

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

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### 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 regularly 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
<b>Total No. of Placement Orders Granted</b>	31	30	29	22	21

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
<b>Adoptions Orders</b>	46	34	23	28	34	15
<b>Special Guardianship orders</b>	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%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>

Ethnicity	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
White British	15	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>

Gender	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
M	9	60.0%
F	6	40.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>

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

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.

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:**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21</b>

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
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>25*</b>

*\*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.



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%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100%</b>

Gender	Children with PO not yet placed	%
M	7	53.8%
F	6	46.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100%</b>

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

Disability	Children with PO not yet placed	%
No	13	100%
Yes	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* 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%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100%</b>

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	<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 2022/23.</p> <p><b>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.</b></p>	451 days	482 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 2022/23.</p>	239 days	198 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 2022/23.</p>	388 days	n/a	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 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)