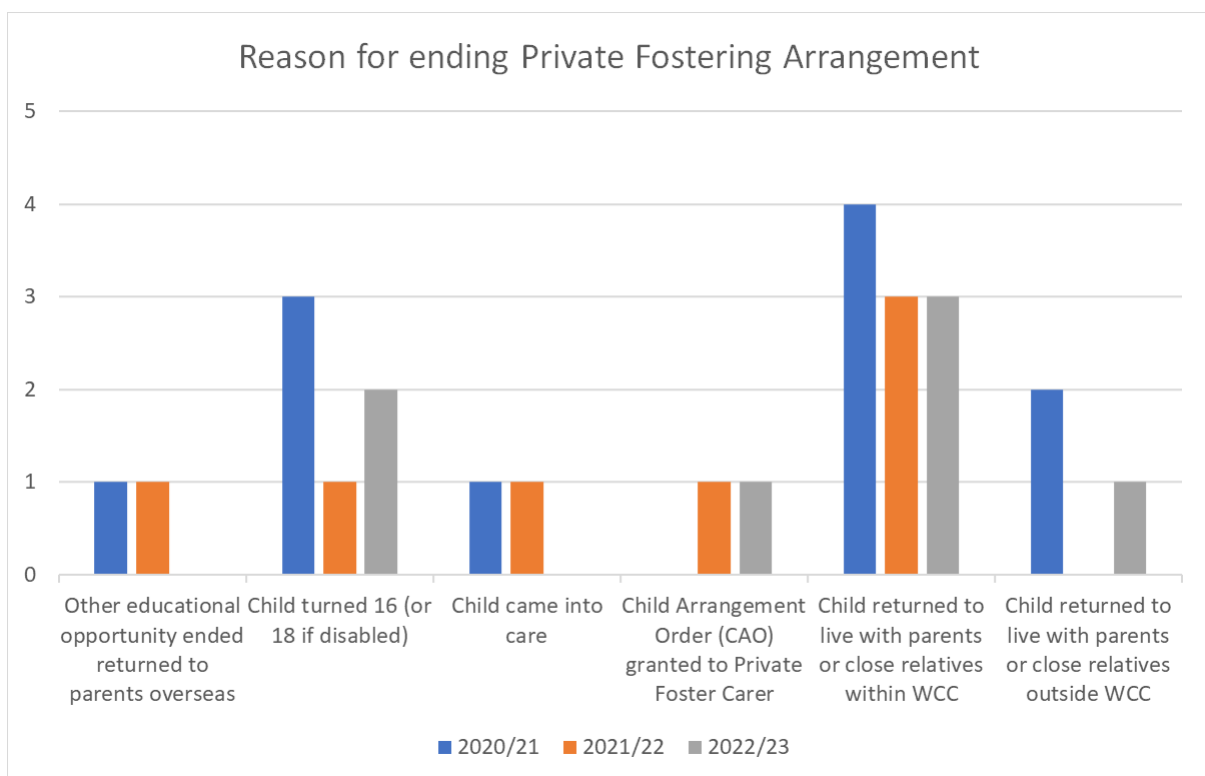**Table 4: New Private fostering assessments have been identified.**

Private Fostering Assessments / Arrangements by District in Warwickshire

Stratford 2
Warwick 3
Rugby 4
Kenilworth 2
North Warwickshire 1
Nuneaton and Bedworth 4

- Stratford   - Warwick   - Rugby   - Kenilworth   - North Warwickshire   - Nuneaton and Bedworth

Table 5: Reasons for ending of Private Fostering

Reason for ending Private Fostering Arrangement

Reason	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Other educational opportunity ended returned to parents overseas	1	1	
Child turned 16 (or 18 if disabled)	3	1	2
Child came into care	1	1	
Child Arrangement Order (CAO) granted to Private Foster Carer		1	1
Child returned to live with parents or close relatives within WCC	4	3	3
Child returned to live with parents or close relatives outside WCC	2		1

- 2020/21   - 2021/22   - 2022/23

In 2022/23, 7 private fostering arrangements were ended; this is the same compared to last year, but lower than the year before when 11 ended. It is important to note that, in the last 2 years – 2021/22 and 2022/2023, the main reasons that the arrangements ended were due to the young person returning to the care of their

parents and the young person turning 16 (or 18 in respect of young people under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme).

Activity undertaken during 2022-2023:
All private fostering carers that were recommended for approval were approved by the Fostering Operations Manager.

Ongoing visiting requirements
Young people who are Privately Fostered under the Homes for Ukraine are required to be visited within 24 hours from arrival to the UK all other young people must be visited within 7 days of notification. Privately fostered children must be visited at a frequency of a minimum of 6 weekly in the first year of placement, and 12 weekly in second and subsequent years. These visits are completed to observe the overall standard of care, ensure that the child is developing appropriately, ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child (seeing them alone) to ensure that the child's health, education and contact needs are being met and to support rehabilitation home in appropriate circumstances.

National Minimum Standard 3
The Local Authority effectively determines the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangements in accordance with regulations.

A monthly report is sent to the Private Fostering Team Leader from the business analysis unit which details both new and ended private fostering arrangements in Warwickshire that have been captured in the MOSAIC case record. This is checked for accuracy by the Team Leader. An annual report is completed from this information.

National Minimum Standard 4
The Local Authority provides such advice and support to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers, as appears to the authority to be needed.

Prospective private foster carers are provided with an information pack which details advice and support services regarding children's needs and details of support services and training. The private fostering social worker supports and advises carers on an ongoing basis with general parenting skills, and issues pertinent to the child's circumstances. Additional visits are made as requested to support carers. Social workers are carrying out regulated visits to provide consistency and offer additional support as needed. Family Support Workers can complete regulation 8 visits, when necessary.

Feedback is sought from foster carers, children, and parents when possible and at the point of annual review. There was no feedback in 2022-2023. Private Fostering Social Workers do however continue to encourage feedback from the private fostering carers, children, and parents during, and at the end of the arrangement.

All private foster carers, children and young people, where appropriate, are provided with the contact details for the social workers in the team and the Out of Hours service.

We continue to provide Private Foster Carers with advice and support to consider the securing of young people's permanence by way of a court order where appropriate. During 202/23, it is positive to see that permanence has been achieved by return to parents or close relative (for 4 children), and a child arrangement order (for 1 child).

National Minimum Standard 5
The local authority provides advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area as appears to the authority to be needed.

Where it has been possible all parents are met with and spoken to whilst establishing the arrangements. When arrangements involve children from overseas discussions are generally held over the telephone, email or through consultation with the Homes for Ukraine Team.

If children already have a social worker, the initial visit to assess the private fostering arrangement will be completed jointly by the case holding social worker and the fostering social worker. This is to ensure that children have a consistent staff member supporting them and that any ongoing issues which might prevent the need for a private fostering arrangement to be made or where there is a clear safeguarding concern can be addressed at an early stage.

Contact details for social workers have been provided to all parents where possible.

National Minimum Standard 6
Children who are privately fostered are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. Privately fostered children are enabled to participate in decisions about their lives.

There has been an increased focus on the 'voice of the child' within the private fostering arrangement, which is also incorporated into the assessment report. The Private Fostering social workers enquire directly with children and young people about their views and ensure that their private foster carers listen to their needs and wishes.

The child or young person is provided with information regarding advocacy.

Leaflets/information packs are provided to children and young people as appropriate during the initial visit to help them better understand the arrangements and their rights within it. These include the contact details for their Private Fostering Social Worker and family support worker as well as other key information.

Ongoing, regulation 8 visits also consider the child's needs and views. The private fostering social worker or family support worker will advocate on their behalf, if necessary, on issues such as legal status, placement, family time and education.

All children in the private fostering arrangement are seen on their own as part of the assessment and the ongoing regulation 8 visits.

National Minimum Standard 7
The Local Authority has in place and implements effectively a system for monitoring the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. It improves practice where this is indicated as necessary by the monitoring system.

Each Private Fostering arrangement is assessed using the 'Private Fostering Assessment Report' and is quality assured by the Team Leader and recommendation is made. Private Fostering arrangements are approved if appropriate by the Fostering Operations Manager on the electronic case file (Mosaic).
Workers are provided with regular supervision and there is management oversight of young people and carers.

Ofsted
In November 2021, Private Fostering was part of the Children's Inspection and in January OFSTED awarded Warwickshire Children and Families a rating of GOOD.

Analysis

In 2022/2023, some of the key findings are that – over 69% of children and young people in private fostering arrangements were aged 10+ years and 60% were identified as white British. Information gathered at enquiry and the initial visit suggests that many arrangements are due to family conflict and breakdown, however young people fleeing war in Ukraine accounts for a significant proportion of the referrals this year.

In line with supporting permanency for the children and young people within this arrangement, 25% returned to live with parents or close relatives within Warwickshire and outside of Warwickshire; 6.25% of the carers were supported by Warwickshire to obtain a child arrangement order. The remaining carers, children and young people continued to receive support from the private fostering team and/or strengthening families.

Referrals have come from a variety of services/agencies with the largest proportion of referrals coming from the new Homes for Ukraine Scheme. 42% of referrals came via parents and carers to allocated social workers, this is an increase from last years and coincides with a drop of referrals coming via the Front Door.
The number of children open to private fostering at the end of March 2023, is consistent with the last 3 years, suggesting that we are now returning to pre pandemic numbers.

All private fostering arrangements held by Warwickshire are residents of the County Council.

PF1 annual data returns continue to be gathered for the CIN census. Warwickshire private fostering team does meet all 7 national minimum standards to a satisfactory level.

Action Plan 2023/2024

Action	Target Date	Responsibility
Refresh posters and leaflets and ensure they are displayed in education, health and community resources	January 2023	Team Leader and Year 4 Advanced Practitioner
Increase promotion and liaison with all internal and external teams/agencies and schools to continue to raise awareness of private fostering.	Ongoing from July 2023-31st March 2023	Team Leader and Year 4 Advanced Practitioner, Private Fostering Social Worker
Private fostering arrangements to be included in the Warwickshire Children and Families case file audit programme (bespoke)	September 2023	Team Leader/Quality and Impact Team
Produce a new Private Fostering Procedure for Unaccompanied Young People under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.	October 2023	Team Leader/Operations Manager/Homes for Ukraine Team
Add Private Fostering onto the agenda at Through Care Panel, updating terms and references as an additional way to monitor existing or new cases, ensuring case progression	October 2023	Service Manager Corporate Parenting

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CHILD FRIENDLY WARWICKSHIRE

Fostering & Alternative Carers Support Team Annual Report

2022 – 2023

Date Issued: August 2023
Team: Fostering and Alternative Carers Support Team
Author: Jo Smith, Operations Managers

1

Warwickshire County Council

Contents

2

Introductions

The Fostering Service is a countywide service, providing a range of foster placements to Children in Care. These include short term, long term, respite care, connected persons care, and schemes carers. The scheme carers offer a range of specialist support and these include:

- Solo (step down from residential / edge of residential care)
- Breathing Space (Short Term Emergency Placement)
- Parent and Child
- Family Link
- Emergency Duty
- Flexible Fostering

In addition, foster carers may provide a Staying Put placement that will enable the young person to have placement continuity beyond 18 years. Private fostering also sits within the team.

The Service was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2021 and was assessed as 'Good'. The Fostering Service will be inspected as part of the 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILAC)', which is a whole system approach again in 2024, unless OFSTED determines it wishes to inspect at an earlier date.

This annual report looks at National trends with a focus on Fostering Networks Research and recommendations on Recruitment. There is then a focus on Warwickshire's Data to show comparisons and trends, information on how Warwickshire Local Authority manages its fostering agency and we end on our team priorities for 2023-2024.

National Trends - taken from Ofsted National Statistics for Fostering in England 2021-2022

Ofsted estimated that,

At the end of March 2022, there were 43,905 fostering households in total in England. Of these, 36,050 offered mainstream fostering provision and 7,855 were family and friends households. Since 2018, the number of approved mainstream fostering households has decreased by 4% and the number of approved mainstream fostering places has decreased by 5%. Approximately 1 out of every 6 fostering households in England offers family and friends provision, providing care for 1 in 5 fostered children.

Mainstream Fostering Households –

This year, Local Authorities accounted for nearly 3 in 5 approved fostering households (20,845), while IFAs represented just over 2 in 5 (15,205). This figure has decreased steadily over the last 5 years with Local Authorities now offering 58% of all approved households (61% in 2018)

3

Of the 36,050 fostering households nationally, 4,035 were newly approved during 2021 to 2022 and still active at 31 March 2022. This is an 18% decrease in the number of newly approved households from 2018 to 2022. LAs and IFAs accounted for similar amounts of newly approved households with 51% and 48%, respectively.

As at March 2022, the most common placement types were non-permanent (49%) and permanent (40%). The remaining 11% of households offered other placement types including emergency, parent and child, multi-dimensional treatment, remand, fostering to adopt and short-break places. 'Not permanent' care refers to care that is not currently planned to last until the child ceases to be looked after or until the child reaches the age of 18.

Mainstream Fostering Household sizes
As at 31 March 2022, the majority of fostering households were approved to care for 2 or more children (71%). Compared with LAs, IFAs tend to approve a higher proportion of households to care for 3 or more children and a lower proportion to care for just 1 child.
Within both LA and IFA sectors, newly approved households were more likely to be approved to look after smaller numbers of children. Of newly approved households, 46% were for approved for 1 child, compared with 28% of all approved households.

Deregistration
In 2021 to 2022, more mainstream fostering households deregistered (5,435) than were approved (4,035), leading to a net decrease in fostering capacity since last year.

Enquiries to applications
There were 138,075 initial enquiries from prospective mainstream fostering households in the year ending 31 March 2022. The number of initial enquiries is 18% higher than in 2017 to 2018, and has been slowly rising over that period. The number of enquiries received by IFAs has similarly risen since 2017 to 2018, by 29%. The number of enquiries to LAs has declined in the same period, by 10% (to 31,045), but has gone up and down over the years, rather than steadily declining.

This year, only 6% of those who made initial enquiries about becoming a foster carer went on to apply. Since 2017 to 2018, when 9% of those who enquired went on to apply, there has been a downward trend in the proportion of applications to enquiries. This means that, over the last 5 years, an increasing number of people have been making initial enquiries about becoming a foster carer but a decreasing proportion of them have gone on to make an application.

This year, IFAs reported a ratio of 23 initial enquiries per application and LAs reported a ratio of 8 initial enquiries per application. In the LA sector, the ratio of enquiries to applications has remained fairly steady since 2017 to 2018, with between 6 and 9 enquiries for each application throughout this period. For IFAs, the ratio of enquiries to applications has increased steadily since 2017 to 2018, when it was 14 to one. Both sectors' ratios suggest a relatively large volume of enquiries are not translating into applications, but this discrepancy is much higher – and increasing – in the IFA sector.

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Applications to approvals

This year, 8,280 applications to become a foster carer were received. This is the lowest number of applications in several years, 21% lower than 2017 to 2018. If 2020 to 2021 is excluded as a potential outlier, which seems feasible given the pandemic, there has been a steady decrease over the last 5 years from the 2017 to 2018 total of 10,520.

For both sectors, applications are at their lowest level in several years. LA applications have decreased by 22% since 2018, and IFA applications have dropped by 21% over the same period. In both sectors, 2021 seems to have been an unusual year, with high numbers of enquiries and applications.

Both sectors have seen a decrease in the proportion of approved applications over the years. This year, the most substantial drop has been in the IFA sector, where only 27% of processed applications led to approvals. This is down from 35% in 2017 to 2018. The proportion of approved applications in the LA sector was 29% this year, down from 36% in 2017 to 2018. The proportion of fostering households that were approved in-year is at its lowest level in several years. Households approved in-year make up 11% of fostering households now compared with 13 to 14% in each of the preceding 4 years.

Approved foster carers

As at 31 March 2022, the number of approved foster carers was 61,360. This represents a slight decrease compared with last year. However, if the last 2 years are excluded as potential anomalies due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it represents an overall decrease in the number of foster carers over the years, with a 4% decrease from 2017 to 2018 (63,815 carers).

Ethnicity

Of all newly approved foster carers during 2021 to 2022, 77% were White and 20% were from ethnic minority backgrounds. The remaining 3% were reported with their ethnicity marked as 'Not known', in line with previous years.

Age

As at 31 March 2022, the largest group of all approved foster carers were in their 50s (41%). For foster carers newly approved in-year, we see a higher percentage of carers in the younger age brackets. Foster carers in their 20s and 30s accounted for a quarter (26%) of all newly approved foster carers, but only 10% of foster carers overall.

Approved places There were 74,660 fostering places in England as at 31 March 2022. This is a decrease of 5% since 2018 (78,300).

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Connected Persons Foster Carers(referred to as Family and Friends)

Family and friends households made up 18% of all active fostering households as at 31 March 2022 (7,855 of 43,905), which is slightly higher than 2017 to 2018 (14%). Just over a quarter of LA households had family and friends care as their primary placement offer (27%). This is higher than 2017 to 2018 when family and friends households made up 21% of active LA households (6,100 of 28,715). The upward trend in the proportion of LA foster care made up by family and friends households.

Family and friends households accounted for 60% of LA households approved in-year that were still active on 31 March 2022, up slightly from 56% in 2017 to 2018. This type of household made up 60% of deregistration's in the LA sector in the 2021 to 2022 period, which is similar to the year before (62%). At the end of March 2022, family and friends households had 12,285 foster carers, which is equivalent to 17% of all approved foster carers, and looked after 11,210 children, which is equivalent to 20% of all fostered children.

The use of family and friends households is in line with the expectation that LAs will place children with family and friends wherever possible. The increase in their number has played a significant part in meeting the demands set by the rising number of children in care and a reducing pool of available mainstream foster placements.

The Fostering network research report 'Foster Carer Retention and Recruitment in England' May 2023

"The challenge in England is that in the last reported fiscal year (ending March 2022), more mainstream foster carers (not family and friends foster carers) stopped fostering than were approved, leading to a net decrease in fostering capacity. At the same time, the number of children in care increased."

"The data show a significant gap between the number of enquiries made to fostering services, and the number of those enquiries that go on to become approved foster carers, in both local authorities and independent fostering agencies."

In the year 2021 to 2022, 31,045 enquiries were made to local authorities and 107,030 to independent fostering agencies. However, as demonstrated by the data below, private agencies demonstrate a much lower conversion rate than LA fostering teams.

2021-2022	LA	Agency
Enquiries	31,045	107,030
Applications	3665	4615
Approvals	675	900

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Key recommendations:

• Provide sufficient funding for the support of social workers, foster carers, and the children's social care system, including foster carer pay – allowances and fees - and entitlements

• Provide recruitment campaigns that focus on realistic expectations for fostering

• Examine the recruitment and support strategies and the ways in which these may not be fit for purpose for different demographics of foster carers (e.g., working adults with enough time, energy and skills to foster, adults in their 20s and 30s, males, and a more ethnically diverse demographics)

• Focus on respect for foster carers, which often includes an attitude shift, involving carers in decision-making about the child when appropriate and showing appreciation

• Ensure fostering services are structured to facilitate practice enabling social workers to understand the reality of fostering from the perspectives of foster carers and children. Ensure a single trusted relationship can be built from point of enquiry to matching and ongoing support.

• Ensure that services for foster carers are professional, including clear inductions, professional finance and support systems, as well as clear communications on timelines for assessment and approval, and processes such as matching with children or investigations of allegations

• Provide consistent conversations when foster carers are considering leaving and exit interviews for those who leave fostering, to uncover the reasons behind exit and any supports that can be put in place before leaving

• Undertake more research to ensure that foster carer recruitment and retention is built on more than good intentions, but on what is needed to ensure a foster carer workforce to provide 'stable homes, built on love'

Warwickshire Fostering Data

The below data was derived from our Ofsted return analysis for April 2022- March 2023.

1. **Number of initial enquiries received from new prospective fostering households**

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of enquiries received	301	232	256	217	91

During the 2022/23 there were significantly less enquiries to the service about becoming a foster carer. This is in line with Ofsted data.

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WCC Households approved during the financial year

Approval Type	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Family and Friends	69	68	91	77*	80
Mainstream	11	21	23	10	12
Shared Care Only	0	0	0	0	1
Short Breaks	0	0	2	0	0
Foster to Adopt	5	6	5	5	2
Number of Households	**85**	**95**	**121**	**92***	**95**

*Includes 4 Family/Friends carers that OFSTED asked us to remove as although approved were yet to have children placed with them as at 31 March 2022

The number of fostering households approved increased during 2022/23. Approvals of mainstream carers saw an increase compared to last year despite a much lower number of enquiries. The majority of approvals in the year continue to be for Family and Friends households.

Of the 12 mainstream foster carers approved in 2022/23, two of these fostering households had previous foster care experience.

Our target is to increase foster carers by 2027 by 10%. We had 159 registered carers at end of March 22 meaning we had 16 more to recruit in 2022/2023. If you only look at new recruitment, we did not achieve this as we only approved 12 carers a deficit of 3. This number increases if you add the resignation of mainstream carers of 20 from the year which meant we needed to recruit 25 this year.

It could be that with the Homes for Ukraine successful campaign people who may have been interested in fostering have instead become a part of this scheme. We know that there were 624 sponsors in Warwickshire from July 22 to July 23. Potentially not all 625 sponsors would have considered fostering, but it is reasonable to consider that some would.

WCC Households De-registered during the financial year

Approval Type	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Family and Friends	61	69	70	87	77
Mainstream	34	35*	24	25	20
Shared Care Only	0	2	3	1	0
Foster to Adopt	7	3	5	5	5
Not Known	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Households	**102**	**109**	**102**	**118**	**102**

The number of mainstream carers who left the service saw a slight decrease on the previous year which is positive and shows retention has stabilised. However, the number of mainstream carers leaving the service remained higher than the number of mainstream households approved during 2022/23 resulting in a reduction in mainstream carers at year end (Table 4 - below).

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Of the 77 family & friends approvals ended during 2022/23, 22 of these approvals ended due to a special guardianship order being granted to the carers. This compares to 31 SGOs granted out of the 87 family & friends approvals ended in the previous year.

WCC Fostering Households at Year End

Approval Type	31 March 2019	31 March 2020	31 March 2021	31 March 2022	31 March 2023
Family and Friends	75	75	103	96*	101
Mainstream	177	170	169	154	146
Shared Care Only	8	6	3	2	3
Short Breaks Only	2	2	4	3	3
Foster to Adopt	2	5	4	6	3
Number of Households	**264**	**258**	**283**	**261***	**256**

*Includes 5 Family/Friends carers that OFSTED asked us to remove as although approved were yet to have children placed with them as at 31 March 2022

Warwickshire has seen a slight decrease in the number of fostering households during the 2022/23 financial year with five less fostering households available on 31 March 2023 compared to the same point in the previous financial year(The figure in March 22 included 5 family and friends carers without children). The most notable reduction at year end is in the number of mainstream carers, 8 less households were approved on 31 March 2023 compared to the same point last year.

Placement Use as at 31 March

	31 March 2020	31 March 2021	31 March 2022	31 March 2023
Number of Children Placed at 31 March	356 (72.7%)	352 (71.1%)	342 (74.3%)	327 (70.3%)
Number of Vacant Placements	65 (13.3%)	79 (16.0%)	70 (15.2%)	76 (16.3%)
Number of not available placements	69 (14.1%)	64 (12.9%)	48 (10.4%)	62 (13.3%)

Data Caveat: One child placed with a WCC Foster Carer at 31 March 2020 is from another local authority

Warwickshire Fostering Service had less children placed at year end than the previous year end. There has been an increase of not available placements where carers are on hold for a variety of reasons such as resting, pending resignation or health/housing related reasons.

As at 31 March 2023, 42% of Warwickshire's child in care population were placed with a WCC foster carer compared to 41.7% at the end of the previous financial year.

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Number of children placed with a WCC Foster Carer during the financial year

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of Children placed with a WCC Foster Carer during the year	605	604	570	581	541

NB. The above includes all children placed during the year regardless of duration of their placement. It also includes children where a viability assessment was completed where children were placed under REG 24.

541 children were placed with a WCC foster carer (including Family/Friends) during the 2022/23 financial year which is a decrease of 40 children on the previous financial year, however the number of children in care has fluctuated with numbers decreasing so this will impact on numbers of placement.

Allegations, Complaints, Exemptions and Physical Restraints

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Allegations	5	25	22	16	9
Complaints	8	8	6	9	5
Physical Restraints	5	4	3	3	3
Number of Carers who had an Exemption in place during the year	5	17	10	6	10

LADO workflows have enabled better reporting on number of allegations against foster carers. However, an 'allegation against registered carer' case note has also been added to Mosaic to ensure we are able to collate information about allegations which may not be referred to the LADO or are picked up by another local authorities LADO.

Independent Review Mechanism

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
How many applications were made for a review to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)	1	2	0	1	3
Of the applications made to the IRM, how many resulted in a recommendation being made to your service to review your decision?	0	1	0	0	0

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Additional Data: Number of New Foster Care Placements started in the year (Extracted from SSDA903 Looked After Return)

Type	Number of Placements Starts during 2020/21	%	Number of Placements Starts during 2021/22	%	Number of Placements Starts during 2022/23	%
Internal Fostering	427	67.9%	504	76.0%	430	78.5%
Agency Fostering	202	32.1%	159	24.0%	118	21.5%
Total Fostering Placements Started	**629**	**100%**	**663**	**100%**	**548**	**100%**

NB. The above includes all placements which commenced during the financial year regardless of duration of placement.

The volume of new placements made with a WCC Foster Carer placed during 2022/23 saw a decrease compared to the previous financial year whilst those made with an agency foster carer was significantly lower. It is worth noting that there has been a reduction in children in care over the last 12 months and increasing reliance on supported accommodation for 16 & 17 year olds.

During 2022-23 there was an increase in the use of ED carers.

Demographics of Foster Carers

The table below shows the demographics of Warwickshire Foster carers during 2022/23 (excluding Connected Persons & Foster to Adopt Carers)

Number of foster carers in household	19/20 Number of Households	%	20/21 Number of Households	%	21/22 Number of Households	%	22/23 Number of Households	%
1 carer	67	31.3%	60	29.6%	53	28.6%	50	29.1%
2 carers	147	68.6%	143	70.4%	132	71.4%	122	70.9%
Total Number of Households during year	**214**	**100.0%**	**203**	**100.0%**	**185**	**100.0%**	**172**	**100.0%**

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Ethnicity of All Carers in Households	18/19		19/20		20/21		21/22		22/23	
	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%
White British/Irish/Other	365	97.6%	345	95.6%	326	94.2%	301	95.0%	278	94.6%
BME	9	2.4%	12	3.3%	15	4.3%	13	4.1%	10	3.4%
Not recorded	0	0.0%	4	1.1%	5	1.4%	3	0.9%	6	2.0%
Total Number of Carers in Households during year (excluding Family/Friends & Foster to Adopt Carers)	374	100.0%	361	100.0%	346	100.0%	317	100.0%	294	100.0%

Age of Main Carer	19/20		20/21		21/22		22/23	
	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%
Under 30	1	0.5%	3	1.5%	3	1.6%	2	1.2%
30 to 40	23	10.7%	20	9.9%	20	10.8%	21	12.2%
40 to 45	22	10.3%	18	8.9%	15	8.1%	12	7%
45 to 50	30	14.0%	34	16.7%	32	17.3%	25	14.5%
50 to 55	44	20.6%	39	19.2%	25	13.5%	25	14.5%
55 to 60	44	20.6%	39	19.2%	44	23.8%	39	22.7%
60 to 65	29	13.6%	30	14.8%	27	14.6%	29	16.9%
65+	21	9.8%	20	9.9%	19	10.3%	19	11.0%
Total	214	100.0%	203	100.0%	185	100.0%	172	100.0%

Gender of Main Carer	19/20		20/22		21/22		22/23	
	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%
Male	27	12.6%	20	9.9%	19	10.3%	20	11.6%
Female	187	87.4%	183	90.1%	166	89.7%	152	88.4%
Total	214	100.0%	203	100.0%	185	100.0%		100.0%

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Location of Household	19/20 Number of Households	%	20/21 Number of Households	%	21/22 Number of Households	%	22/23 Number of Households	%
North Warwickshire	14	6.5%	12	5.9%	11	5.9%	9	5.2%
Nuneaton & Bedworth	61	28.5%	55	27.1%	48	25.9%	46	26.7%
Rugby	35	16.4%	34	16.7%	32	17.3%	27	15.7%
Stratford	21	9.8%	24	11.8%	22	11.9%	24	14%
Warwick	36	16.8%	34	16.7%	29	15.7%	25	14.5%
Coventry	15	7.0%	13	6.4%	13	7.0%	15	8.7%
Leicestershire	11	5.1%	10	4.9%	12	6.5%	9	5.2%
Northamptonshire	4	1.9%	6	3.0%	4	2.2%	4	2.3%
Staffordshire	3	1.4%	3	1.5%	2	1.1%	2	1.2%
Worcestershire	7	3.3%	7	3.4%	7	3.8%	5	2.9%
All Other Out of County	7	3.3%	5	2.5%	5	2.7%	6	3.5%
Total	214	100.0%	203	100.0%	185	100.0%	172	100.0%

The majority of our foster carers are two parent families and are White British; the main carers tend to be female 88.4%. The highest number of carers are in the age range 55-60 age bracket at 22.7% this has been a consistent pattern for four years of data. There is a decrease in 40–45-year age range. This may be due to several factors: carers own children being older or leaving home and perhaps being more financially secure. The concern with approving carers in an older cohort is that they may potentially choose to retire at 67. However, we do have foster carers in their late 70's. Our demographics are similar with Ofsted's findings, 41% were in their 50's.

Historically we have had more success approving foster carers in the north of the county and this continues to be the case, currently we have 26.7% in Nuneaton & Bedworth and 5.2% in North Warwickshire. We have had slight increased success in securing foster carers in the South of the county, Stratford of 2% and decrease in areas of Warwick 1.2% in Rugby 1.6%. We continue to approve an increasing number of foster carers outside the county border; this figure is currently 23.8.

As with previous years, Ofsted reports there was a greater proportion of foster carers from non-White ethnic groups in IFAs (23%) than in the LA sector (13%),

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Structure of the Team

The Service has 5 Teams.
- **Recruitment, Training and assessment** – based in Shire Hall, Warwick.
- **Fostering Supervision and Support** (including specialist schemes) - located in Kings House, Bedworth and in Shire Hall, Warwick.
- **Connected Person assessment team** located in Shire Hall, Warwick.
- **SGO & Alternative Carers Support team and private fostering** - located in Shire Hall, Warwick.
- **Family Support Team –** linked to Connected Persons team, countywide
- **Placement Hub** - located in Kings House, Bedworth,(managed by separate Operations Lead, fostering social workers from fostering establishment have dual roles, split between the Hub and fostering supervision and support)

The Fostering Service is currently managed by a registered manager, one Operations Manager (Placement Hub), 8 Team Leaders, 5 Family Support Workers, WRAP - 2 family support workers and 1 youth worker and 40 Social Workers. During this period we have had agency workers to support workload and at the end of year we had 1 agency SW in supervision and support.

During the year the service provided work placements for two social workers in training. Given a FSW an opportunity as an apprentice social worker.

A hybrid model of working has been adopted of people working at home and being office based.

Functions of the Teams

Recruitment, training, and assessment

From 31/07/22 recruitment has been aligned to Warwickshire's Marketing and Communications Team. We work in partnership on recruitment strategy.

We have a varied and full training programme and are a QCF centre of excellence.

Assessments for Mainstream foster carers are held in this team. The team also manages initial enquiries, initial visits and recruitment events.

Support and supervision

Social workers monitor and support foster carers with supervisions, cause for concerns, LADO referrals, complaints, planning and end of placement meetings, long term matching and complete annual foster carer reviews that are submitted either to fostering panel or the fostering review officer. Social workers also complete SGO reports for court. Caseloads include mainstream and connected persons foster carers. Family support workers are assigned to support carers based on meeting criteria, they complete specific pieces of time-based intervention work and support with some

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aspects of childcare. We have a contract with two psychologist and student who offers consultations to foster carers three days a week.

Specialist schemes

We have developed several 52-week paid schemes:
- Solo is for children who are on the edge of residential or stepping down from residential care, including children with disabilities.

- Breathing Space foster carers are for those who need a time limited placement to allow for planning (10 to 20 days).

- Specialist Parent and Child is a 12-week placement to allow for an assessment of parent (s) and child in a family setting. The parent and child foster carer are expected to accept three placements a year.

- Specialist Solo Disability Scheme foster carers meet the high needs to children with disabilities.

- Treehouse – This also sits within Schemes. We have appointed 1 set of Treehouse foster carers from October 2022The treehouse carers support 8 branch carers. The aim of this scheme is for children and young people to have a trusted adult to stay with as would occur in family life and it also offers foster carers who need this support due to the needs of the child or having limited support network themselves 28 days per year for day or overnight care. There is also an element of shared experiences for foster carers and children. Group activities are planned and learning experiences are promoted in this scheme.

Other schemes (not on a guaranteed 52 week payment are)

- Family link foster carers support the needs of families or connected persons where a carer needs a respite facility. The benefit to the young person is that they stay with a foster carer they build a relationship with on a regular basis for short term breaks.

- Staying Put –young people over 18 stay with carers until 21.

- Flexible fostering – This is a new scheme developed in March 2022 to meet the demand for flexible fostering arrangements. 20 nights or 5 periods of accommodation within a review period is required.

Connected Person Assessment Team

This Team is responsible for completing the assessments of prospective connected persons. Reports once completed are presented to either the Fostering Panel or the Court. The assessments may result in recommendations of relatives/connected persons as special guardians or child arrangement orders. This team support approved foster carer for up to three months if an SGO is imminent.

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The Team continues to undertake assessments across the country and on occasion abroad. Although most assessments abroad have been outsourced to Social Workers in the country itself due to Brexit.

Additional Connected Person Statistics

	No. Of referrals	No of assessments started	No of withdrawals	No of negative viabilities	No of overseas assessments	No, of approvals
19/20	210	146	29	0	1	69
20/21	262	220	27	13	1	58
21/22	230	182	66	19	0	41
22/23	140	129	69	3	0	52

There has been a decrease in the number of referrals compared to last year which bucks national trends. We have seen a decrease of 3 from last year's withdrawals. It is positive that fostering panel have had more approvals than last year which tells us that initial IVA's are of better quality. This is in line with national trends. The dedicated duty worker continues to be an effective role and the children's team are clear how to seek advice and guidance.

The number of approvals is captured for cases going to fostering panel this does not account for assessments where SGO, CAO or where assessments are completed but not required as the subject child is returned to parents.

Connected Persons Support and Supervision Team

This team works closely with the SGO team and the Permanency social worker when considering permanency for children. They also work alongside the Connected Persons Assessment Team with reg 24 temporarily approved placements.
All of the fostering training is available to Connected persons carers. They can complete core training and evidence their skills through a portfolio and complete the Training and Support standards to progress to skill level payments.

Special Guardianship and Alternative Carers Support Team

We support carers and children who have a Special Guardianship order or where children are on a Child Arrangements Order seeking an SGO when a child has been previously in care . If the child has not been in care but the carers have sought a private law SGO we will sign post them to relevant services and offer the opportunity to join support groups.

The name of the team has been changed to reflect changes in ASF funding eligibility (from April 2022) to further include all children under a Residency Order or Child arrangement order who were previously looked after and all children who were looked after where an Adoption, Special Guardianship, Residency or Child Arrangement Order placement had broken down, irrespective on any reconciliation plans.

A part time Team Leader is responsible for the team and there are 3 workers 2.75fte.

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Permanency through SGO is increasing; this year 31 children have been discharged from care with an SGO. This is a significant increase from last year when the figure was 18. A new permanency social worker has been appointed to track progress and we have already seen the positive impact of this following a period of time without one and we have seen an increase of applications made by foster carers.

Adoption support fund
In 22-23 we have made 40 Applications (increase by 12 from previous year), totalling £103,299.31 to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic services for SGO holders and children.
SGO carers can access fostering training and have access to monthly support groups across the county, there is a regular newsletter highlighting services and carers are invited to any fostering social event.

Please see Appendix 1 Annual Report

Private Fostering

A private fostering arrangement is one made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 or under 18, if disabled. This year the criteria for private fostering has been extended to include Unaccompanied Minors Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The young person must be cared for by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt or host.

There has been a decrease by 7 in private fostering arrangements this year.

The Private fostering continues to be aligned to the connected person support team. All team members (5) are trained to complete assessments.

Please see Appendix 2 Private Fostering Annual Report.

Foster for Adoption

Foster for Adoption has been reviewed and since November 2021 there are now 2 dedicated social workers responsible for monitoring and providing support. We continue to work closely with ACE. In 2022-2023 there have been 6 children placed under foster for adopt early permanency.

Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel's role is to make recommendations in respect of Connected Persons Carers and Mainstream foster carers. It's function is to also make recommendations on annual Foster Home Performance Reviews, Terminations and note resignations, exemptions and temporary change of approvals. Five members of panel sit at one time and the panel is made up of level 4 professionals from social work, health and education, foster carers, adults who are care experienced. The Independent Panel Chair is supported by one Deputy Chair and Warwickshire's salaried Panel Advisor. Business Support provide a dedicated panel administrator.

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The recommendations of panel are sent to the Fostering Agency Decision Maker who is a senior manager. In 2022-2023 Fostering Panel considered 70 fostering households and 43 business items.

Please see Appendix 3 Annual Warwickshire Fostering Panel Report

Phoenix Psychology

This service is commissioned for 3 days a week and is available to foster carers and to staff for consultation. The provider also offers training for carers and staff. This service has been instrumental in supporting foster carers and maintaining placements where therapeutic support is required.

Please see Appendix 4 Psychology Report June 2022-March 2023

Recruitment of Foster Carers

In June 2022, Warwickshire took the recruitment of foster carers back in house from an external provider who we had commissioned to complete a 2 year contract. Following resuming marketing and recruitment in house, we have rebranded creating a new logo and full marketing campaign in line with existing WCC Child Friendly design.

The Team uses a range of methods of advertising and awareness-raising as follows;

- Digital marketing
- Facebook and Instagram
- In person promotional events
- Online information sharing sessions -Teams and Facebook Live
- Press releases of relevant foster carer achievements / human interest
- Retention activities promotion including conference, well- being day and celebration events.
- TV advertising
- Radio advertising
- Shared Council Advertising Network activities
- Case studies and video content

Recruitment priorities remain;

- Emergency duty carers
- Carers for teenagers (young people 10-18 years)
- Solo placements (including children with disabilities)
- Breathing space carers
- Carers for sibling groups
- Parent and Child specialist placements
- Family Link carers and short break carers

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Prospective foster carers can:

- Talk to a fostering social worker and a foster carer at events
- Attend an information session run by foster carers and social workers
- Enquire online, via email or telephone.
- Receive a brochure within 1 working day of enquiry
- Receive a phone call within two working days of enquiry
- Receive a 'Useful Information Document'
- Have a home visit within 5 working days (Subject to the applicant's availability)
- Attend Fostering Preparation Groups 'Journey to Foster'
- Meet support and supervision social worker on or before panel to promote positive transitions.

Recruitment initiatives:
- Flexible fostering launched Autumn 22 – recruitment for respite and planned emergency duty of people who cannot foster full time.
- Fostering Friendly organisation – a commitment to support Warwickshire staff who wish to foster.
- Refer a Friend £300 incentive for foster carers should their recommendation be approved at panel
- Giveaways at live events and craft activities for children.
- Working in partnership with CAN to deliver co-produced nationwide fostering promotion, benchmarking and practice development
- Co-development with Voice, Influence and Change team of child's voice throughout fostering throughout assessment and approval.
- Engagement in nationwide Fostering Network campaigns including fostering fortnight. Activities include foster walk, conference and live events.
- Attendance at live community events such as Leamington Pride, Lions events and cultural celebrations.

Assessment
- The team consists of 4 social workers who complete stage 1 and stage 2 of the mainstream assessment process to prevent delay.
- Access to full training offer during assessment
- National minimum standards weaved throughout the assessment.
- Handover between recruitment officer and then to supporting social worker
- Focus on 5 month assessment timeframe.
- Teaching within assessment including focus on Foundations of Attachment

Training for Foster Carers
The Core courses are as follow.
- Child Protection, safeguarding (all carers expected to complete as soon after approval as practical and must be completed within the first year of fostering)
- A Child's Journey Through Care
- Attachments
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Emergency Paediatric First Aid (all carers are expected to complete in first year of fostering)
- Recording Skills

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These courses are also available as distance learning packs/online training. Following approval carers have 2 years to complete the core training to date 245 carers have achieved this.

There is a large number who have almost completed all 6 courses and it is encouraging to see how many carers are refreshing their training in these core areas by reattending, the Fostering services expectation is that carers courses are revisited every 3 years at least.

Following the corona virus pandemic, we continued to offer virtual training, and have offered more live courses during March 2022 and April 2023, paediatric first aid, continued to be live in line with government guidance for life saving skills. We continued to take on board what training our foster carers needed and what we as an authority have as our vision, restorative practice is a mandatory course for all staff including carers and has a rolling programme available for all carers to access.

We have continued to be successful in our virtual offer to carers but less successful in our live training, online training take up has been particularly high, 606 courses were requested and set up for carers.

This year the Service delivered the following new live courses; Getting the Most Out of the Outdoors, Family Literacy, Supporting Care and Connections through Communication, TSD workshops, House Project Webinar, SGO training, Trauma Informed Practice, Adoption Transitions Training,

The following were reintroduced in updated formats, Recording Skills, A Child's Journey Through Care. It is our practice that all courses are regularly reviewed and updated.

New online courses are regularly available and updated lists are distributed to carers via WeLearn and via the email group address called foster carers.   We continue to offer over 60 online training options specifically for young people, on a range of topics including Bullying, Managing Anger, Emotions and Getting Relevant Support, Gangs and Group Offenders, all about Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, Leaving Care Expectations and Support, Eating Disorders, Radicalisation, What to Do When I Feel Stressed, Why Carers Get Worried When I Go Missing.

Each live course usually has 20-25 places available for carers and places for social workers/other professionals. This recognises the advantages of joint training opportunities; we have continued to book larger spaces where venues and the service were being cautious of health and safety measures.

Since April 1st, 2022, to present, we had 37 households (25 of these were connected persons households) complete their TSD's. Overall, 195 households have completed their TSD's on our current approved carer list; the list is updated from panel minutes and therefore may be different to the number of current carers as ADM decisions and notifications take a few weeks to filter.   (Historically 544 households have completed their TSD standards whilst being approved carers in Warwickshire).

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Foster carer training is monitored and discussed by the fostering social worker and recorded in the foster home annual performance review. All foster carers have a training profile. Each training year we run 3 training terms, carers get full information on what is being offered prior to each term and any amendments are communicated via a dedicated foster carer email system and via the WeLearn platform.

The service ran a conference for carers during this year and hosted our first well-being day. Both were received well be carer and staff who attended.

Some feedback from the wellbeing day.

"All workshops were invaluable to us as foster carers personally as well as reflecting and using with others in our families".

"Have more of these days. The interact between carers and Warwickshire Fostering people is invaluable. To be able to put faces to names, and just say hi builds strong bonds and gives support that online training and TEAMS chats doesn't provide. And keep making it centric to learning and developing our knowledge. I know coffee meetings also exist, but sometimes these can end up just being a whinge-fest".

Some feedback from Conference.

"What a great event the fostering conference was today, seeing faces old and new"

"Can I just say thank you for a really great day it was lovely catching up with people meeting people we've spoken to on the phone but now can put a face too and the workshops were informative helpful but also presented on a relaxed manner which always helps the group chats helped us clarify things, excellent day thank you"

Foster Carer approval and retention

Approval Process – mainstream foster carers

Once the initial visits are completed and the foster carers applies to foster with Warwickshire, the assessment is allocated to a social worker in the recruitment, assessment, and training team. The social worker completes an assessment of the household, involving any children of the applicants. They undertake all statutory checks, including DBS, medical checks, ex-partner references, education checks and visits to referees. The completed assessment report is presented to Warwickshire's Fostering Panel.

Retention of foster carers

Once foster carers have been approved, their induction process begins. Carers need to complete their Training, Development and Support induction standards within 12 months of approval. For Connected Persons, the timescale is 18 months.

All newly approved foster carers receive professional supervision every 3 weeks with their social worker. After their first annual review, supervision is every 6 weeks; Team Leaders review this frequency thereafter.

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Support is provided to foster carers via their fostering social workers, the child's social worker, family support workers, and the services of an independent Advice and Mediation Worker.

In line with the Fostering Regulations, all foster carer households have a minimum of one annual, unannounced visit by fostering social worker, however we attempt to do two. Foster carers are only approved for 12 months at a time and foster carer Annual Reviews are presented to either Fostering Panel or the Fostering Reviewing Officer for on-going approval. This scrutiny by an independent Fostering Panel/ Fostering Reviewing Officer and Decision Maker ensures a robust approach to safeguarding children in foster care.

Foster carers are accompanied by their fostering social workers attend a range of meetings concerned with the children in the fostering home including Placement Planning meetings, All About Me Reviews, Placement Stability meetings, End of Placement meetings and additional meetings with education and health professionals.

In addition to support, the Fostering Service provides social opportunities to carers and their own children via Parties and Family Days. This year we were able to have a Christmas party and foster carers were recognised for their achievements at the annual staff conference. In addition, there was a trip to the pantomime for fostering families.

The WFCA administration group is now dissolved.

Children Who Foster

The Fostering Service recognises how difficult fostering can be for the carers' own children and provides some activities for children of foster carers, trips to the cinema or other activity twice a year. The aim is to offer support but also offer opportunities to talk with other children in a similar position.

Foster carers' own children can add their comments to the Foster Home Review.

Role of Family Support Workers

The Fostering Team had 9 Family Support workers, which was reduced to 6 following a restructure. The family support worker's role is to offer foster carers time-limited support for example, behaviour strategies or bespoke targeted training, emotional support, advice, link the carers with another local foster carer, or on a more practical level, to spend time with children who are looked after, or emergency support with school transport or family time to support the stability of placements. Planned work also involves support with carers who have an identified need for support with induction or financial management. Family Support Workers run local foster carers support groups, leading on the Kids Who Foster groups, support with distance learning and ensuring carers can access the WeLearn Platform.

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We continue to invest in training for family support workers. Four of our family support workers are Non-Violence Resistance (NVR) trained, including one worker who completed the advanced course.

Working in Partnership with Foster Carers

All foster carer home reviews are signed off by a Fostering Team Leader. The Fostering Review Officer keeps a log of issues as does Fostering Panel and ADM which enables practice issues to be raised.

Exit questionnaires are offered to enable carers to express their views about the service they have received. An electronic version of the exit interview form that may increase uptake. This will also allow us to collate and report on trends. A face-to-face exit interview is offered if carers request this.

In addition, OFSTED invites foster carers to respond to an online questionnaire about the fostering service the uptake is low.

We have worked with foster carers to support with recruitment activities which has been a real focus this year.

Challenges to the Fostering Team

There are several factors influencing this.

- There is a shortage of Foster carers who can meet the needs of our children - this is a national pattern.
- An increase in the number of same day placements.
- We see increasingly complex needs of the children for example mental health issues and CSE.
- Children in teenage years are hard to place within our own resources.
- Inability to place another child/young person in placement because of the needs of the other children who may have complex needs.
- Increased need for foster carers requiring more respite and difficulty resourcing this.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

This remains a national problem, with both Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies competing within the market. WCC Fostering Service has a clear market brand. There are 66 Independent Fostering Agencies operating in the area. All these agencies pay carers a fee from day one of a placement. WCC pay skill level one allowance if one carer is at home full time or if they have professional transferable qualifications for example, nursery nursing. Other newly approved carers must evidence their skills via the induction standards and attendance at core training. The Team has a strong reputation and carers continue to promote fostering. The Team continues to look at new advertising opportunities and ways to promote the profile of the Service.

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Our foster friendly policy has been rolled out to enable Warwickshire County Council employees to access days off for their foster carer assessment and subsequent training etc once they are approved foster carers. This will be advertised and may encourage staff across the council to apply.

Retirements/Termination of Foster Carers

This year has again seen several retirements of experienced carers. Some foster carers have had allegations, and this has resulted in termination of their approval, or in a reduction of their placement approval range.

Team Priorities for 2023-2024

Action	Responsibility
Increased recruitment of foster carers. New advertising strategies will be implemented. Facebook, Instagram, face book live and podcasts will be used. A combination of traditional methods and new tech will be agreed over a 12 month programme.	Team Leader/Operations Manager/Comms and Marketing Team/Child friendly Warwickshire
Build a Mentoring Scheme for new foster carers – they will be matched and supported by an experienced foster carer	Recruitment and assessment Team
Review of specialist schemes & the new 'flexible' fostering scheme.	Operations Manager/Schemes & Recruitment Team Leader/Placement Hub Operations Manager
Grow the Treehouse scheme to be able to offer this direct support to 8 Warwickshire foster carers in the north or east of the county	Operations Manager/Recruitment Team Leader
Further develop the SGO and Alternative carers support team to offer support to previously looked after children and their carers once they have been granted an SGO. Ensure DDP level 1 training is secured for new SGO support team practitioners.	Operations Manager/Team Leader
Continue benchmarking against other Local authorities, to ensure knowledge is shared and ensure Warwickshire's offer is competitive.	Operations Manager/Service Manager

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To review policies and procedures particular focus on transport & Allegations, Complaints and Cause for Concern	Operations Manager/Team Leader/Year 4 advanced practitioners
Offer support to the Children's team's and ensure regular training on Regulation 24 & 25 plus Private Fostering	Year 4 advanced practitioners
Transfer fostering review data onto Power BI so that data is available for transparency and monitoring	Business Intelligence
Scoping exercises between with Business Support and Fostering Alternative Carers Team to bring about best practice	Business Support/Fostering and Alternative Support Carers Operation Lead/Team Managers

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – SGO and Alternative Carers support Annual Report

SGO Annual report
2022-2023.pdf

Appendix 2 – Private Fostering Annual Report

Private Fostering
Annual Report 2022-2

Appendix 3 - Warwickshire Fostering Panel Annual Report

WCC ANNUAL
REPORT FOR FOSTER

Appendix 4 – Phoenix Psychology Report

Phoenix Psychology
Feedback Report Apri

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Corporate Parenting Panel
Work Programme 2023/2024

Item	Report detail	Date of Meeting
Update from CICC and Care Leaver Forum and Change Team	Children in Care Council/Care Leaver's Forum, & Voice, Influence and Change Team Update – *next full update 15th January 2024*	* Standing items for every meeting
Performance Data	Report which includes key data regarding CLA & Care Leavers	
Development of Work Programme for 2023 and Forward Plan information	To consider proposed work programme & future areas of work for the panel; including information from the forward plan with items relevant to the remit of the panel	
Report from the Virtual School Head	• **Spring Term** (March/April) - focus on validated achievement outcomes • **Summer Term** (July/August) - focus on other work of the Virtual School such as enrichment opportunities, as this supports the raising achievement agenda. • **Autumn term** (November) - focus on provisional achievement outcomes	**Quarterly Report – next report due 13th November 2023**

Report detail	Date of Meeting
• Annual Adoption Reports – ACE and Warwickshire • Private Fostering Annual Report & Fostering & Alternative Carers Support Team Annual Report	13th November 2023
• Work Force Strategy - members of the team to come and talk to the panel (Social Workers etc)	15th January 2024
	25th March 2024

Actions from the previous meetings/additions to the work programme

- County Line – a police representative will be asked to attend.
- Partnership working with District and Borough colleagues - A Charter with shared objectives will be presented to the panel after April 2022.
- Further information in relation to siblings in care - a more detailed breakdown was requested following the report presented at the meeting.
- A briefing note to be produced on the KOOTH website.
- Invitation to be sent to a representative of the Police to join a discussion in relation to missing children.

Information circulated to Members outside of meetings - *none currently.*

Items included on the Forward Plan relevant to the remit of the Panel:

The remit of the panel is to secure elected member and cross-organisation support and commitment for delivering improvement services and better outcomes for looked after children, young people and care leavers:

Decision	Description	Date due	Decision Maker
Children and Family Centre Updates and Strategic Direction	To present to Cabinet an update on Children and Family Centre's with recommended options for service delivery from September 2024	14 December 2023	Cabinet
Warwickshire 0-25 Education Sufficiency Strategy/ School Sufficiency Strategy	Warwickshire 0-25 Education Sufficiency Strategy	19 December 2023	Full Council
SEND and Inclusion Core Offer	Review of the revised core offer following public consultation	23 January 2024	Cabinet
SEND Public Consultations	Proposals from the SEND Public Consultations for SEND Service Offer.	23 January 2024	Cabinet

Upcoming Member Development Sessions

Please contact Helen Barnsley (Senior Democratic Services Officer) if you would like more information or if you are missing a calendar invitation. All development sessions will be held via Microsoft Teams unless otherwise stated.

Session	Date and Time	Provider
Woodland Strategy	17th November @ 10am	Scott Tompkins Dave Lowe

Future Meetings – 2023/2024

- 15th January 2024 at 10am
- 25th March 2024 at 10am

Meeting Schedule 2024/2025

- 1st July 2024 at 10am
- 30th September 2024 at 10am
- 18th November 2024 at 10am
- 20th January 2025 at 10am
- 24th March 2025 at 10am