

Annual Report of the Adoption Service 2021-2022 for Warwickshire County Council

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1. Introduction

This is the Warwickshire County Council adoption service report for the period April 2021 - March 2022. 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 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 8 sibling groups with adopters including 2 sibling groups of 3 and 6 sibling groups of 2.
- We have developed a positive working relationship with the Agency Decision Maker and ACE.
- We regularly review the children who have been subject to a Placement Order.
- Despite the ongoing impact of a global pandemic our number of children placed for adoption decreased slightly to the previous year however the number of children adopted increased.

3. Service Activity

In summary, during 2021/22:

- 36 children (up 13 from 2020/21) were subject of the decision that they should be placed for adoption
- 22 children (down 7 from 2020/21) were made subject to a Placement Order by the court
- 16 children (down 14 from 2020/21) were matched with prospective adopters
- 24 children (down 4 from 2020/21) were placed with adopters
- 34 children (up 6 from 2020/21) were made subject to an Adoption Order by the court.
- No disruptions happened (down 2 from 2020/21)
- 11 Change of Plans/ Review of Plans (down 2 from 2020/21) were completed which enabled alternative permanency options to be progressed

Overall children's performance:

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of children adopted	23	28	34
Number of children placed with adopters	28	28	18
Number of children with an ADM & awaiting match	46	29	37
Number of disruptions	0	2	0

The above figures indicate that in the last 12 months although the number of children placed with adopters has reduced there has been an increase in the number of Adoption Orders being granted. Seven of the children who were adopted during this year had been living with their adopters for over 2 years (one child was adopted by his foster carers having lived with them since 2017 and one child who moved to his adopters in 2018). This explains why more Adoption Orders were granted than decisions that children should be placed for adoption.

As shown below, there have been 22 Placement Orders secured in the last 12 months, which continues the year on year decrease from the 49 Placement Orders granted in 2017/18.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Total No. of Placement Orders Granted	49	31	30	29	22

The national figures are not yet available for 2021/22 but figures recorded nationally for year ending 2021 show a fall in adoption numbers by 18%, a further fall from the 2020 numbers and SGOs have increased by a further 2% compared to 2020. Whilst there has been an increase in both Adoption Orders and SGOs in 2021/22 compared to 2020/21, 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 and CAOs. It is possible that historically the children who left care on an SGO may have been placed for adoption.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Adoptions Orders	70	46	34	23	28	34
Special Guardianship orders	26	33	18	31	37	46
Child Arrangement Orders	11	2	15	10	4	16

Last year there was a considerable decrease in the number of Agency Decisions being made, this is likely to be due to the delays within court processes as a result of Covid-19. However, as the courts have progressed matters, we can see an increase in the number of Agency Decisions being made this year with a rise to 36. 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.

Data for Adoption Orders granted in 2021/22:

Age at AO (Years)	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
Under 1	0	0%
1 to 4	23	68%
5 to 9	11	32%
10 to 15	0	0%
16 and over	0	0%
Total	34	100%

Ethnicity	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
White British	30	88%
White and Black Caribbean	3	9%
White Other	1	3%
Total	34	100%

Gender	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
M	24	71%
F	10	29%
Total	34	100%

Sibling Groups?	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
No	16	47%
Yes*	18	53%
Total	34	100%

* Refers to two sibling groups of 3 and six sibling group of 2 children

Of the 34 children who were adopted between April 2021 and March 2022, 24 were male (71%) and 10 (29%) were female. This is the largest split we have seen in the last 3 years (2020/21 was 57% male and 43% female and 2019/20 was 52% males and 48% female). The national data for this time period is not currently available.

It is evident from the chart above that the largest proportion (68%) of Warwickshire adoptions are for children aged 1 to 4 years old. In the year April 2021 to March 2022, 23 children adopted were aged between 1 and 4 years of age when the Adoption Order was granted and 11 were aged 5 to 9 years. There were no children under the age of 1 or over the age of 10 adopted in Warwickshire in 2021-2022.

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	2021/22
White British	41	26	27	28	16
White and Asian	2	0	1	0	0
Any other Mixed Background	3	0	0	0	0
Any other White Background	1	1	1	0	2
White and Black Caribbean	1	3	0	1	2
Any other Asian Background	1	0	0	0	0
White and Black African	0	1	0	0	2
Any other Ethnicity	0	0	1	0	0
Total	49	31	30	29	22

Of the 34 children who were adopted in 2021/22, 2 individual children were adopted by their foster carers, 1 couple were assessed by ACE as adopters and the other couple made a private application. These figures are in addition to the children who are placed in Fostering 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. Warwickshire continue to support foster carers through this process where it is assessed as being in the child's best interests.

Fostering for Adopt

Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, 6 children were placed for fostering in Fostering for Adoption placements and during the same time period 5 children who were in a Fostering for Adoption placement had their placement changed from a fostering placement to an adoptive placement. There has been a reduction in the use of Fostering for Adoption placements in line with a reduction in all adoptive placements however when this is the right plan for children Warwickshire continues to use

Fostering for Adoption placements to minimise disruption and change for our children and these placements are successful in securing positive outcomes for our children.

Children Awaiting a Match

There are 37 children who have an ADM decision but have not been placed or matched in comparison to 29 last year. This includes 15 children who do not have a Placement Order and are still in care proceedings where active family finding won't be taking place. This doesn't include the two children who are in an Fostering for Adoption Placement awaiting an ADM decision and formal match and have been discarded from this figure as they are both relinquished babies who don't have an adoption decision yet. The table below shows the breakdown of the status of children awaiting matches for the last 3 years.

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

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.

The number of children in Warwickshire who are awaiting a match has increased by 8, 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.

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

During 2021/22, 20 children had a Placement Order granted and were still awaiting a match (see breakdown table above). Please note, as of 31 March 2022, included in the 20 children is one child that was living in an FFA placement, and eight children were linked but had not yet attended matching panel. This leaves 11 children who we are actively family finding for at the end of 2021/22, inclusive of six Placement Orders granted in March 2022. The breakdown data of these children is shown below.

Age at 31/03/2022 (Years)	Children with PO not yet placed	%
Under 1	1	5%
1 to 4	13	65%
5 to 9	6	30%
10 to 15	0	0%
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	15	75%
White and Black Caribbean	2	10%
White and Black African	2	10%
Any other ethnicity	1	5%
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	7	35%
Yes*	13	65%
Total	20	100%

* Includes 5 sibling groups of 2 and 1 group of 3 however the sibling group of 3 were being adopted separately.

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 are for male children between the ages of one to four years old and for sibling groups. Of the twenty children with Placement Orders 6 are recorded as being slightly older aged five to nine. Therefore, alongside general family finding consideration should continue to be given to targeting adopters that can meet the needs of older children with experiences of trauma and more complex needs.

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, six children have been able to attend covid secure activity days on 5 separate occasions. One child attended 3 activity days within this year before a Change of Plan was considered.

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.

This year, ACE and Warwickshire have piloted Linking Meetings which take place 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.

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 8 children in 4 sibling groups of 2 between April 2021 and March 2022. In addition to these sibling groups, 2 other children were placed with adopters who had previously adopted a sibling and therefore grow up living with a brother or sister in their adoptive home. Given that sibling groups are amongst the "harder to place" groups this is extremely positive.

Warwickshire are in support of the exceptional payments which ACE make to support the placement of brothers and sisters together. This highlights Warwickshire's and ACE'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. It is extremely positive that over half of the children placed for adoption in Warwickshire this year were placed with their brothers and/or sisters and evidences the excellent working relationship between ACE and Warwickshire in securing permanency for our children.

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.

This year, of the 18 children placed with adopters, Warwickshire have needed to use 3 inter-agency adopters for 3 sibling groups of 2. The remaining 12 children were placed with ACE adopters (11 adoptive placements including 2 foster carers who were assessed by ACE). 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 good information sharing.

Disruptions

In the previous 12 months, Warwickshire has not experienced any adoption disruptions.

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 and representatives from ACE are invited to the panels.

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 has been in post for two years. 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. Warwickshire's three average for 2017-2020 remains lower than both the national average and the statistical neighbour's average in all areas.

The three year average of children entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (2017-2020) has decreased in Warwickshire by 16 days and remains below the same three year national average and statistical neighbours. However, the figure for 2021-22 shows a significant increase to 554 days (in comparison to 354 days in 2020-21).

As mentioned above, Warwickshire's three year average for the 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 2021/22 remains lower than the national and statistical neighbour's average. However, Warwickshire average for 2021/22 was 358 days (an increase from 306 days in 2020/21) which is higher than both Warwickshire's and the national three-year average for 2017-2020.

Warwickshire children adopted between April 2021 and March 2022 the average number of days between a child being granted a placement order and being matched to an adoptive family is 232 days which is a significant increase from the previous year which was 111 days however the three year average (2017-2020) remains below the three year national average. 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.

It is likely that some of this delay is as a result of the court delays due to the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to the court delays, the children who have been adopted this year includes 2 sibling groups of 3 children and 6 sibling groups of 2 children and a further 3 children with additional needs. It should be noted that 6 of the children were residing with their adopters for over 3 years before the Adoption Order was granted which will have greatly impacted on the average. Furthermore, one sibling group of 2 children had experienced a disruption in 2020 and therefore this has impacted on their timescales as this was their second adoptive home.

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 2021/22 (01/04/2021 - 31/03/2022)	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	<p>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 2021/22.</p> <p>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.</p>	554 days	327 days	367 days	346 days
A2: PO-Match	<p>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 2021/22.</p>	232 days	126 days	175 days	162 days
A20: BLA-PO	<p>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 2021/22.</p>	358 days	229 days	256 days	238 days

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 contact between brothers and sisters who do not live together in an innovative way which maintains positive family relationships.
- Offer permanency training to all social workers within Warwickshire
- Improve the standards of the Child Permanence Report in line with piloting the new version of the Child Permanence Report.
- 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.
- Continue to promote Fostering for Adoption and ensure social workers consider all alternative options and complete pre-birth assessments. This will ensure that permanence is considered at an early stage for children when this is appropriate.
- 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.

6. Appendices

1. [2021-2022 ACE Annual Report](#)
2. [2021-2022 ACE Panel Annual Report](#)