

Annual Report of the Adoption Service 2020-2021 for Warwickshire County Council

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1. Introduction

This is the Warwickshire County Council adoption service report for the period April 2020 - March 2021. 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:

- We continue to place children in adoptive placements, once a Placement Order is granted, in a timely manner, and our figures remain lower than the 3-year national average.
- 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 3 sibling groups with adopters including 1 sibling groups of 3 and 2 sibling groups of 2.
- We have trained a number of Warwickshire staff in Richard Rose's Therapeutic Life Story Model.
- We have reviewed the children who have been subject to a Placement Order for a significant amount of time and have spent time considering a Change of Plan and revoking Placement Orders to enable us to progress their care plan of long term foster care or Special Guardianship Orders.
- Despite a global pandemic our number of children placed for adoption remained similar to the previous year and the number of children adopted has risen from 23 to 28.

3. Service Activity

In summary, during 2020/21:

- 23 children were subject of the decision that they should be placed for adoption
- 29 children were made subject to a Placement Order by the court
- 30 children were matched with prospective adopters
- 28 children were placed with adopters
- 28 children were made subject to an Adoption Order by the court.
- 1 disruption happened for a sibling group of 2 children.
- 13 Change of Plans/ Review of Plans were completed which enabled alternative permanency options to be progressed

Overall children's performance:

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Number of children adopted	34	23	28
Number of children placed with adopters	30	28	28
Number of children awaiting match	28	22	25
Number of disruptions	1	0	2

The above figures indicate that in the last 12 months although the number of children placed with adopters has remained stable, there has been an increase in the numbers of adoption orders being granted. Despite there being a global pandemic, which has reduced court availability Warwickshire has been successful in progressing permanency through adoption. The national figures are not yet available for 2020/21 but figures recorded nationally for year ending 2020 show a fall in adoption numbers by 4%, a further fall from the 2019 numbers.

There has been a considerable decrease in the number of Agency Decisions being made. There are 25 children who have an ADM decision but have not been placed or matched, in comparison to 46 last year. During this year, we have focused on revoking Placement Orders when a change of plan decision has been made. Some of these have been long outstanding Placement Orders and either have a plan of long term foster care or Special Guardianship Order (SGO). 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.

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 and also provides monthly updates to the Senior Leadership Team to ensure there is management oversight. This has resulted in an independent review which was completed by the Practice Improvement Team to extract learning on the issues of delay. The learning from the ADM and Permanency Social Worker's reviews is captured in a learning bulletin which is shared with all Children and Families Staff (and has received positive feedback) and is incorporated into ACE training.

The number of children in Warwickshire who are awaiting a match has increased by 3, 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. The Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board reports that in 2020/21 Adoption Orders granted decreased 17% compared to 2019/20 and SGOs increased by 4% compared to 2019/2020. Whilst there has been an increase in both Adoption Orders and SGOs in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20, the national trend has been evident in Warwickshire over the last 5 years with an overall decrease in Adoption Orders and an overall increase in SGOs. It is possible that historically the children who left care on an SGO may have been placed for adoption.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/2021
Adoptions Orders	54	70	46	34	23	28
Special Guardianship orders	24	26	33	18	31	37

Data for Adoption Orders granted:

Age at AO (Years)	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
Under 1	1	4%
1 to 4	20	71%
5 to 9	3	11%
10 to 15	4	14%
16 and over	0	0%
Total	28	100%

Gender	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
M	16	57%
F	12	43%
Total	28	100%

Ethnicity	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
White British	23	82%
White and Asian	1	4%
Black Caribbean	2	7%
White Other	2	7%
Total	28	100%

Sibling Groups?	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
No	21	75%
Yes*	7	25%
Total	28	100%

* Refers to two sibling groups of 2 and 1 sibling group of 3

Of the 28 children who were adopted between April 2020 and March 2021, 16 were male (57%) and 12 (43%) were female. In 19/20 there wasn't a split between males and females with 52% males being adopted and 48% females. The national data for this time period is not currently available however we can see from the national data from the previous year that Warwickshire are in line with the national figures which are 52% male and 48 % female.

It is evident from the chart above that a large proportion (71%) of Warwickshire adoptions are for children aged 1 to 4 years old. In the year April 2020 to March 2021, 20 children adopted were aged between 1 and 4 years of age when the Adoption Order was granted, 1 child was aged under 1 year, three were aged 5 to 9 years and four were aged between 10 and 15 years. These figures are similar to the national data for

the previous year, however we had 14% of Adoption Orders made to children aged 10-15 years old compared to the national average of 1%. Of these children, two were living with their adopter for 8 years prior to the adoption order being made and two were living with their adopters for two years. In the case of the two children living with their adopters for two years prior to the Adoption Order, the application for the adoption order was not made sooner due to the children experiencing a previous adoption disruption and the need for the children to settle and feel confident that this could be a permanent home for them.

There continues to be a clear majority of White British children being adopted in Warwickshire 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. This also demonstrates that Warwickshire have a commitment to securing permanency for children of all ethnicities through adoption.

No. of Placement Orders by Ethnicity:

Ethnicity	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
White British	41	26	27	28
White and Asian	2	0	1	0
Any other Mixed background	3	0	0	0
Any other White background	1	1	1	0
White and Black Caribbean	1	3	0	1
Any other Asian background	1	0	0	0
White and Black African	0	1	0	0
Any other ethnicity	0	0	1	0
Total	49	31	30	29

As shown below, there have been 29 Placement Orders secured in the last 12 months, which is consistent with 30 Placement Orders granted in 2019/20.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total No. of Placement Orders Granted	49	31	30	29

Similarly, to 2019-20 there has continued to be a number of foster carers wishing to adopt children in their care. Of the 28 children who were adopted in 2020/21, 5 individual children were adopted by their foster carers, 1 couple were assessed by ACE as adopters however the remaining 4 made private applications. These figures are in addition to the children who are placed in Foster For Adoption homes which are mentioned below. This is a very 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.

There have been some incidents where foster carers have wished to adopt the children in their care which has not been supported by the Adoption Panel, whilst not querying the decision made by panel this has resulted in delay in the care planning and achieving of permanency for a number of children with carers making private applications.

Foster For Adopt

Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, 11 children were placed for fostering in Foster For Adoption placements and during the same time period 9 children who were in a Foster For Adoption placement had their placement changed from a fostering placement to an adoptive placement. This demonstrates that Warwickshire continue to use Foster For Adoption placements to minimise disruption and change for our children and that these placements are successful in securing positive outcomes for our children.

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

During 2020/21, 20 children had a placement order granted and were still awaiting a match. Please note, included in the 20 children is one child that was living in an FFA

placement, two children matched but not yet placed with their adopters and one child whose Foster Carers are seeking adoption. This leaves 16 children who we are actively family finding for at the end of 2020/21. The breakdown data of these children is shown below.

Age at 31/03/2021 (Years)	Children with PO not yet placed	%
Under 1	0	0%
1 to 4	11	55%
5 to 9	8	40%
10 to 15	1	5%
16 and over	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Gender	Children with PO not yet placed	%
M	13	65%
F	7	35%
Total	20	100%

Ethnicity	Children with PO not yet placed	%
White British	19	95%
White and Black Caribbean	1	5%
Any other ethnicity	0	4%
Total	20	100%

Disability	Children with PO not yet placed	%
No	20	100%
Yes	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Sibling Groups?	Children with PO not yet placed	%
No	5	25%
Yes*	15	75%
Total	20	100%

* Includes 6 sibling groups of 2 and 1 sibling group of 3

In comparison to last year's data which featured a high number of individual male children between the ages of one to four years old it is evident that the highest need for adopters is for sibling groups, male children and children ranging between the ages of one to nine years. Of the twenty children with Placement Orders 8 are recorded as being slightly older aged five to nine. Therefore, alongside general family finding consideration should be given to targeting adopters 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.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic and national restrictions, ACE have not been able to hold any face to face family finding events or national exchange days where Warwickshire children have been able to be featured. However, two children have been able to attend covid secure activity days.

ACE continues to subscribe to 'Link Maker'. All Warwickshire children with a family finder are featured on 'Link Maker'. ACE also has its own internal portal to feature all Warwickshire children who are waiting to be matched to a family. Alongside the internal portal 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.

Sibling Groups

Sibling assessments underpin and support decisions to place brothers and sisters together or apart and maintain meaningful contact. Warwickshire has been successful in placing 11 children in 5 sibling groups between April 2020 and March 2021. This includes 4 groups of 2 siblings and 1 group of 3 siblings. Given that sibling groups are amongst the "harder to place" groups this is extremely positive.

Warwickshire have recently agreed that ACE will make exceptional payments to support the placement of sibling groups. This highlights Warwickshire's commitment and recognition of the importance of sibling relationships as a sibling relationship can provide a source of continuity throughout a child's lifetime and can often be the longest relationship they experience. It is extremely positive that over half of the children placed for adoption in Warwickshire this year were part of a sibling group. The fact that Warwickshire placed a sibling group of three is even more remarkable and evidences the excellent working relationship between ACE and Warwickshire in securing permanency for our children.

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.

This year, of the 28 children placed with adopters, Warwickshire have needed to use five inter-agency adopters for 3 sibling groups, one child with additional needs and one individual child. The remaining 19 children were placed with ACE adopters. 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. 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.

Disruptions

In the previous 12 months, 2 children (1 sibling group) in Warwickshire have experienced an adoption disruption following prospective male adopter failing to bond with the children. However, these children have since gone on to be matched. There has continued to be the opportunity to learn from disruptions within ACE. Each child has a disruption meeting, which is independently chaired with the aim of understanding

the sequence of events leading up to the disruption in line with compliance. This information has been used to inform individual care planning.

4. Service Performance

The scorecard showing Warwickshire's average performance is detailed on page 14. The timeliness of children entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is 11 days higher than Warwickshire's previous three year national average of 343 however this figure remains below the three year national average (2016-2019) of 376 days.

There has been a significant increase in the average time (in days) between a child entering care and Warwickshire receiving court authority to place a child, for children who have been adopted in in 2020/21. Warwickshire average for 2020/21 was 306 days which is higher than both Warwickshire's and the national three-year average for 2016-2019. Similarly, the measure A20 which is the 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 has significantly increased from 217 in 2019/20 to 306 in 2020/21. These increases are likely to be as a result of the significant delays in care proceedings due to the family courts being closed at the beginning of the pandemic and national lockdowns.

However, despite this delay for children, for Warwickshire children adopted between April 2020 and March 2021 the average number of days between a child being granted a placement order and being matched to an adoptive family is 111 which is a significant reduction from the previous year which was 159 days and remains below the three year national average (2016-2019) of 178 days. It should be noted however that Warwickshire has continued to be aspirational and been committed to identifying adopters for older children and sibling groups, this is likely to increase our timescales as they are harder to place children. It continues to be our view that if adoption is the most appropriate placement for a child all avenues should be explored even if this means our timescales are slightly longer.

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 and representatives from ACE are invited to the panels. The addition of a Permanency Social Worker enables regular, consistent oversight of cases allowing for collaborative working between ACE and Warwickshire and information being provided to senior leadership for management oversight.

There has been a rise in timescales this year for A10 and A20, both measures will have been impacted by COVID-19, the closure of the courts and the subsequent backlog of cases waiting to be heard.

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	2020/21 (01/04/2020 - 31/03/2021)	DfE Adoption Scorecard 3 Year Average (2016 to 2019)	DfE Adoption Scorecard 3 Year Average - ENGLAND (2016 to 2019)	DfE Adoption Scorecard 3 Year Average - Stats Neighbour Average (2016 to 2019)
A1: BLA-PFA Measure removed and replaced by A10	Average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted in 2020/21.	430 days	-	-	-
A10: BLA-PFA New measure to replace A1	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 2020/21. 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.	354 days	343 days	376 days	349 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 2020/21.	111 days	115 days	178 days	151 days
A20: BLA-PO New measure for 2016-19	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 2020/21.	306 days	251 days	257 days	240 days
A3: % BLA-PFA (<14 months) Measure removed 2016-19	Percentage of children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (includes all children that have been adopted in 2020/21 and those that were going through the adoption process at 31 March 2021).	36%	-	-	-

5. Service Plan 2021-2022

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:

- All children to receive good 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.
- Reviewing children on Placement Order with ACE monthly
- Promoting early permanency through training for social workers across Warwickshire
- Promoting Foster For Adoption, to ensure that permanence is considered at an early stage for children when this is appropriate.
- Permanency worker to offer 'Permanency Drop Ins' for consultations on potential and current adoptions including support with writing good quality CPRs, Adoption Support Plans and the matching matrix.
- Develop robust Adoption Support Plans which are relevant to individual children and their needs.
- 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.
- Reviewing and updating Child Permanence Report inline with Warwickshire's Restorative Practice Model ensuring that the voice of the child and their journey is clear throughout the report.

6. Appendices



1. ACE Annual Report
2020-21.docx



2. ACE Panel Annual
Report 2020-21 FINA