

Annual Report of the Adoption Service 2023-2024 for Warwickshire County Council

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Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Local Authority Update.....	3
3. Service Activity.....	4
4. Service Performance.....	13
5. Service Plan 2020-2021	16
6. Appendices	16



1. Introduction

This is the Warwickshire County Council adoption service report for the period April 2023- March 2024. 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.

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.’

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
- Ensure post adoption support services to adoptive families are trauma informed and promote attachment between children and their adoptive parents.

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.
- Increase in the number of sibling groups placed for adoption, with a commitment to brothers and sisters living together where possible and appropriate.
- An increase in children over the age of 5 years being adopted.
- 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 have a positive working relationship with the Agency Decision Maker and ACE.
- We regularly review the children who have been subject to a Placement Order, or where it appears that adoption maybe the plan and meet regularly with representatives from ACE to discuss family finding.
- We have agreed to recruit a second permanency social worker, to progress permanency plans for children in a timely manner.

3. Service Activity

In summary, during 2023-24

- Last year 21 children were subject of the decision that they should be placed for adoption.
- 26 children were made subject to a Placement Order by the court.
- 24 children were matched with prospective adopters.
- 21 children were made subject to an Adoption Order by the court.
- 1 disruption happened.
- Change of Plans/ Review of Plans were completed which enabled alternative permanency options to be progressed.

Overall children's performance:

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of children adopted	34	15	21
Number of children placed with adopters	18	28	24
Number of children with an ADM & awaiting match	37	24*	30
Number of disruptions	0	3	1

**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 decreased slightly from the 28 placed in 22/23, however the number of children with an ADM decision awaiting a match increased in this period. Which means that we have a larger number of children awaiting adoption.

There has been an increase in the number of Adoption Orders being granted (6) with 21 of the 28 children placed for adoption in 22/23 being adopted during 23/24.

Given the increase in the number of children who had an ADM agreement who were waiting a match, it should therefore be assumed that if we are successful in identifying matches for these children the number of children adopted in 24/25 should increase.

As shown below, there have been 26 Placement Orders secured in the last 12 months, which is the highest number since 20/21. National figures for adoption are not yet available for 23/24, however the figures at the end of 2023 showed a 2% decrease from 2022 of children being adopted. The number of SGO's granted in 23/24 is the lowest it has been since 2018/19.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total No. of Placement Orders Granted	30	29	22	21	26

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Adoptions Orders	34	23	28	34	15	21
Special Guardianship orders	18	31	37	46	36	28

Data for Adoption Orders granted in 2023/24:

Ethnicity	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
White British	19	90%
White and Black African	2	10%
Total	21	100%

Age at AO (Years)	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
Under 1	0	0%
1 to 4	10	48%
5 to 9	11	52%
10 to 15	0	0%
16 and over	0	0%
Total	21	100%

Gender	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
M	12	57%
F	9	43%
Total	21	100%

Sibling Groups?	Total No. of AOs Granted	%
No	10	48%
Yes*	11	52%
Total	21	100%

Of the 21 children who were adopted between April 2023 and March 2024, 12 were male (57%) and 9 (43%) were female. This is similar to 22/23 and 21/22 figures where there were more male children adopted than female children. The national data for this period is not currently available.

It is evident from the chart above that the largest proportion of Warwickshire adoptions are for children aged 5 to 9 years which is a change from last year when it was age 1 to 4 years. This shows Warwickshire's commitment to identifying adopters for older children, but can also be attributed to some delays in achieving adoption orders where adoptive families have required additional support prior to making their adoption application. In the year April 2023 to March 2024, 11 children were aged 5 to 9 years and 10 children were aged between 1 and 4 years of age when the Adoption Order was granted. There were 0 children under the age of 1 adopted and there were no adoptions for children over the age of 10 adopted in Warwickshire in 2023-2024. Given that 0 children were adopted under the age of 1 year this does highlight further work required to ensure that early permanence through foster to adopt is considered whenever appropriate.

There continues to be a clear majority of White British children being adopted in Warwickshire, 90% 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	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
White British	27	28	16	21	19
White and Asian	1	0	0	0	0
Any other Mixed Background	0	0	0	0	3
Any other White Background	1	0	2	0	1
White and Black Caribbean	0	1	2	0	1
Black - African	0	0	0	0	2
White and Black African	0	0	2	0	0
Any other Ethnicity	1	0	0	0	0
Total	31	30	29	21	26

Of the 21 children who were adopted in 2023/24, 15 were placed with Ace adopters and 5 through interagency adoption, with 1 child being adopted by their foster carer.

However of the 21 children placed for adoption (some have not yet obtained Adoption Orders) 12 (57.1%) were placed with Ace adopters and 9 (42.9%) were placed with interagency adopters which is a significant increase on previous years.

Foster For Adopt

Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, 4 children were placed for fostering in Foster For Adoption placements. This is a decrease of 2 from 22/23. 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 and Through care panel, and has been used successfully when previous adoptions have disrupted or there has been a need to move a child from their foster placement urgently to avoid children experiencing several moves.

Children Awaiting a Match

There are 32 children who have an ADM decision but have not been placed or matched in comparison to 25 last year. This includes 10 children who do not have a Placement Order and are

still in care proceedings where active family finding won't be taking place. The number of children with a Placement Order who are awaiting a match has increased this year from 12 to 19.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Awaiting Match - No Placement Order	6	13	10	10
Awaiting Match - With Placement Order	16	19	12	19
In FFA Placement - Awaiting Formal Match (with Placement Order)	1	1	1	2
In FFA Placement - Awaiting Formal Match (No Placement Order)	2	2	1	0
In FFA Placement - Awaiting Formal Match & ADM Decision	0	2	0	0
Awaiting Change of Plan	3	2	1	1
Awaiting Private Adoption Order	1	0	0	0
Total	29	39	25*	32

**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.

Age at 31/03/2024 (Years)	Children with PO not yet placed	%
Under 1	5	22%
1 to 4	13	56%
5 to 9	5	22%
10 to 15	0	0%
16 and over	0	0%
Total	23	100%

Gender	Children with PO not yet placed	%
M	9	39
F	14	61
Total	23	100%

Disability	Children with PO not yet placed	%
No	22	96%
Yes	1	4%
Total	23	100%

Sibling Groups?	Children with PO not yet placed	%
No	11	48%
Yes*	12	52%
Total	23	100%

Ethnicity	Children with PO not yet placed	%
White British	18	78%
Black African	1	4%
White and Black Caribbean	1	4%
Mixed Other	3	13%
Total	23	100%

The data for children awaiting a match is different this year in that over the previous 3 years the highest number of children waiting for a placement to be identified was males, In 23/24 it is females at 61%. 52% of the children waiting a match are part of a sibling group and this underlines the challenges in identifying adopters for siblings.

78% of children with a Placement Order but no match yet were aged under 5 years (some of these children are part of a sibling group) this is reviewed regularly with Ace to understand why young children are waiting for placements to be identified and what family finding is taking place.

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.

Linking Meetings 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. Of the 21 children adopted in 23/24, 8 children were siblings, 4 sibling groups of 2.

If brothers and sisters are not able to be adopted together careful consideration is given to how the sibling relationship can be best maintained through both direct and indirect contact.



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.

Of the Adoption Orders made in 23/24 5 children were placed with interagency carers, and of the 21 children placed in this period 9 were placed with interagency carers (some will be children adopted in this period).

Disruptions

In the previous 12 months, Warwickshire has experienced 1 adoption disruptions, this is a decrease on the previous year when there were 3 disruptions.

Disruption meetings are held for all children where there is a disruption 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 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. A decision had been made to recruit an additional post to support driving forward permanence plans at the earliest opportunity and this post is being currently recruited to.

4. Service Performance

A10. Average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	5 Year ACE Average 2019-24	2020-23 England average (Provisional Coram-I Data)
Warwickshire	344	354	554	451	567	457	482 days

The average time of a child entering care and moving in with it's adoptive family has increased significantly this year to 567 days an increase of 116 days from 2022/23, some of this can be attributed to delays in court hearings however



A2. 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

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	5 Year ACE Average 2019-24	2020-23 England average (Provisional Coram-I Data)
Warwickshire	159	111	232	239	210	187	198

** 3 year average - provisional data from Coram-i*

In 23/24 there has been an improvement in the time it has taken between Warwickshire receiving court authority to place a child and the Local Authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family this remains about the 2020-23 England average of 198 days.

It is recognised that when placing sibling groups and older children it may be harder to identify suitable families who can meet their needs, and the increase in interagency adopters will have impacted on this figure given that an inhouse ACE adopter is sought first. Reducing the time, it takes to match a child is a key area that we will work with ACE on in 24/25.

5. Service Plan 2023-2024

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:

- Ensuring that careful consideration is given to placing brothers and sisters together wherever possible. When children cannot live together we will continue to promote 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.
- 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 Foster For Adoption, to 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.
- Reduce timescales in identifying families for children once the Placement Order has been granted.

6. Appendices

1. ACE Annual Report 2023-2024
2. Adoption Panel Report 2023-24