

# Public Document Pack



Coventry City Council

## Agenda

### Cabinet Member (Children and Young People)

#### **Time and Date**

10.00 am on Wednesday, 23rd September, 2020

#### **Place**

This meeting will be held remotely. The meeting can be viewed live by pasting this link into your browser:  
<https://youtu.be/3owNV2z9vxA>

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#### **Public Business**

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interests**
3. **Minutes** (Pages 3 - 4)
  - (a) To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 17 February, 2020
  - (b) Matters Arising
4. **Coventry Fostering Service Annual Report 2019-20** (Pages 5 - 16)  
Report of the Director of Children's Services
5. **Coventry City Council Annual Adoption Report** (Pages 17 - 98)  
Report of the Director of Children's Services
6. **Corporate Parenting Board - Activity Report 2019-20** (Pages 99 - 106)  
Report of the Director of Children's Services
7. **Outstanding Issues Report**  
There are no outstanding issues
8. **Any Other Business**  
To consider any other items of business which the Cabinet Member decides to take as a matter of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

#### **Private Business**

Nil

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Julie Newman, Director of Law and Governance, Council House Coventry

Tuesday, 15 September 2020

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Usha Patel, Governance Services Tel: 024 7697 2301

Membership: Councillor: B Gittins (Deputy Cabinet Member) and P Seaman (Cabinet Member)

By invitation: Councillor J Lepoidevin

If you require a British Sign Language interpreter for this meeting  
OR if you would like this information in another format or  
language please contact us.

**Usha Patel**  
**Tel: 024 7697 2301**  
**Email: [usha.patel@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:usha.patel@coventry.gov.uk)**

# Agenda Item 3

## Coventry City Council

### Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Children and Young People held at 1.00 pm on Monday, 17 February 2020

Present:

Members: Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member)

Councillor J Lepoidevin (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Councillor B Gittins (Deputy Cabinet Member)

Employees (by  
Directorate):

People: K Robinson

Place: K Northmore (Work Experience), U Patel

## **Public Business**

### **30. Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **31. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January, 2020 were agreed and signed as a true copy. There were no matters arsing.

### **32. Pathways to Care Capital Funding Approval Policy**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive which presented the Pathways to Care Capital Funding Approval Policy.

The City Council identifies a given amount of capital budget each year to facilitate permanence for children and where appropriate, to increase internal fostering capacity. The policy identified the criteria for these monies to be allocated and the processes that would be followed to ensure robust management oversight.

Pathways to Care is the name given to an amount of capital budget set aside by the City Council on an annual basis to support permanence of looked after children cared for by the City Council, facilitate increases to capacity within existing internal fostering provision or to purchase a larger vehicle where specific criteria are met. The policy outlines the criteria used for the allocation of funds, the processes that need to be followed when making payments and the criteria that would be used to recoup funds if circumstances change.

The policy brings together existing practise to make sure all relevant professionals understand it and the criteria is applied in a fair and transparent way.

**RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member approves the Pathways to Care Capital Funding Approval Policy.**

**33. Outstanding Issues Report**

There were no outstanding issues.

**34. Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 1.35 pm)



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Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

23 September 2020

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People - Councillor Pat Seaman

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Director of Children Services

**Ward(s) affected:**

None

**Title:**

**Coventry Fostering Service Annual Report 2019/20**

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**Is this a key decision?**

**No**

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**Executive Summary:**

The purpose of this report is to inform the Cabinet Member about the work undertaken by the Fostering Service between April 2019 and March 2020.

The performance of Coventry's Fostering Service is critical to delivery of high-quality local placements that can meet the diverse needs of Coventry's looked after children.

The report summarises the activity of the service over the past 12 months. It highlights the continuing success of the service in increasing both the number and the proportion of looked after children who are placed with foster carers approved by Coventry City Council as part of the ongoing work of the Fostering Transformation Project. It also highlights the ongoing development of the work of the Connected Persons Teams.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. The Fostering Service Annual Report 2019/20 is accepted.**

**Other useful background papers:**

- None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

- No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

- Yes – Corporate Parenting Board

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title: Coventry Fostering Service 2019/20**

## **1. Context (or background)**

- 1.1 This report considers the activity by the Coventry Fostering Service during the year April 2019 to March 2020.
- 1.2 Coventry City Council is committed to ensuring that, wherever possible, children are supported to live with their birth parents. Where this has not been possible and children become looked after, it is preferable that they are placed within a family setting. It is the aim of the council that wherever possible this will be within a foster placement approved by Coventry rather than through commissioning an external placement. Through guidance on delegated authority, there is a recognition that foster carers should be empowered to take on the day to day tasks of parenting in the same way as any good parent would
- 1.3 Foster care is subject to legislative and regulatory guidance through, The Children Act 1989, The Fostering Regulations 2011 and the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011. It is further regulated through the Care Planning, Placement and Case Regulations 2010. The regulatory framework for fostering sets out the minimum standards expected to ensure that the care provided by foster carers is adequate to ensure that those children placed within fostering placements are well cared for and achieve good outcomes.
- 1.4 Fostering placements are referred to as either mainstream or connected persons. Connected persons fostering refers to those households who offer to provide care to a child known to them, usually a relative. Mainstream foster care refers to a range of households who apply to become foster carers for children not known to them. Mainstream foster carers include those offering both long-and short-term care and those who provide respite care. Mainstream carers can be approved to care for between 1 and 3 children at a time and can care for children throughout the age range.
- 1.5 The Fostering Service sits within Children's Services as part of the Looked After Children service. It is comprised of 5 teams and has responsibility for the recruitment, assessment and support of foster carers and the assessment and support of Special Guardians.
- 1.6 A fifth team was created in April 2019 to increase the capacity for connected persons assessment and to enable those who support and supervise connected persons foster carers and Special Guardians to specialise in this work. There has been a significant rise in the proportion of children cared for in these types of placements in the past 4 years and combining the supervision of these households has enabled greater focus in the mainstream support team on growing in house mainstream capacity. In addition to the social work teams there is a Recruitment and Development Officer and a Panel Advisor both of which report to the Operational Lead.
- 1.7 An additional role of Placements Liaison Officer was also created in April 2019 to support the efficient matching of in house foster carers to children requiring a foster placement. This role has supported the service to significantly increase occupancy rates of in-house household since its creation.

The Fostering Transformation Project has been ongoing since April 2016. The Transformation Project targets were updated and extended in both February 2019 and April 2020 and the current target for the Fostering Transformation Project is to have 286 occupied internal mainstream placements by 01/04/2021. The aim of the project is both to enable more looked after children to be placed within or close to Coventry and to decrease the reliance on more expensive externally commissioned placements.

- 1.9 The number of children placed in internal mainstream placements rose from 225 on 31/3/19 to 259 on 31/3/20. This is a 4th annual rise in this number from a baseline of 149 in April 2016.
- 1.10 At the end of March 2020, there were 698 looked after children. Of the 698 children 504 children were placed in foster care of which 357 were placed with Coventry foster carers compared with 314 at the end of March 2019. This equates to 71% of those children in foster care. 147 children were placed with independent fostering agencies and this is a further reduction from the compared with the 183 on 31/3/19. Of the total number of looked after children 51.1% are with Coventry foster carers. This is a further improvement in this percentage from a baseline in March 2015 when only 22.8% were placed in internal foster care.

#### **1.11 Marketing, Recruitment and Mainstream Approvals**

- 1.12 The Fostering Recruitment and Development Officer continues to drive Coventry's innovative approach to recruiting foster carers. The service took part in a 3rd regional recruitment film project across the West Midlands in May 2019. The Recruitment and Development Officer continues to chair the West Midlands Fostering Recruitment Forum and hosts a nationwide social media network for local authority fostering recruitment workers.
- 1.13 Alongside digital marketing, there is on-going activity to strengthen relationships with business partners, faith and community groups to broaden the opportunities to recruit foster carers. This has included both work with a number of churches and other faith groups and attendance at Coventry Pride and Godiva festivals. A specific recruitment event was hosted in May 2019 to recruit foster carers from Coventry's Polish Community. During the past 12 months, the Fostering Service has initiated regular informal drop in recruitment sessions at both a local coffee shop and a local LGBT venue. The team has quickly adjusted in light of Covid 19 to host recruitment events online with live, interactive sessions with members of the recruitment team. These are advertised on all our online platforms.

- 1.14 Coventry has a strong social media presence established with interactions from media and existing carers. Recruitment activity has included extensive use of social media such Facebook and Twitter.

Our online content on the website is regularly updated.

- 1.15 The following table provides statistics for patterns over time in relation to the recruitment of mainstream foster carers:

Mainstream carers	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Approved households	148	152	170	184	187
Number of initial enquiries	312	387	703	815	609
Assessments started at stage 1	112	186	143	151	91
Assessments commencing to stage 2	39	66	61	58	58
Number of households approved	20	25	31	33	21
Conversion Rate - Enquiry to full assessment	13%	17%	9%	4.4%	9.5%
Conversion rate – stage 2 assessment to approval	51%	38%	51%	57%	36%
Conversion rate enquiry to approval	6%	6%	4%	4.04%	3.4%

- 1.16 In the period between April 2019 and March 2020 there was a significant decrease in the number of enquiries to the Fostering Service. Work is underway to explore the reasons for this change and refresh and update the marketing strategy. However, the Marketing and Recruitment Officer was absent from work between November 2018 and May 2019 which is likely to have been a contributing factor.
- 1.17 In the same period, though, there has also been a drop in the conversion rate from enquiry to approval.
- 1.18 The conversion rate between full assessment commencing and approval has also decreased significantly. An analysis of the factors contributing to this decrease will be undertaken by September 2020.
- 1.19 There was a rise in the percentage of foster carers from a BAME background approved by Coventry City Council from 13% to 15%. However, this is still lower than the percentage of looked after children from a BAME background which is approximately 30%. There is ongoing focus on this area in our marketing strategy.
- 1.20 There was a reduction in the number of new fostering households approved during 2019-20 from previous years. However, the impact of this on overall service targets was offset by increases in occupancy of approved fostering placements.

#### 1.21 Occupancy of Mainstream Placements

Coventry's mainstream foster carers now provide an average of 1.8 approved placements per household. The total number of approved placements on 31/3/20 was 330. Over the past 12 months, the Fostering Service has focused on increasing the percentage of these available placements which are occupied by children needing a placement.

This percentage has risen from 66% on 31/3/19 to 78% on 31/3/20.

- 1.22 The increase in occupancy is a result of carers being supported and developed to care for a larger number and greater range of young people and are being more actively engaged in the fostering task. The creation of the Placements Liaison Officer role alongside the close working between the Fostering Service and the Placements Team have been significant contributors to this development.

1.23 In January 2020, the Pathways to Care policy was updated. This policy provides a measure of financial support to be made available to local authority foster carers to both secure permanence for children and increase mainstream fostering capacity.

#### 1.24 **Connected Persons Fostering**

The number of children cared for in a connected persons fostering arrangement approved by Coventry City Council has risen significantly in the past 4 years. This trend continued in 2019/20 with 86 children being cared for in this way on 1/4/19 and 98 on 1/4/20.

The growth in this number is now beginning to stabilise and the service is actively promoting legal permanence through Special Guardianship for children for whom this is the preferred outcome.

#### 1.25 **Foster Carer Retention**

In 2019-20 18 mainstream fostering households ceased to foster. No foster carers chose to transfer to an independent fostering agency. One chose to move to a neighbouring local fostering service.

The retention of foster carers is kept under regular review and all those who choose to move on are offered an exit interview with a manager in the service.

Reason	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Permanence plan for child (including Staying Put)	2	0	1	2	4
Transfer to another LA fostering service	1	0	1	1	1
Transfer to an independent fostering agency	0	0	0	0	0
Personal circumstances e.g. separation, bereavement, retirement	12	19	12	10	12
Dissatisfied with quality of service	1	0	0	0	0
Safeguarding (Termination)	0	0	0	0	0
Resigned prior to quality of care and safeguarding issues	4	1	0	2	1
Other – including death	0	1	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>

1.26 No carer has cited dissatisfaction with the support provided by the service as a reason for them ceasing to foster. The majority (89%) of those who have ceased to foster have done so due to retirement, changes in circumstances or because they have continued to care for a previously fostered child under a different arrangement.

1.27 Of those foster carers approved by Coventry 4 households transferred from fostering from an independent fostering agency. This represents 19% of total mainstream fostering approvals.

#### 1.28 **Support to Foster Carers**

1.29 The service has continued to focus on the consistency of support given to foster carers through ensuring consistency of the supervisory relationship, regular visiting patterns and that annual reviews of the foster carer's work take place.

1.30 The Annual Foster Carers' Conference took place on 16/5/19. This included both a key note speech and a choice of workshops as well as an opportunity for foster carers to meet directly both with each other and a number of those who provide services which they and the fostered children access.

- 1.31 The service produces a monthly Foster Carer Newsletter providing up to date and relevant information. This includes contributions from a range of partners including a regular section produced by the Foster Carers Association.
- 1.32 Events where the service and council acknowledges the valuable work of foster carers in meeting the needs of looked after children have been held during 2019/20. These have included a regular welcome event for newly approved foster carers, an annual recognition event and a seasonal celebration.
- 1.33 The service also provides support to the birth children of foster carers through sons and daughters events. These events are held twice a year and provide the opportunity for children who are part of a fostering family to spend time together both having fun and having the opportunity to get support from others in a similar position to themselves.
- 1.34 The service provides an 'out of hours' telephone support for foster carers at all times - outside office hours through the fostering service on call rota.
- 1.35 The service runs a monthly support group for connected persons foster carers and Special Guardians alongside regular social events for those carers and their households.
- 1.36 The service has been developing a formal buddy scheme for foster carers to receive support from one another which launches in May 2020.
- 1.37 All foster carers approved by Coventry City Council are provided with membership of the Fostering Network. This membership includes access to the Fostering Network's independent Advice and Mediation service.

#### **1.38 Training and Development of Foster Carers**

Foster Carer Training is provided through the council's Organisational Development Team. This includes both mandatory courses ensuring that foster carers have the training necessary to undertake their role and more in-depth training for those carers who want to develop particular specialisms or a deeper knowledge of a subject area, for example attachment or caring for teenagers.

- 1.39 The Fostering Service contributes to monthly meetings to plan and coordinate the training offer. These meetings also include a foster carer representative. This ensures that foster carers' views directly influence the training provided. This year, for example, as a result of feedback the structure and content of the first aid training was reviewed and foster carers have reported finding the revised course significantly more useful to them.
- 1.40 The Fostering Service has supplemented the training offer for foster carers by providing a range of developmental activities for foster carers including presentations at support groups and learning resources. Workshops have also been provided on topics such as adverse childhood experiences and social pedagogy.
- 1.41 The service also continues to run regular refresher training for those foster carers who have completed the mandatory training. Foster carers are expected to undertake this every 3 years in order to keep up to date with their practise.
- 1.42 Preparation and training groups have been held for all prospective mainstream foster carers. The training, which is delivered by the fostering team involves foster carers as well as care leavers. Connected persons foster carers are also invited to attend this training. The introduction of the use of a virtual reality training package as part of this training has been very well received by course attendees.

1.43 The service continues to support newly approved foster carers in completing the mandatory Training Support and Development Standards (TSD). There is an adapted version of these standards for connected persons foster carers and there is an expectation that any connected person carer completes this within 18 months of approval.

1.44 The service produces a monthly Foster Carer Newsletter providing up to date and relevant information. This includes contributions from a range of partners including a regular section produced by the Foster Carers Association.

#### **1.45 The Foster Carer Association**

1.46 All Coventry approved foster carers are members of the Coventry Foster Carer Association although participation is voluntary. The Foster Carer Association meet monthly and feedback the views of foster carers to the service on a regular basis. The association is consulted on changes to practice and contributes to a range of service activities such as foster carer training, the welcome event for new foster carers, interviews for new staff members and co facilitating training for foster carers and applicants. A foster carer also sits on the governing body of Coventry's virtual school.

1.47 The Foster Carer Association support Coventry's foster carers through hosting a social media group, running support groups for foster carers and hosting social events. In August 2019, the Foster Carer Association ran a camping weekend which was open to all fostering households.

1.48 The Foster Carer Association has requested that members are more routinely consulted by the wider Children's Services and this is being carried forward through consultations about the provision of CAMHS services to Looked After Children and through consultation about the commissioned arrangement for supervised family time for fostered children.

1.49 The Foster Carer Association annual general meeting was due to take place in March 2020 and was postponed as a result of Covid 19 lockdown measures. As a result, the association is currently dormant. It is hoped a new committee can be elected as lockdown eases.

#### **1.50 Fostering Panel**

1.51 Maria Hunt was appointed as Fostering Panel Chair in February 2019 and continues to fulfil this role. Siobhan Haney continues to act as Fostering Panel Vice chair and a second vice chair, Sharon Chetwynd, was appointed in February 2020. Fostering Panel business continues to be busy with the Panel meeting on 41 occasions. Panels, alongside the new mainstream applications, reviewed 51 connected persons fostering assessments, 15 long term fostering matches and 67 foster carer annual reviews. Panel was quorate on each occasion.

1.52 The Panel Advisor takes the lead in co-ordinating the recruitment, induction and annual appraisal of panel members. During 2019-20 she also arranged 2 training days for panel members alongside facilitating their private study through sharing information from guidance and research with panel members.

1.53 The Panel provides the service with detailed feedback on the quality of the work discussed and has noted continued improvements in the quality of the work presented by members of the service. The Panel has, however, raised issues around the quality of connected persons assessment reports that have been externally commissioned.

1.54 Feedback to the Panel from those attending continues to demonstrate that they experience a positive and welcoming meeting in which information is considered fairly.

#### **1.55 Fostering Schemes**

- 1.56 The Next Steps fostering scheme was launched in May 2018 to provide intensively supported fostering placements to those children who might otherwise be placed in a children's home
- 1.57 . Recruitment to the scheme continues and has been slower than the target set with 3 foster carers having participated in it to date and 1 deciding in August 2019 to return to mainstream fostering. However, the 2 existing placements supported through the scheme remain stable which has meant significantly improved outcomes for the children placed with Next Steps carers.
- 1.58 The Fostering Service also runs an out of hours fostering scheme to provide placements to those children who need these in an emergency outside office hours. There has been active recruitment to this scheme to develop its ability to provide sufficient placements for these children. However, demand for these placements is still greater than availability.

#### **1.59 Service Performance**

- 1.60 During the past twelve months, regular meetings have taken place across the service to consider the specific issues for fostering best practice. The topics for these meetings have included the regulatory and inspection framework for fostering work and learning from serious case reviews which involve foster carers.
- 1.61 The Insight and LCS teams have also worked closely with the service to produce regular performance reports and to ensure that everyone in the service and those in professional support fully understand the electronic case recording system.
- 1.62 The Fostering Service actively participates in both regional and national forums to promote improvements in our support to fostered children. The Operational Lead chairs the West Midlands Regional Forum for local authority fostering registered managers.

#### **1.63 The Impact of Covid 19**

- 1.64 At the end of the period covered by this annual report, central government instituted the national lockdown measures as a result of the global Covid 19 pandemic. The long- term impacts of this on the Fostering Service are yet to be determined.
- 1.65 However, to date there have been a number of areas in which the lockdown has affected the service and our foster carers.

##### **These include:**

- Additional pressure on fostering households as children are spending more time at home.
- Adjustment to undertaking many activities including meetings, visits and Fostering Panel through virtual platforms.
- Changes to arrangements for children to see their families.
- Reduction in the availability of fostering vacancies as foster carers are unable to include new fostered children in their households due to health vulnerabilities.
- A period of around 6 weeks in which new enquiries to foster slowed significantly.

#### **1.66 Future Priorities**

##### **Priorities for service going forward are:**

- Continuing work to increase the proportion of looked after children placed in an in-house fostering placement.
- Maintain an assertive and robust focus on marketing, recruitment and assessment of foster carers.

- Review and focus on the effectiveness of recruitment of foster carers from diverse backgrounds.
- Maximise the capacity of internal foster carers and increase the children placed in internally.
- Undertake an analysis of conversion rates between enquiry and approval.
- Extend the range of in-house fostering provision to include increased availability for parent and child placements and placements for children with complex additional needs.
- Recruit further carers to the in house out of hours rota of foster carers to ensure placements are available as needed outside office hours.
- Continue to review and strengthen the training and development offer to foster carers.
- Continue to work with children's teams to focus on permanence and placement stability.
- Continue to ensure that where appropriate looked after children are placed in connected persons care and that, where they are these arrangements are well assessed and supported.
- Review and improve the quality of recording undertaken in the service.
- Work with commissioning colleagues to improve the quality of assessments that are completed on a sessional basis.
- Continue to grow and develop the buddy scheme for foster carers.
- Ensure foster carers are consulted about all changes that affect their role.

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

2.1 That the Fostering Report 2019/20 is accepted.

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

3.1 Not applicable.

## **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

4.1 Not applicable.

## **5. Comments from Director of Finance & Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance**

Financial implications

### **5.1 In-House Fostering Fees Outturn 2010/20**

	<b>2018/19 £000</b>	<b>2019/20 £000</b>
<b>Budget</b>	5,932	5,566
<b>Expenditure</b>	4,719	5,435

Internal fostering continues to be one of the most cost-effective placements for Looked After Children, on a unit cost basis. Expenditure is increasing as part of the Children's Transformation Programme. This enables savings in other areas, specifically the external placements budget, which are significantly in excess of the additional spend on in-house

fostering. The budget will increase as appropriate in future years to reflect increases targets. Additional resources will also be made available as necessary to expand the internal Fostering Team to support the increasing numbers of foster carers.

Fostering fees for 2019/20 were increased by 2% from 2018/19 levels in order to recognise the impact of inflation and to ensure that our rates remain competitive with those of surrounding local authorities.

#### Legal implications

5.2 The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 state that the fostering service provider must compile a written statement in relation to the fostering service ("the statement of purpose") which consists of—

- (a) a statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service, and
- (b) a statement as to the services and facilities (including any parent and child arrangements) provided by the fostering service.

The fostering service provider must provide a copy of the statement of purpose to the Chief Inspector, place a copy on their website (if they have one), and make copies available, upon request, to—

- (a) any person working for the purposes of the fostering service,
- (b) any foster parent or prospective foster parent of the fostering service,
- (c) any child placed with a foster parent by the fostering service, and
- (d) the parent of any such child.

Under Statutory Guidance the fostering service must compile a Statement of Purpose, which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole, and the services, and facilities which are provided (including the provision of any "parent and child arrangements"). The statement must be reviewed and updated as necessary, but at least annually and published on the provider's website (if they have one), with a copy provided to Ofsted.

The statement of purpose is placed on the Coventry City Council website and can be accessed through the link:

[https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/31786/fostering\\_service\\_statement\\_of\\_purpose](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/31786/fostering_service_statement_of_purpose)

### 6. Other Implications

#### 6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan ([www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/))?

The Fostering Service contributes to the wellbeing of children through arranging for a fostering placement for a child whose own family is unable to provide care. It supports a key element of Corporate Parenting – that of securing appropriate family placements for 'Looked After Children' (LAC), as an effective means of giving them the best life chances possible.

#### 6.2 How is risk being managed?

This risk is being managed through both management oversight in the Looked After Service, participation in the Placements Board which reports to the Transformation Board. This provides robust challenge to the delivery against the targets set for the service, in examining the increase in foster carer households and occupancy of approved beds.

#### 6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

An effective Fostering Service ensures that looked after children are well cared for and promotes their best outcomes. Enabling more fostered children to be placed with internal foster carers and children placed internally will reduce the need for more costly external placements and enable looked after children to be placed closer to their home.

#### 6.4 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

An Equality Impact Needs Assessment is to be updated in August 2020.

#### 6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None.

#### 6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None.

##### Report author(s):

###### Name and job title:

**Katherine Robinson, Operational Lead Fostering**

###### Directorate: People

**Tel and email contact:** 024 7683 1873 and [katherine.robinson@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:katherine.robinson@coventry.gov.uk)

Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

Contributor/approver name	Title	Service Area	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Katherine Robinson	Operational Lead	Fostering Service		20 July 2020
Paul Smith	Strategic Lead	LAC Service		27 July 2020
Jeanette Ollive	Project Manager	Transformation		
Usha Patel	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	09.09.2020	09.09.2020
Bonita Moulton	Team Manager (Support)	Fostering Service		20 July 2020
Claire Brown	Team Manager (Support)	Fostering Service		20 July 2020
Zelma Van Rhyn	Team Manager (Recruitment)	Fostering Service		20 July 2020
Jo Smith	Team Manager (Assessment)	Fostering Service		20 July 2020
Debbie Corkett	Fostering Panel Advisor	Fostering Service		20 July 2020
Rachel Brown	Fostering Recruitment & Development Officer	Fostering Service		20 July 2020
Other members				
<b>Names of approvers for submission:</b>				
<b>Finance:</b> Nicola David	Lead Accountant	Finance		20 July 2020
<b>Finance:</b> Rachael Sugars	Finance Manager	Finance		20 July 2020
<b>Legal:</b> Julie Newman	Director	Law and Governance		8 September 2020
<b>Director:</b> John Gregg	Director	Children's Services		27 July 2020
<b>Member:</b> Councillor P Seamen	Cabinet Member	Children & Young People		

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# Agenda Item 5



Coventry City Council

**Public report**  
Cabinet Member Report

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People  
Corporate Parenting Board

23 September 2020  
24 September 2020

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Children and Young People Cabinet Member - Cllr P Seaman

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Director of Children's Services

**Ward(s) affected:**

None

**Title:**

*Coventry City Council Annual Adoption Report*

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**Is this a key decision?**

No - although the proposals affect more than two electoral wards, the impact is not expected to be significant.

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**Executive Summary:**

The Annual Adoption Report is required by National Minimum Standards, which are applicable to the provision of Adoption Services. The National Minimum Standards form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 in relation to the conduct of Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Services. It is crucial that the adoption performance in Coventry is examined on an annual basis to ensure that children who are adopted get the best possible outcomes.

**Recommendations:**

Cabinet Member is requested to:

- 1) Analyse and endorse the work completed in this area of work.

**List of Appendices included:**

**Coventry City Council Annual Adoption Report**

**ACE Annual Report**

**Annual Adoption Panel Chair Report.**

**Background papers:**

None.

**Other useful documents**

None.

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No.

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

Yes –Corporate Parenting Board on 24 September 2020.

**Will this report go to Council?**

No.

## **1. Context (or background)**

1.1 Each local authority in England is obliged by National Minimum Standards to formally approve the statement of purpose and children's guides, and to review these at least annually. This Annual Report is provided to meet this obligation. Coventry City Council is currently in a partnership arrangement with a Regional Adoption Agency. This is Adoption Central England (ACE). This is a shared services arrangement hosted by Warwickshire County Council. ACE is responsible for recruiting and assessing adoptive families. It is also involved in matching children with adopters in partnership with the child's social worker. ACE is also responsible for administering the Adoption Panel. Therefore, the annual report consists of a report from Coventry City Council regarding children, a report from ACE regarding adopters and a report from ACE written by the Adoption Panel Chair.

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

Cabinet Member is requested to:

Analyse and endorse the work completed in this area of work.

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

3.1 Consultation occurs on several levels with children and adopters. This work is documented within the body of the appendices where appropriate.

## **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

4.1 This is an annual report and work will continue in this area over the next 12 months.

## **5. Comments from Director of Finance and Director of Law and Governance**

### **5.1 Financial implications**

Costs relating to the children are held within Coventry City Council's budgets, in the LAC and Permanence teams. These are managed through the usual internal budgetary control process and there are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

Costs relating to the services provided by ACE are governed via the legal host agreement between Coventry City Council and ACE which includes comprehensive funding arrangements. Any changes to these arrangements must be agreed by the Executive Board, of which Coventry is a member.

Coventry City Council's contribution to ACE in 2019/20 was £895,909, a reduction of £27,500 from the previous year. Both 2018/19 and 2019/20 resulted in underspends for ACE. Under the terms of the funding arrangements this must be kept in a ringfenced reserve and a proportion of which must

be returned to partners if it reaches a predetermined level. Therefore, as a result of the underspends Coventry City Council will receive a one-off ACE dividend of £100,000 during the financial year 2020/21.

Financial arrangements are kept under review and monitored closely by the ACE Executive Board, along with finance representatives from each partner authority.

## 5.2 Legal implications

The National Minimum Standards (NMS), provided by the Department for Education, as of July 2014, set out the standards of service to be provided. The NMS are issued by the Secretary of State, pursuant to ss 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, and are issued for use by Ofsted, which are then taken into account for the purpose of inspections. The relevant provisions, as set out in Standard 18 of the NMS are:

- 18.1. The adoption agency and adoption support agency has a clear statement of purpose which is available to and understood by staff, volunteers, children, birth parents and guardians, prospective adopters and adopters, and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance.
- 18.2. The aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose should be outcome focussed and, for adoption agencies, show how the service will meet outcomes for children.
- 18.3. The adoption agency /registered person of the adoption support agency formally approves the statement of purpose and children's guides and reviews them at least annually.
- 18.4. The agency's policies, procedures and any written guidance to staff and volunteers accurately reflect the statement of purpose.

Additionally, Standard 25.6 of the NMS provides that the executive side of the local authority, the voluntary adoption agency's/Adoption Support Agency's provider/trustees, board members or management committee members are to:

receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every six months, to monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users, and to satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

The reports contained at Appendices are provided in compliance with the NMS.

## 6. Other implications

### 6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan ([www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/))?

The service contributes the Council Plan in the following ways:

- Locally committed- adoption contributes to keeping children safe from harm, particularly in the light of early permanence. It gives children a family where they get the best start in life

- Delivering our priorities with fewer resources- children are at the heart of the customer journey. Sharing services gives a more cost-effective service. Working with partners in ACE across the sub-region makes sure that good practice is shared and enhances problem solving. This in turn improves outcomes for children
- Managing performance and measuring progress- the Annual Adoption Report documents performance and progress of the service.

## **6.2 How is risk being managed?**

Risks are monitored in real time. This includes care planning for children and an Executive Board that oversees the running of ACE. Ameliorative action is promptly taken in the light of any issues identified.

## **6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

This is crucial to the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities. This report is also reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Board.

## **6.4 Equality and Consultation Analysis (ECA)**

Equality of opportunity is a key part of adoption work. This is considered in the organisations' reports documented in the appendices.

## **6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment**

None.

## **6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

None.

**Report author(s):**

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<b>Contributors:</b>				
Usha Patel	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	11.09.2020	11.09.2020
Paul Smith	Strategic lead- looked after children	Children's Services		27 July 2020
Other members				
<b>Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)</b>				
Finance: Nicola David	Lead Accountant	Finance		10 September 2020
Legal: Safda Mahmood	Advocacy Team Leader	Law and Governance		10 September 2020
Director: John Gregg	Director of Children's services	Children's Services		27 July 2020
Members: Cllr P Seaman	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People		4 August 2020

This report is published on the council's website:

[www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings)

## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### **Annual Report of the Adoption Service 2019-2020 for Coventry Children's Services**

##### **Contents**

1. Introduction
2. Local Authority Update
3. Service Activity
4. Service Performance
5. Service Plan 2019-2020

##### **1. Introduction**

This is the local authority adoption service report for the period 2019-2020. It provides an overview of adoption activity and performance.

Coventry Children's Services delivers adoptions services in partnership 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, Coventry City Council's adoption service has made in progress in the following areas and against the service plan 2019-2020.

- *Develop a working group between Coventry City Council and ACE colleagues with the focus of building relationships and improving areas of practice including, child's permanence report, matching and transitions.*

The working group set up to address this action was successful in embedding a positive working relationship with ACE. This group then developed into the fortnightly adoption clinic which began in January 2020, tracking children's progress through their adoption care planning. The adoption clinic has continued to evolve, with defined terms of reference and templates for social workers to complete.

- *To develop joint workshops to strengthen practice, improve the matching process and preventing placement disruptions.*

Family action was commissioned to undertake bespoke training across the whole service on how to improve the writing in child permanence reports; understanding early permanence; effective matching between children and prospective adopters; improving transition between placements and sibling assessments across for the whole service met. An experienced team manager also delivered training on pre-birth assessments; public law outline and evidence-based assessments.

- *Effective pre-birth, pre-proceedings, care proceedings and post-placement order tracking to ensure timely permanence is achieved for all children, including those who are subject to an adoption plan.*
- *Develop a tracking system for Coventry children subject to a placement order to ensure family finding is undertaken with the urgency that is required*
- *To ensure team managers have access to adoption scorecard data to enable regular monitoring and review of children's progress.*

An adoption dashboard has been created to enable the tracking and monitoring children's progress. The dashboard is used to drive performance at the clinic improving timeliness for children's plans. An adoption workspace is being

create on an electronic database that will replace the adoption dashboard. All team managers have access to the adoption scorecard and use it in performance management with social workers.

- *To recruit three children and family workers to complete direct work in the preparation and planning with children around transitions.*

The service was successful in recruiting an additional three children and family workers. The new workers have enhanced the service through supporting social workers in completing life story books, later in life letters and helping children transition to their adoptive placements.

- *To collate learning from placement disruptions, disseminate to staff and develop an action plan.*

In the last twelve months there have been no placement disruptions, compared to four children in the previous year. The service has embedded an overall culture of learning and improvement. It has built on the significant learning from the previous disruptions, developing practice and action plans to try and prevent children having similar experiences.

The Looked after children and permanence service has experienced a period of stability over the last twelve months. Team manager capacity has increased along with the reduction in the numbers of agency social workers. This has led to children and young people experiencing fewer changes of social worker.

The service continues to develop practice and develop better outcomes for children in the following areas:

- *All children to receive good quality life story work and later life Letters*

Team managers now have a tracking system that provides early notification of the progress of life story books and later in life letters. Positively, there is no backlog of outstanding life story books. This area of practice is being developed with colleagues in ACE and will be re-launched along with the new operating model of some social workers dedicated to progressing children's adoption plans.

- *An improvement in the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) performance which is the nationally set government targets for adoption practice*
- *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.*

In the last twelve months the performance against national set targets has not improved. A review of some children's adoption journeys has been completed to gain an understanding of the reasons why some children have a positive experience securing adoption, whilst others experience significant delay. This review has led to a reconfiguration of the service's operating model, with some social workers dedicated to progressing children through to adoption in a timelier way.

Since March 2020, some children have experienced delay in progressing or completing their adoption journey, due to the Covid-19 lockdown. Unfortunately, the court has cancelled or delayed hearings for ten children, at the time of completing the report seven children were still awaiting a new court date. Three children have experienced delay in moving to their adoptive placement.

### **3. Service Activity**

Adoption recruitment activity is reported by ACE.

Overall children's performance:

	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>
<b>Number of children adopted</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Number of children placed with adopters</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Number of children awaiting match</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Number of disruptions</b>	<b>4 (children)</b>	<b>0</b>

#### **In summary, during 2019-2020**

The number of children who were subject to the decision that they “should be placed for adoption” increased from 28 to 40 on the previous year. In the last twelve months 5 children were subject to having their adoption plans changed. This contrasts with the previous end of year figure of 10 children’s plans being changed.

Placement Orders granted by the court – 28 children (same as last year)

Matched with prospective adopters – 25 children (30 last year)

Placed with adopters – 25 children (30 last year)

Made subject to an Adoption Order by the court – 31 (36 last year)

Children with a Placement Order waiting to be matched – 23 (26 last year)

As a local authority Coventry successfully placed 5 children in foster to adopt placements, with all children securing their permanent home at the earliest opportunity. Regionally this is the highest number of children placed in foster to adopt placements.

### **4. Service Performance**

National Performance Indicators	Government Target	CCC Three Year Average
<b>A1</b> Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days)	426 days	636 days
<b>A2</b> Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)	121 days	330 days
<b>A3</b> Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)	14 months	32.7% (52/159 children)

The timeliness of children entering care and moving in with their adoptive family has increased from the previous year. Coventry's timeliness remains above national targets. However, the timescales are affected by five children whose adoption journey, was significantly beyond the A1 and A2 timescales. If this cohort of children are removed from the data set the A1 and A2 timescales reduce to 547 days and 249 days respectively. These figures are more in line with the 2015-2018 adoption scorecard.

Of the 31 children adoption 15 were defined as 'hard to place' children. The increase in timescales can be partly attributed to this cohort of children, some of whom had an adoption plan dating back to 2013. Social workers have been persistent in achieving this positive outcome. However, this has impacted on the performance of the local authority, reflecting in the higher number of days in the A1 and A2 timescale targets.

Examples of children who have been adopted include, a sibling group aged 4 and 8 years were adopted together; an 11-year-old boy was adopted by his foster carer after being in same placement for six years.

In 2019/2020 eleven children were adopted by their foster carers. These adoptions have provided children with security and stability, affording them with long term attachments with their carers, creating excellent outcomes for children. However, these particular children do affect the overall timeliness and data performance of the local authority. Despite this Coventry will continue to promote such outcomes as being in the best interests of children.

For 10 of the 31 children who were made subject to an Adoption Order by the court in 2019/2020, it took less than the Government target of 426 days between the children entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. For those children not achieving the timescale, social workers have remained resolute in securing permanence through adoption as the best outcome for children.

Overall, the timeliness of children being matched with prospective adopters once a Placement Order has been granted increased to an average of 330 days. Analysis has shown that this increase has been attributed to children

who are in the 'harder to place' cohort; and those children where adoption has been achieved but over a lengthy period.

The proportion of children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive families has decreased to 32.7%. The number of children exiting care through adoption is down to 11.6%. As this data is reported as a percentage of children it correlates with the reduced numbers of children being adopted.

There are a number of children who are 'hard to place' for whom adoptive families have been secured. Seven children from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds were adopted last year. This represents 22.6% as a proportion of all children being adopted in 2019-20.

A tracking system that includes the monitoring of pre-proceedings, care proceedings and progress of post-placement orders is the tool that is consistently used by children's services and ACE to monitor a child's care journey. This system has been effective in early family finding for unborn children.

Children's services are consistently looking to improve practice in identifying early permanence. Social workers and team managers have attended seminars and webinars to ensure Foster to adopt placements are at the forefront of children's care planning. This learning has also been shared with other local authorities.

The number of decisions to progress a plan of adoption has increased in the last twelve months. The local authority continues to have a robust process for concurrent planning so that time is not lost should adoption become the child's plan.

In 2018-19 four children experienced disruptions to their adoptive placement. In response to the disruption's, meetings were held to gain an understanding of why placements ended and what could have been done differently. The learning from the meetings led to action plans to develop good practice. It is positive to report that in the last twelve months; no children have experienced disruption to their placements.

The service has recently completed an audit of children who are adopted within timescales, along with some children who experience delay in securing permanence through adoption. The audit highlight areas of good practice and reinforced that adoption was the appropriate plan for children. However, it also highlighted that several children experience delay in securing permanence through adoption.

As a result of the findings the service has been reorganised, identifying a cohort of social workers within the team who are dedicated to progressing children's adoption plans in a timelier way.

## **5. Service Plan 2020-2021**

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 regional adoption agency the local authority plans to improve and develop its adoption practices in the following key areas:

### **Coventry City Council Service Plan 2020-2021**

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:

- **Page 28** to build on the number of children place in foster to adopt placements.

- All children to receive life story books and later in life letters within 10 days of the celebration hearing
- Social workers to undertake bespoke training to improve the quality of children's life story books. Team managers to complete training on how to quality assure children's life story books
- To improve the timeliness of the A2 indicator of a Placement Order being granted and a match with an adoptive family
- To ensure the new operating model for looked after children and permanence service reduces the time taken for children in their adoption care planning

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.

Lisa Walsh

Operational Lead Looked after children and permanence service

09.07.2020



## Annual Report 2019-2020



## Adoption Central England Annual Report 2019-2020

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Coventry City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Worcestershire County Council joined with Warwickshire County Council (the host) on 1 February 2018 to form Adoption Central England (ACE). The service was joined by Herefordshire Council on 1 July 2019. ACE is a local authority shared service and was the seventh regional adoption agency to become operational in the country.
- 1.2 This is the second annual report that provides a summary of activity and developments within ACE that covers the 2 year period up to 31 March 2020. It can be read alongside the ACE Adoption Panel Annual Report 2019-2020.

### 2. Background Information

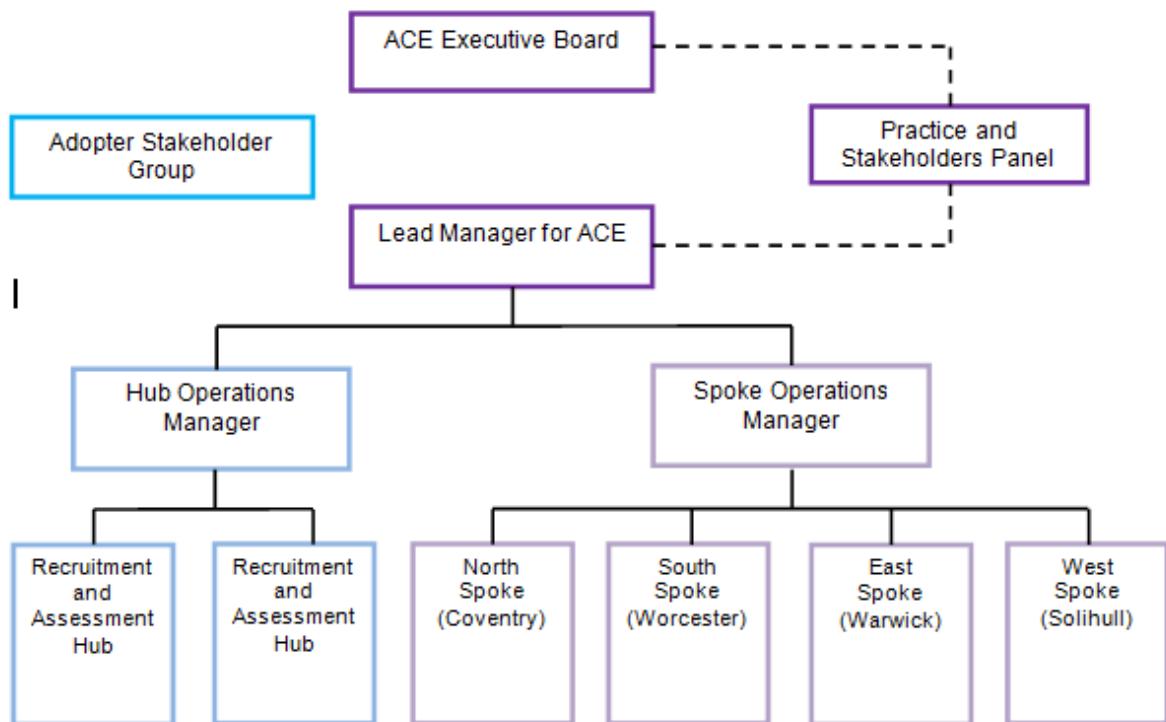
- 2.1 Following legislation arising from four Department for Education (DfE) policy papers on adoption, the Regionalising Adoption paper published in June 2015 spelt out the government's expectations for all local authorities to be part of a regional adoption agency and 'Adoption: A vision for change' (April 2016) committed to deliver a radical, whole system redesign by regionalising adoption services by 2020. ACE has been at the forefront of this development as a demonstrator site and the overarching aim of ACE is to *provide an innovative service for children, adoptive families and others affected by adoption. This is by offering lifelong support based on up to date practices and interventions supported by modern technology.*
- 2.2 The 10 areas identified for improvement at the outset were:
  - To improve adopter recruitment to meet children's needs,
  - To have better tracking of children to improve placement timeliness,
  - To identify potential adopters for children at the adoption decision stage,
  - To have bespoke recruitment for children with complex needs,
  - To develop and embed early permanence,
  - To improve assessments and matching,
  - To improve adoption and special guardianship support,
  - To upskill the workforce with specialist therapeutic training,
  - To upskill and involve adopters in training and support,
  - To use modern technology to improve access to services.
- 2.3 ACE has needed to work in close partnership with the local authorities and other services to:

- Ensure a wider pool of prospective adopters for those children who need a permanent family through adoption,
- Increase the levels of adoption for children waiting to be adopted,
- Reduce the length of time those children wait to be adopted,
- Improve post adoption support services to adoptive families.

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

### 3. Staffing

3.1 The ACE structure is as follows:



3.2 ACE delivers its services through a hub and spoke model with a central referral point in Warwick. The hub activities are concerned with the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective adopters. The same staff are also involved in matching children with adopters and providing a level of support for 12 months after the adoption order is granted. Within this part of the service there is a dedicated team of family finders who aim to secure adoption placements for children who are harder to place.

3.3 ~~Places~~ that are located within each local authority area. They offer a duty service,

undertake assessments of needs for adoption support, process and commission therapeutic services through the Adoption Support Fund, work directly with families who require social work services, provide birth records counselling to adult adoptees and complete non-agency adoption assessments for the court. Staff work flexibly across the region and some hub social workers may be based in a spoke where this is appropriate.

3.4 There are 86 people working in ACE as follows:

ACE Managers	10.3 FTE
Hub social workers	15.47 FTE
Family Finding Team - social workers	2.81 FTE
Family Connexions – social workers	2.6 FTE
Spoke social workers	20.86 FTE
Therapeutic Team – social workers	2.5 FTE
Family support workers	3.23 FTE
Business support and related roles	11.56 FTE
Adoption panel advisors – social workers	1.5 FTE

3.5 In the service has small three specialist teams:

The Family Connexions Service recently increasing to 2.6 FTE social workers and 1.3 FTE family support workers is in three sites across the region. The aim of the service is to offer support and information to significant birth family members when adoption has been formally identified as the plan for the child. The aim is to provide a service in a timely fashion to support people through the process and this is done by offering:

- 1 to 1 emotional support and advice during and after the adoption process.
- An explanation of the adoption process.
- Support with the practical aspects of the adoption process, including support with letterbox contact and/or meeting with adopters.
- Advice regarding future life planning including signposting to other universal support services.
- Group sessions for birth parents and extended family members across the ACE region.
- Support with any direct contact or reunification plans requested by the adopted child and their adoptive parents.

The Therapeutic Team where the workers can deliver therapeutic interventions to families who have high levels of assessed needs, on an individual or group work basis. The workers are frequently working alongside other social workers either within ACE or from the local authorities.

The Family Finding Team, also small, where the workers work very closely with the child allocated social workers in efforts to secure adoption for children with complexities.

3.6 ACE has small pool of adoption social workers who are employed on a sessional basis who can support the service during periods of high workload and to cover maternity leave.

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

3.8 Since 1 March 2020 all staff employed have been seconded to Warwickshire County Council. This was the original intention following a 2 year seconded period.

3.9 In the past year the ACE Executive Board has invested into the ACE service and approved the following additional staff:

- Family Connexions Service – increase social workers 1.8 FTE and family support workers 1.4FTE
- 2 x 0.8 family support workers for the spokes
- 2 FTE social workers for the hub/south spoke
- 0.5 additional adoption panel advisor
- 0.6 contracts manager to support the development of a Framework Agreement for therapeutic providers.

3.10 All staff in ACE are supported to practice in a way that is underpinned by Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) informed practice. ACE is working towards DDP certification. This approach is aimed at supporting adoptive parents to offer their adopted children a healthy and developmentally corrective experience so that they learn to trust their adoptive parent/s and feel comfortable in their relationships with them. Adoptive parents are helped throughout the adoption process to recognise and meet their child/ren's hidden as well as expressed attachment needs and to provide relationships that help their child/ren recover from trauma and loss and to feel secure.

3.11 An 80% target has been set for ACE social workers to be trained at DDP Level 1. As on 31 March 2020 of the 64 staff with a social work qualification in ACE, 54 had DDP level 1 training (84 %). Opportunities exist for some staff to attend DDP level 2 training and to achieve their DDP practicum that will enable them to confidently support their colleagues in the service as it maintains its DDP focus. Further training at level 1 has been commissioned to accommodate the turnover and increase in staff to the service.

3.12 The adoption panel functions of the five local authorities have been brought together are held across the ACE region. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in the UK, virtual adoption panel have been taking place since March 2020.

3.13 The documentation and work presented to the adoption panel provides a window into the standard and quality of adoption practice across the local authorities and within ACE. The adoption panel advisers meet with the local authority senior managers on a quarterly basis

sharing quality assurance information and feedback. A training event with the local authority adoption agency decision makers took place on 9 January 2020 and was well received.

#### 4. Developments 2019-2020

4.1 The ACE Annual Report 2018-2019 outlined the following areas for service development and improvement:

Actions	Update
As a service to achieve DDP certification	<p>This continues to be work in progress as the proposed submission date of July 2020 has been postponed until November 2020. The service is required to put together a portfolio of evidence reflecting its journey towards certification. There is a comprehensive action plan and a key measure of success is how the service can positively impact upon outcomes for families. Staff through training and support are better equipped to emotionally 'hold' families who are experiencing challenging from their children. In addition, prospective adopters are introduced to the concept of therapeutic parenting from the outset and are better equipped in understanding how to respond therapeutically to their child's trauma. The certification requires evidence of cultural change within the service and all processes are to reflect the DDP principles. ACE passed its midway review towards certification in September 2019 and is making steady progress towards achieving this, with the approach having a noticeable impact on families as they are helped to understand, manage and contain the challenges presented in parenting their children.</p>
To establish the Adopted Young Person's Support Group	<p>Adopted Young People groups have been set up in central and south areas (Warwick/Worcester) and have been positively received and proved beneficial to the young people who have attended.</p>
To continue the initiative to increase the number of	<p>The recruitment of BAME households has remained steady in year 2 and ACE has</p>

families approved to adopt from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.	worked with a neighboring RAA in developing recruitment material and publicity. The impact was minimal. ACE is now part of the national initiative that will focus on Birmingham and neighboring regions aimed at strengthening community contacts in order to promote the need for adoptive parents from these communities.
To develop further the ACE website.	There has been some adjustments to the ACE website and the secure portal for ACE adopters has been effective in allowing ACE to feature children who are waiting for families. This is an area for ongoing development and investment.
To embed further quality assurance arrangements across the service.	Quality assurance is evident in many processes and practices such as supervision, signing off reports, observations of practice and most significantly the feedback provided to local authorities and ACE from the adoption panel. Further work is required in embeddings the quality assurance arrangements with reference to case file auditing.
To engage in a strategic discussion with the local authority partners on how ACE can support special guardianship developments across the region.	The ACE Executive Board considered a report on 6 February and have agreed that further collaboration between the local authorities is to be explored. The terms of reference for a regional project group are to be finalised and agreed actions progressed during 2020/21.
To support the work arising through the PIF project.	This government funded project led by Barnardos in the latter stages resulted in the development of a revised Prospective Adopters Report, alongside the exploration of new ways of working in adoption. The project is now completed and the final evaluation report submitted to the DfE. The ACE Executive Board are to consider the recommendations.
To arrange a development session for the local authority ADMs, panel chairs and ACE managers.	This event took place on 10 December 2019, was positively received and a further event is to be organised.
Page 36 Facilitate a performance	This took place on 10 September 2019 and

challenge event to include consideration of the reduction in children with adoption decisions.	will be an annual event.
To respond to the requirements arising from the decision regarding the future of the Adoption Support Fund.	There have been no changes in the Adoption Support Fund arrangements although flexibilities were introduced arising from the coronavirus pandemic. This has allowed ACE to put in place additional services and support to adopters (and special guardians) during this period up until the end September 2020.
To use recruitment opportunities to establish a more diverse workforce.	ACE has not been successful in recruiting men to the service, however approximately 10% of ACE staff are representative of BAME communities.

## 5. Performance Management

5.1 The performance of the regional adoption service needs to be seen in the context of the overall numbers of children who are coming forward with a plan for adoption. In 2018/19 a 32.5% reduction in the number of children with an adoption decision was noted compared with the previous year. In 2019/20 the number of children with an adoption decision has broadly been the same, given that Herefordshire Council is now part of the regional adoption agency. 144 children had an adoption decision compared with 111 in the previous year.

5.2 Positively of the children with an adoption plans 86% (95) have been matched with ACE approved adoptive parents with 15 (14%) children placed on an interagency basis where a family has been approved by another adoption agency. This is an improvement on the previous year where 83% (79) children were placed internally and 21 (22%) on an interagency basis.

5.3 At 31.3.2020, 134 children were identified as waiting to be formally matched with adoptive parents and this will include sibling groups of children to be placed together. At the same time ACE had 74 approved adopters – many however would have been provisionally earmarked for matching with ACE children. ACE has a subscription to Link maker – a national database that allows approved adopters to consider children from other areas and vice versa.

5.4 The Executive Board receives a quarterly performance management report that outlines performance against key criteria including:

- Overview of children - numbers, adoption decision and adoption orders made and timeliness of actions against national scorecard measures,

- Number of early permanence – fostering for adoption placements,
- Number of children placed with ACE adopters,
- Enquiries about adoption and prospective adopters at each stage of the process (See detail in Appendix 1)
- Timeliness of adopter assessments (stage 2)
- Interagency placements made and number of placement disruptions.

5.5 In addition the ACE Business, Performance and Service Improvement Plan sets out targets and includes a wider range of measures and actions to be achieved by the service.

5.5 The Progress Report for the Business, Performance and Service Improvement Plan for 2019-2020 set out the following key measures:

Measure	Performance
To place 90% of ACE children with ACE approved adopters	In 2018/19 ACE achieved 83% in 2019-2020 this increased to 86%
To move children more quickly to early permanence through the development of fostering to fostering for adoption (FfA).	In 2018/19, 22 FfA placements were made rising to 32 in the current year. This did include 2 placements for children who has a subsequent change of plan and returned to family.
To recruit 40 households who are able to meet the needs of older children, sibling groups and harder to place children including fostering for adoption.	In 2018/19 40 households were recruited and this has increased to 56 during 2019-2020. Some households met more than one criterion and have only been counted once and the figure now includes FfA households.
To increase the number of households who enquirer about adoption through ACE – target 600	In 2018/19 the total was 531 rising to 608 in 2019/20
To approve 125 households	In 2018/19 92 households were approved as suitable to adopt and in 2019/20 this remained steady at 91 approved households.
To improve the assessment timescales for prospective adopters. (Note: national timescale for stage 2 is 4 months)	In 2018/19 the ACE average timescale was 5.6 months and in 2019/20 the average timescale was increased to 6.2 months See Appendix 2 for detailed of analysis of adopter recruitment.
To reduce the number of children who experience an adoption placement disruption.	There was no placement disruption on 2019/20.

5.3 **Page 38** is the timeliness of adoption for children and this is measured against national

performance (scorecard) measures. These are as follows:

	Measure	Threshold Timescale	2018-2019 ACE average	2019/2020 ACE average
A 1	For children adopted in the year, average length of time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family	426 days		502 days
A 2	The average time between placement order and deciding the match to an adoptive family	121 days	200 days	216 days
A 3	The average time between children entering care and moving in with the adoptive parents is less than 14 months	14 months	53%	52%

5.4 In summary in 2019-2020 performance has improved in embedding early permanence – fostering for adoption for children and in the number of children placed with ACE approved households. There has been higher than expected interest in adoption through ACE although the number of approved households has remained constant. Timescales for approving adopters has declined slightly compared with the previous year. Positively there has been no placement disruptions and the timeliness of placing for children for adoption is very similar to the previous year. Within this there are local authority variations.

5.5 Areas for further attention during 2020-2021 are:

- Improving adopter assessment timescales,
- Reducing delay in placing children from the point that the placement order has been granted by the court
- To increase the number of households approved from BAME communities.

5.6 These measures will be incorporated into the ACE Business, Performance and Service Improvement Plan 2020-2021 that sets out the following additional priorities for the service:

- To develop the ACE website with a focus on adoption support,
- To further embed quality assurance processes across the full spectrum of ACE services,

- With the local authorities to consider the viability of a regional special guardianship support strategy.

5.7 It is the shared aspiration of the ACE local authorities to be in the top quartile of performing adoption agencies against the national scorecard measures. The tracking processes that ACE has in place with each local authority that tracks and monitors children for whom there is early consideration of adoption and those children with an adoption decision who are waiting for families ensure that a focus is kept on these children and drift is avoided. Also measures that underpin the ACE governance arrangements allow for ongoing discussion and dialogue about ACE and the local authority services can work together to improve performance and adoption practice.

## 6. Adoption Support

6.1 Adoption support remains an area of importance within ACE with 642 households receiving support during the year. The service introduced a tiered approach to adoption support during the year so that adoptive families receive services that are proportionate to the needs of the child and family. The process ensures that adoptive families have access to services at the right time and can move between the tiers of interventions including stepping down when the levels of needs or risks reduce. A summary of the tiered approach is provided in Appendix 3.

6.2 The social workers in the spokes also make the applications to the national Adoption Support Fund that funds therapeutic support to adoptive families. During 2019/20 607 applications were made securing just under one million pounds of therapeutic interventions. More families benefitted than the previous year (561) although the value of therapeutic interventions was higher at £1.3million. This is part is reflecting the growing confidence within the ACE service to meet needs and respond to the requirements of adoptive families. This reinforces the approach adopted by ACE to become DDP certified.

6.3 The types of support requested by adoptive families vary but frequently include requests for advice on strategies:

- To help their children settle within the family
- Talking about and telling their children their adoption story
- Dealing with child on parent violence
- Education related matters
- Dealing with developmental trauma and how to parent therapeutically.

6.4 As on the 31.3.2020 of the 642 allocated support cases, 306 families were supported at level 3/4 and 336 families at the lower level tier 1/2 where intervention and support is primarily delivered from an external therapeutic provider.

6.5 The Therapeutic Team has also developed the programmes of interventions that have proved to be particularly successful and helpful to families. These are:

- Non-Violent Resistance – a 5 session programme with 4 embedding sessions plus individual consultation.
- Therapeutic and Sensory Based Parenting – a 4-week programme with a follow up session.

- PCAP

6.6 An Adopters Newsletter is produced on a quarterly basis and sent to 618 households and ACE managers also meet with the Adopter Stakeholder Group at quarterly intervals.

## 7. Quality assurance and inspection

7.1 ACE has a range of quality assurance arrangement in place that include:

- Learning from complaint and representations
- Robust staff recruiting practices including induction
- Regular supervision and annual appraisal of all staff
- Opportunities for staff exit interviews
- Quarterly performance management reports presented to the ACE Executive Board
- Feedback to ACE and local authorities on the quality of reports presented to the adoption panel
- Clear service specification for external providers delivering therapeutic services to adoptive families
- User feedback through the Adopter Stakeholder Group, training events, adoption panel etc.
- Managerial oversight of reports and countersigning
- Feedback from local authority partners and other stakeholder through various forum such as the practice and stakeholder group
- Follow up of all adopter enquirers who do not proceed through the process
- Timescales for key activities in the adopter journey from enquiry to approval
- Observed practices.

7.2 During this period, OFSTED inspections took place in Worcestershire and Solihull and ACE practice was examined on both occasions. There were no actions arising from these and the following observations were made:

*'Planning for children with a plan of adoption is a strength. Since February 2018, Worcestershire's adoption service has been provided through a regional adoption agency, Adoption Central England (ACE). A high proportion of children are leaving care without delay to join new adoptive families. Children are identified at an early stage at the Achieving Early Permanency Panel and are linked to family finders. Seven young children have benefited from foster for adoption 9 placements in the last year. There is effective use of the adoption support fund, and there have been no placement disruptions in the last 12 months.'* (July 2019)

*'Children who have a plan for adoption are adopted in a timely manner... There is effective parallel planning for many children that ensures that adoption plans and most plans for long-term fostering are progressed without delay. 7 Solihull children move to live with prospective adopters, including fostering to adopt carers, quickly, and the time it takes to place children continues to improve. For most children, the timescale is better than the national average, and demonstrates strong performance by the local authority'* (January 2020).

7.3 Also during this year a mystery shopper exercise was completed and undertaken by a partner regional adoption agency. The feedback overall was positive reflecting good front end processes which have been reviewed in light feedback received.  
*'Maybe ask if they had any more questions at the end but overall a very good phone call the second time round was much better.'*

7.4 In January 2020 ACE conducted its annual survey with adopters and received 84 responses (14%). The survey covered a number of areas and the key areas for development arising from this are:

- To improve communication about services, support and training using the full range of communication e.g. website, Facebook, Newsletters,
- To offer more training and support about life story books and talking to children about adoption,
- To have a support strategy in place for adopters who have teens.

7.4 The quality assurance arrangements to be developed include the arrangement for case file auditing of ACE adoption records including supervision file audits by senior managers in the service.

## **8. Practice Improvements**

7.1 ACE has extended the range of practice guidance developed and shared with local authority teams. These serve to complement existing procedures and outline approaches to adoption work based on current best practice and research.

7.2 Practice guidance is available on:

- Early Permanence – Fostering for adoption
- Preparing Children for adoption
- Name changes for children placed for adoption.
- Application to adopt by Foster Carers
- Supporting Transitions to an Adoptive Family

7.3 Work has also started on developing guidance on 'Relinquished Babies' guidance  
On 7 November 2019 ACE commissioned training on behalf of the local authorities on Contact in Adoption. This was delivered by Julie Young, University East Anglia that shared the most recent research on contact. An important element of this was the voice of the adopted young people. As a consequence of the conference an action plan has been put into place. Key actions include an individualised approach to assessing the contact needs of children to be adopted and the introduction of the contact assessment tool, better information and exploration of contact issue with prospective adopters and the first adopter conference planned for 2020 will also focus on 'Family communication around adoption and identity development: learning from the experiences of adoptive families.'

7.4 ACE has continued work of the PIF Assessment and Matching project that has latterly been led by Barnardos. One of the aims of the project was to review the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) and to this end ACE has been piloting a new format that has been positively received. This was coupled with training for staff and other pieces of work

including an evaluation of preparation training provided to prospective adopters. The overall project is in the final stages of being evaluated and recommendations will be made to agencies in due course.

## **9. Disruptions**

9.1 An adoption disruption is where the child has been matched and placed with adoptive parents and where the placement did not proceed to the making of an adoption order. During this period there were no adoption disruptions

9.2 However, three Learning Review Meetings have taken place, one concerned a child who was matched with a family that did not proceed to placement and two further learning reviews took place where the children were placed on a fostering for adoption basis, which subsequently did not proceed further to becoming an adoption placements.

9.3 Learning from these events has been disseminated across ACE and local authority partners.

## **10. Complaints, complements and representations**

ACE has received a number of compliments from service users reflecting their experience of all aspects of the service. These have been resolved and learning taken place.

## **11. Staff Development and Support**

11.1 The Annual Workforce Development Plan for this period has primarily focused on

- DDP level 1 training for 24 staff
- Assessment skills and tools for completing prospective adopter reports
- MOSAIC
- Child Sexual Exploitation

11.2 Individual staff members have had access to other training and group supervision sessions are encouraged. Some of these have had a focus on incorporating DDP into practice. There have been two further events where the whole staff group have been brought together to update and share information.

## **12. Overall impact and future plans**

12.1 ACE can demonstrate the progress it has made against the 10 areas for improvement outlined above. The area least developed concerns special guardianship support.

9.2 Now as an established service in the first 2 years of operation ACE has:

- Established its brand identity,
- Consolidated its staff group and has committed to having a DDP informed approach leading towards certification,
- Put in place policies and procedures and kept these under review,
- Increased the number of children placed for adoption with indications of improved timeliness,
- Embedded early permanence – fostering for adoption,
- Widened the range of support services available to adoptive families,
- Maintained a steady stream of adoptive parents from all sections of the community who

can meet the needs of children needing families,

- Has consulted and engaged with adopters as key stakeholders with plans to strengthen arrangements including an annual survey,
- Has put in place networks of communications with a range of other professionals including IRO and fostering managers and key managers within the local authorities.
- Delivered the service in accordance with the governance requirements as detailed in the Partnership and Hosting Agreement that includes an ongoing and detailed risk assessment.

9.3 The service has been delivered within budget by virtue of having a significant underspend in the interagency budget as more children have been placed with ACE adopters. As a consequence of this a financial dividend has been returned to the local authorities

9.4 Key areas for development in 2020-2021 are:

#### **Service level plans**

- To achieve DDP certification,
- To review the ACE website incorporating podcasts illustrating different areas of the service and experiences,
- To update quality assurance arrangements embedding file auditing processes across the service,
- To support the work arising through the PIF Assessment and Matching project,
- To use recruitment opportunities to establish a more diverse workforce if possible.

#### **Recruitment plans**

- To implement the Adopter Recruitment Sufficiency Plan relating to the recruitment of adopters and as part of this to increase the number of families approved to adopt from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups,
- Improve adopter assessment timescales,
- Work with the local authorities to reduce delay in placing children from the point that the placement order has been granted by the court

#### **Support plans**

- To improve communication about services, support and training using the full range of communication methods,
- To offer more training and support about life story books and talking to children about adoption,
- To have a support strategy in place for adopters who have teens.
- To explore opportunities to strengthen adoption support through the provision of respite/day care support,
- To put in place a Framework Agreement for therapeutic providers of adoption support services.

## **.14. Conclusion**

14.1 This year has seen the expansion of ACE incorporating Herefordshire Council adoptions service. It has continued to develop, and this is particularly notable in the area of adoption support and with the development of the regional adoption support service for birth families. The service has been involved innovative practices such as the PIF practice and has reviewed its own systems and processes on an ongoing basis. Further it has been part of the two OFSTED inspections during this period and have no actions arising from these.

14.2 The most significant achievements have been the increasing number of ACE children placed with ACE approved adopters across the region, who are able to be well supported from the point of placement. The absence of any adoption disruptions during this period is testament to the quality of work completed and the effectiveness of partnership working with the local authorities with whom there is shared commitment to increasing the levels of adoption for children waiting to be adopted and ,reducing the length of time those children wait to be placed with families who are able to meet their needs.

**Brenda Vincent**  
**Lead Manager – ACE**

### **Adoption Central England – A Tiered Approach to Support Services**

Following an initial contact with Adoption Central England, adoptive families will be offered a range of post adoption support within a tiered framework. At every tier, the aim of the support and intervention is to improve the life experiences and outcomes for adoptive families.

**The tier of intervention offered to the family will be proportionate to the needs** of the child and family. It is important that adoptive families have access to services at the right time and can move between the tiers of interventions including stepping down when the levels of needs or risks reduce.

ACE use approaches informed by Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP) that are safe, open and engaging, delivered by staff who are informed, trained and supported in their work with children and families at all stages of the process.

#### **TIER 1: Support and Advice**

ACE will offer advice and assistance which may include enabling adopters to consider their own family, friends and peer support or signposting to universal services i.e. school, CAMHS, Early Help.

Families may also be directed to ACE services which may include:

- Letterbox and advice on low level contact issues.

- Picnic and social events.
- Training / workshops.
- Stay and play mornings.

Where issues relate to financial matters these are referred to the responsible local authority.

The referral will be closed if there is no follow up contact with the service from the family:

- (i) within 10 working days or
- (ii) where the Spoke workers have had three unsuccessful attempts to contact the family,

whichever is sooner.

#### **TIER 2: As above plus:**

- A consultation meeting at a Spoke office, this may include completing an Assessment of Need to ascertain the presenting issues for the family and exploration about how these needs can be supported and by whom.
- Signposting and referral to ACE therapeutic interventions i.e. therapeutic parenting, sensory integration and non-violent resistance courses.
- Allocated to the Spoke Team for the coordination of meetings and support services.
- Consultation meetings with Educational Advisor from Virtual School.
- Referral to a mentor – an experienced adopter who provides a telephone listening ear service.
- Referral to Systemic Family Counsellor who provides individual /couple counselling – 4 sessions.

Where a therapeutic intervention is required a provider will be identified, and an application to the Adoption Support Fund will be undertaken. The working agreements and reviews will be attended by a member of the Spoke Team. Ongoing and repeat applications to the ASF will be considered by the ASF Multi Agency Review Panel.

The Spoke Managers review all work on a monthly basis and the level of support may be stepped down or stepped up according to the needs of the family.

#### **TIER 3: As above plus:**

- An allocated ACE social worker where families have more complex needs requiring the provision of coordinated, targeted and enhanced services following an Assessment of Need.
- An Adoption Spoke Manager has reviewed the Assessment of Need report/s and identifies that the family should be allocated a named ACE Spoke social worker. In these situations, there is a clear plan of support (including outcomes) that is monitored in supervision and reviewed on a three monthly basis.

In the event where a child is assessed to be at risk of harm or neglect, ACE will refer the family to the relevant Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub / MASH.

This will apply where:

- There has been a deterioration in family circumstances to such an extent that there are child protection concerns for the child/young person.
- A concern which relates to the ongoing care and well-being of a child which may indicate neglect.
- The child or young person exhibits acute or severe needs and /or is a child in need of protection.

The local authority will lead on these referrals and ACE social workers may attend joint visits and provide consultation.

Universal services will continue to be offered and therapeutic interventions will be continued where the child remains in the family home.

## Appendix 3



## 1.1 Report of the Adoption Panel

1.1.1.1

1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020

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# Introduction by Panel Chairs

During 2019 to 2020 a fifth local authority joined ACE with the addition from Herefordshire of a highly experienced chair and a number of valuable and longstanding panel members.

The appointment of an experienced panel administrator has supported the smooth and efficient running of panels across five locations. A new streamlined approach to approving panel minutes has reduced the time in which they reach the agency decision makers (ADMs), reducing timescales for decisions surrounding approvals for adoption and, more importantly, matches for children.

A more rigorous quality assurance process has been introduced, yielding positives in improving the quality of some paperwork and recognising that the children themselves will have sight of this when they are older. It is imperative that it is always of the highest standard that it can be.

The panel chairs are pleased about the additional investment in the adoption panel of a part-time panel adviser who will join the service from the end of April 2020.

A formalised approach to quarterly meetings between the four chairs, vice chair, panel adviser and ACE Decision Maker has proven extremely valuable, informative and productive. Processes, policies, procedures, and quality of paperwork completed are all considered, and suggestions for amendment, improvement or new initiatives are all discussed in order to continue to enhance the panel process for applicants.

ACE's response to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis has been impressive, efficient and most effective as all approval and matching panels moved to the virtual experience during March 2020. With the support of our panel administrator and panel adviser, the transition to the virtual panel has been relatively seamless as all panel members adapted to the new way of working. It is testament to all involved that virtual panels continue to take place on at least a weekly basis in order to reduce delay in our children being matched and placed in their adoptive families.

It has been encouraging to witness the growth in numbers of adopters willing to undertake fostering for adoption (FfA) placements. Panels have been impressed with the care and preparation work that has gone into selecting children to be placed under FfA arrangements as well as the understanding and realism displayed by adopters at panel following the training they have received from the agency.

Finally, it remains the privilege of each chair, vice chair and panel member to play their part in securing permanency for our children. Without exception, all panel members have personal or professional experience of adoption and a deep commitment to achieving the best matches in order to attain that vision.

1  
Eamon Moran (Chair)

Avriel Reader (Chair)

**Margaret Powell (Chair)**

**Heather Tobin (Chair)**

**Lorraine Cooksey (Vice Chair)**

# Context

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

The proposals placed before the adoption panel are

- The suitability of applicants to become adoptive parents
- **The match between a child or children and approved adopters**
- **The plan that a relinquished child be adopted**

The panel will also consider the renewed approval or termination of approval for adopters who have not been matched with a child after 3 years; and a 'brief report', i.e. the case made by the agency that an applicant or applicants is/are *not* suitable to adopt.

Adoption panels have the discretion to offer advice to the relevant agency about:

- The approval range for prospective adopters (ie the number, age range and needs of a child or children to be matched)
- The arrangements the adoption agency/local authority proposes to make for allowing any person contact with the child

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

The Government's programme for the regionalisation of adoption services that heralded the creation of Adoption Central England (ACE) since February 2018, brought together the work of the adoption panels of Worcestershire County Council, Warwickshire County Council, Coventry City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council into one single panel.

With Herefordshire Council joining ACE in July 2019, the ACE adoption panel now considers adoption proposals for children from five local authorities, together with applications made to ACE from individuals and couples, residing in or close to those local authorities, who wish to adopt a child or children.

# The Central List

The Adoption Agencies Statutory Guidance requires that each adoption agency must maintain a 'central list' of persons whom it considers suitable to be a member of an Adoption Panel. The Panel's business can only be conducted if at least 5 members are present, including the Chair or Vice-Chair and a social work representative.

1.1.1.1.1.2 The Central List membership stands at 36 active members – ie those who have attended at least one panel during the reporting period - as on 31 March 2020 (see Appendix A).

The Chair and members of the adoption panel serving Herefordshire Council were invited to transfer to the ACE Panel at the point that Herefordshire's adoption team merged with ACE in July 2019. The schedule of panel meetings - held weekly and already fixed for 2019-20 - was amended to incorporate four panel meetings to be held in Hereford: the number of meetings was estimated to be proportional to the anticipated levels of panel business for the coming year. The majority of Herefordshire panel members transferred to the ACE central list whilst others resigned due to a range of reasons.

There have been two further resignations from the central list during 2019-2020 due to health or personal circumstances.

#### 1.1.1.1.1.1.3 New Members

ACE has welcomed 11 new members of panel – including those transferring from Herefordshire Council - as follows:

- Avriel Reader: panel chair (formerly chair of Herefordshire Panel)
- Stuart: social work member and retired adoption service manager
- Cathy: adopted person with experience in fostering social work
- Elaine: adopted person with experience of health service panels
- Cornelia: social work member and manager within Warwickshire Children's Services
- Gini: social work member and team manager with a Voluntary Adoption Agency
- Peter: social work member, academic, writer and researcher, former foster carer
- Joanne: adoptive parent of two children
- Mark: adoptive parent of one child
- Bob: adoptive parent (children now adults)
- Clare: semi-retired teacher of children with special educational needs.

The representation of males on panel doubled (from four to eight) since the last report, although from the list of 36 this is still low. Adopted people are also better represented at panel with the addition of two members (both female) who were adopted as children. 15 panel members are adoptive parents.

#### 1.1.1.1.1.1.4 Coronavirus

A week before the end of the reporting period, the Government's response to the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic led to the closure of schools and workplaces, and severe restrictions on the freedom of people to meet in groups. A national 'lockdown' commenced on 23 March 2020 with the expectation that restrictions on gatherings of people would continue to some degree for many months to come.

The impact on the work of the adoption panel of this unprecedented development in national life was considerable in that it required meetings to be transferred quickly online using a video conferencing platform (Microsoft Teams) that had been introduced to ACE mere weeks beforehand. The meeting planned for 23 March, the day 'lockdown' began, was postponed for a week and the first virtual adoption panel meeting was held on 30 March.

*[Further developments since the end of this reporting period have seen the number of cases at any one panel meeting capped at three. The Adoption and Children*

*(Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, which came into force on 24 April 2020 allowed adoption agencies to suspend panel meetings altogether or operate with a*

*reduced quoracy of 3. However, ACE – in line with other RAAs and some VAAs – continues to run its panel meetings with a quoracy of 5 members.]*

A number of panel members – foster carers, those with school-age children now at home, teachers and health professionals – were obliged to withdraw from panels they would otherwise have attended. Their places were however filled by other members whose personal circumstances allowed them to attend online panel meetings.

The core group of panel members who sit regularly demonstrate a high level of commitment and passion for their role, and the recommendations made for prospective adopters and children reflect members' broad range of expertise and experience. Panel members are well-prepared and prompt for meetings and seek to contribute helpful feedback to the agencies. It is also appreciated that panel members have been accommodating and patient as new panel processes were established and refined: in particular, members' willingness and capacity to adapt quickly to a new way of working since 23 March 2020 has been particularly valuable.

#### 1.1.1.1.1.5 Appraisals

Due to the suddenly increased workloads across the agency brought about by the challenges of moving all its work online, the chairs' 2019-20 appraisals by the ACE ADM have been deferred until August 2020. These will follow a programme of observations undertaken by the ADM, together with 360-degree feedback from panel members, social work staff and self-evaluations.

Panel member appraisals take place up to 12 months after the member's start date, and therefore not necessarily within the reporting period. Appraisals always involve a panel chair and panel adviser as well as the member concerned, and have been held following a panel meeting (where the number of cases was less than 6 and commitments allowed). Panel members complete a self-evaluation in preparation of their appraisal and the session typically reviews the panel member's experience, performance, development goals and interests.

Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, 12 panel member appraisals took place.

The annual Panel Members' Training Day was held on 12 September 2019 at the Artrix Centre, Bromsgrove.

24 panel members attended, plus senior staff from ACE and 2 senior managers from Coventry City Council.

The programme for the day included:

- **Overview and update on ACE:** Brenda Vincent, ACE Lead Manager
- **Introduction to Dyadic Developmental Practice Principles and the basis for therapeutic intervention:** Dr Billy Smythe
- **Case Study Exercise** - Applying DDP to the work of the Adoption Panel: Dr Billy Smythe and Melissa Rose, ACE Operations Manager
- **Overview of ACE support, training and therapeutic interventions:** Louise Hathaway, ACE Operations Manager
- **Introducing a new Prospective Adopter's Report:** Nicky Probert, Family Action/PIF Project
- **Feedback to panel** from adopters, social workers and decision-makers: Kate Cowell
- Social networking during breaks and lunch.

Overall, the event was positively received and very helpful. Participants' evaluations of the key focus of the day are summarised in **Appendix B**.

## 2 Summary of Panel Activity

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

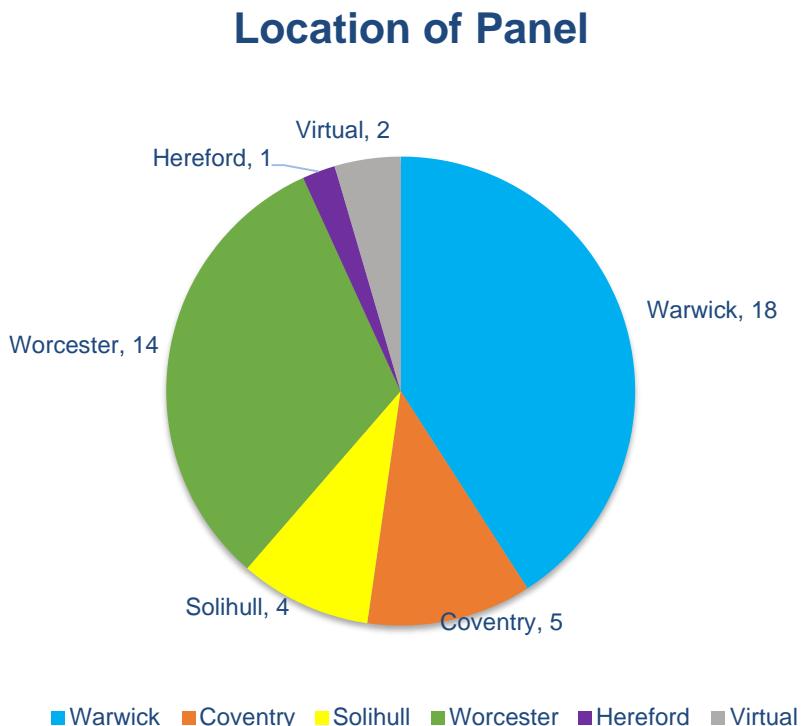
- **The Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR):** this report presents a case that the applicants are suitable to adopt, and is prepared by an assessing social worker employed by ACE.
- **The Child's Permanence Report (CPR):** this report makes the case that a child's plan for permanence should be adoption. It is prepared by the child's social worker and will have informed both the decision of an ADM and the Family Court that adoption is the only plan for the child. The CPR also serves as a life story document for the adopted child and his/her family.
- **The Adoption Placement Report (APR):** this report presents the case that a particular child should be matched with a particular family and includes a plan describing how the child and family are to be supported. This report is prepared by the child's social worker and the adoption social worker.

2.1.1.1.1.1.1 The ACE Adoption Panel met on 44 occasions between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 (42 in 2018-19) and considered 185 (184) agenda items.

8 Panel dates were cancelled (2 in Warwick, 1 in Coventry, 2 in Solihull and 3 in Worcester) due to the low number of agenda items.

#### 1.1.1.1.1.2

Panel meetings were held across the ACE region as follows:

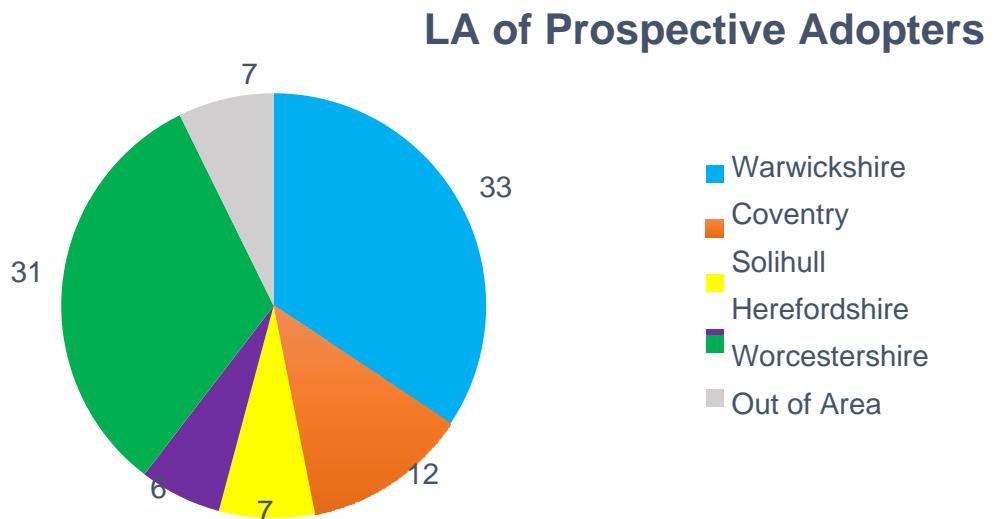


*In 2018-19, 20 panels were held in Warwick; 5 in Coventry, 8 in Solihull and 9 in Worcester.*

*The national Coronavirus restrictions introduced on 23 March meant that 1 panel each planned for Hereford and Worcester were rescheduled as virtual panels on 30 March.*

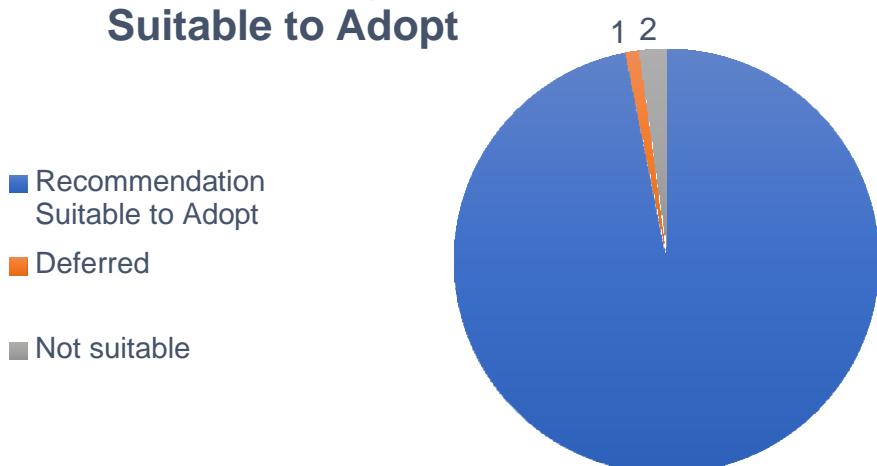
### 3 Suitable to Adopt ('Approvals')

1.1.1.1.1.1.1 At panel meetings held between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, panel considered 97 'Suitable to Adopt' proposals which - as one proposal was presented twice - represented 96 families from the following Local Authorities:



*In 2018-19, 92 approvals were presented to panel. 27 from Warwickshire, 27 from Coventry, 11 from Solihull, 20 from Worcestershire and 7 from Out of Area.*

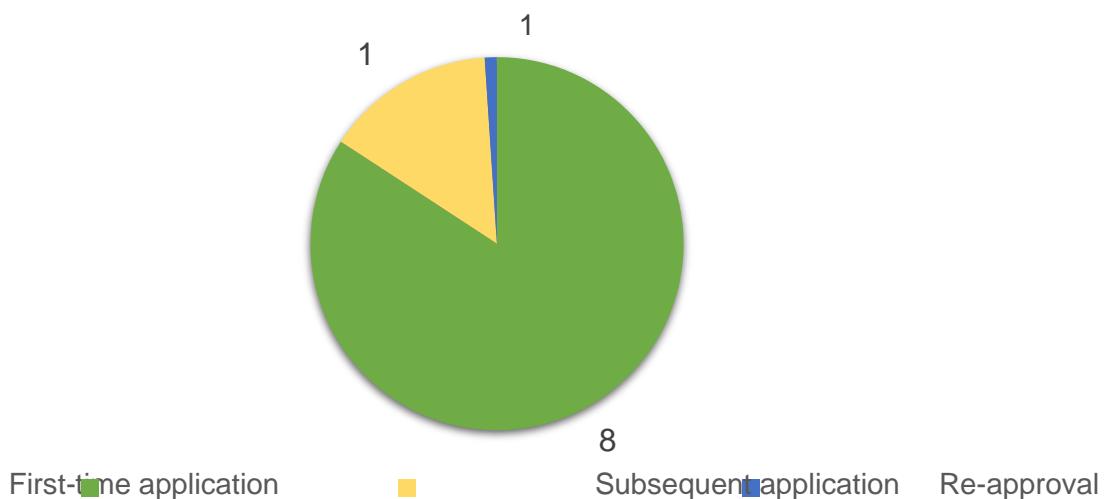
#### Recommended by Panel as Suitable to Adopt



Of the 2 non-recommendations, one was based on the conclusions of the assessing social worker in a Brief Report and upheld by the Agency Decision-Maker. The second non- recommendation was overruled by the Decision Maker, who chose to defer approval for 12 months. The one case deferred by Panel was returned later in the year, when panel made a majority recommendation in favour of approval: this was endorsed by the ADM.

Of the **95** (92) families for whom a positive recommendation was made:

#### 3.1.1.1.1.2 Adoptive families recommended



*In 2018-19, 92 positive recommendations were made. 61 were first-time applications; 22 were subsequent applications and; 1 was a re-approval.*

Within this number (2018-19 figures in brackets):

- **8 (11) were single carers**
- **8 (9) were foster carers wishing to adopt a child in their care after approval**
- **8 were LGBTQ+ couples**
- **8 were from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities**

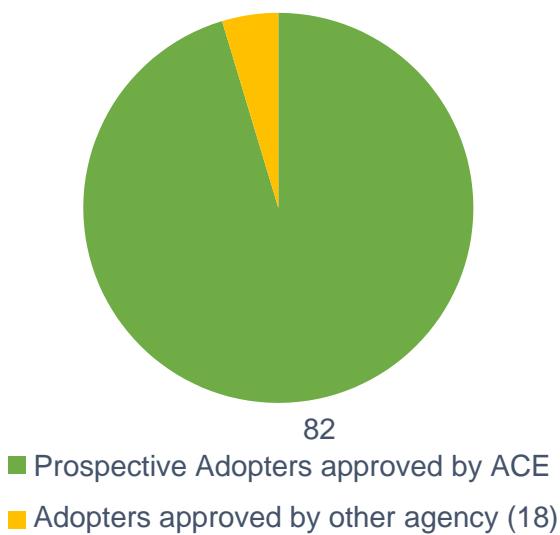
# Matches

During the same period, panel considered 88 agenda items concerning **87\*** proposed matches for a total of **102 children**.

**86** of the 87 proposed matches resulted in ADM approval. Of these 86, panel had initially deferred two cases for further work on the support plan. One deferment was upheld by the ADM and the match was recommended on its re-presentation to panel. The other deferment was overruled by the ADM and approved following its first presentation to panel. The remaining match (1 child, already placed under FFA regulations) was also deferred by panel and that deferment upheld by the ADM: this case was not re-presented to panel during the reporting period.

**Of the 86  
matches:**

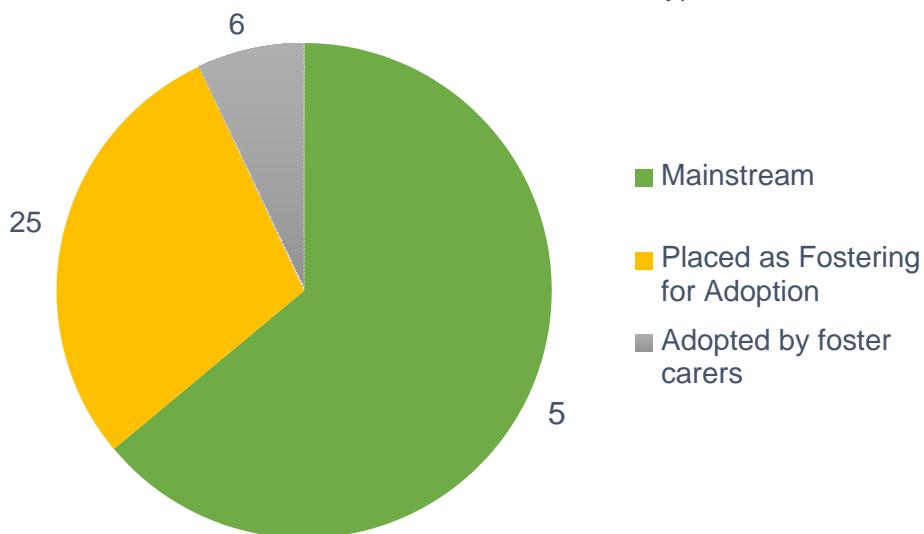
**ACE/other agency adopters**



*In 2018-19, 85 matches were recommended and approved, 78 of which involved prospective adopters approved by ACE.*

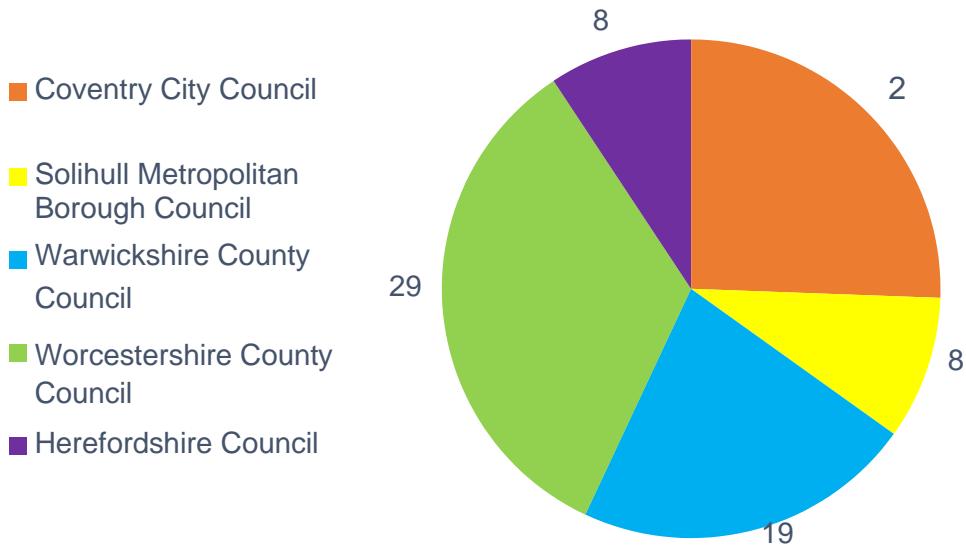
\*1 match was presented twice during the reporting period.

### 3.1.1.1.3 Type of match



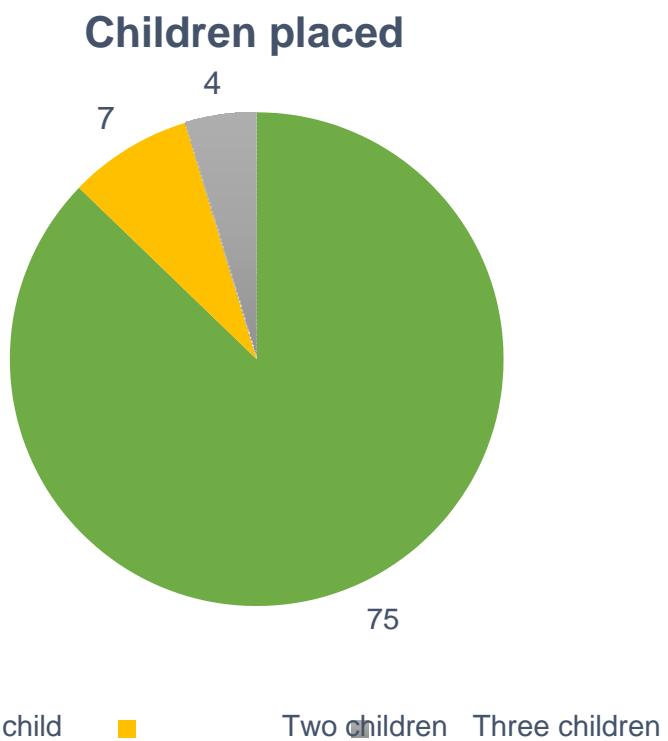
3.1.1.1.3.1.1.1 The 86 recommended and approved matches represented adoption plans for a total of **101 children** from the following local authorities:

### Local Authority of child



*In 2018-19, 95 children were placed by: Coventry (31), Solihull (3), Warwickshire (32) and Worcestershire (29).*

1.1.1.3.1.1.2 Of the **101 children** for whom matches were presented to panel, there were sibling groups as follows:



## Relinquished baby: Plan of Adoption

There were no plans of adoption presented to the ACE adoption panel during the reporting period.

### 3.1.1.2 Disruptions/Placement Breakdowns

There were no disruption or breakdown reports presented to panel in 2019-20.

## 4 Quality Assurance

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

Adoption: National Minimum Standards, 2014, 17:2

During this reporting period, the ACE Panel Adviser collated quality assurance feedback from the panel following its consideration of each case, re

- The quality of the Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR); and
- The quality of the matching reports, ie the Child Permanence Report (CPR) and the Adoption Placement Report (APR, which includes the Adoption Support Plan).

## 1. Prospective Adopter's Reports (PAR)

Panel members provided feedback on **91\*** of 97 prospective adopter's reports considered between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020.

1.1.1.1.1.1 In 83% (74% in 2018-19) of the PARs presented, panel rated the report as adequate, good, very good or outstanding; 57% of all reports were rated as good, very good or outstanding.

Really well-rounded report, couldn't have been easiest assessment to carry out and panel could see social worker's efforts to gain evidence and analyse ...the worker's strengths in psychodynamic analysis were evident.

Really good balance of narrative, adopters' voices, and analysis. Social worker had pushed herself out of comfort zone to explore a sensitive issue, which she then also triangulated appropriately with referees; she acknowledged areas of vulnerability at the meeting.

Excellent report with evidence of challenge, conciseness and great analysis. Panel had few questions.

## Panel feedback on Prospective

Report of a high standard, presentation very professional, really knows her family and did ask the difficult questions. Credit to her for work and presentation.

Would have liked more analysis of how child will experience them as family, didn't get to know about their relationship, given they are new relationship, would have liked a clear picture

Could always be a bit more exploration of adopters' understanding of key issues, especially FASD, but this is a general comment to the agency.

*Analysis of how adopter had parented previous child was lacking: report heavily weighted to using previous PAR with a little bit added when in fact everything has changed since first child placed.*

Excellent that SW put adopters in touch with families in a similar position, including a family that has had challenges. Trainer feedback was not included. A great many opening questions and needed to ask a number of questions to get a picture of the applicant.

As noted above, panel made the recommendation that applicants were not suitable to adopt on two occasions during the reporting period. Both cases concerned foster carers who wished to adopt. In one case, the assessing social worker also recommended non-approval and panel agreed with her recommendation. In the other, the social worker recommended approval but panel disagreed, sharing collective concern about the applicants' capacity to be available to an adopted child. For these cases, Panel provided feedback to the agency via the panel adviser and the minutes of the meetings at which the cases were considered, as opposed to the feedback tool.

## 2. Child's Permanence Report (CPR)

For the **86** matches presented to panel between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, panel provided feedback on the reports relating to **73\***.

Panel members noted a variation in the quality of Child Permanence Reports, rating

**64% (49% in 2018-19) as adequate, good or very good** (28% good or very good; 36% adequate but could be improved) and

**36% (51% in 2018-19) requiring significant improvements.**

**Panel did not have many extra questions. It was balanced**

Excellent: includes evidence of attempts to locate and confirm birth father, and a good social history of maternal grandmother. Also medicals were organised in a timely fashion

Rare but excellent to see that child's social worker has involved birth parents in choosing adopters.

Brilliant level of details, descriptions of birth

1.1.3

SOCIAL  
worker presented  
AT meeting AS  
PASSIONATE,  
EMPATHETIC  
INDIVIDUAL AND  
ADVOCATE for the  
children.

Please update panel: also pro  
spelled correct

The ]  
birth  
pres  
for tl  
adopters on implications.

## Panel feedback on Child Permanence Report

Further work on  
contact proposal  
to be done

*CPR just FULL of errors,  
particularly dates: feels  
'casual'. Not signed by any  
manager. No update of  
Guardian's view. No  
photographs of siblings, nor  
any consideration of contact  
with paternal half-siblings.*

Pa  
wo  
up  
in

1.1.4

First two and half

years of child's life are lacking. Sexual abuse is mentioned but not explored sufficiently

**Report needs extensive amendments. It was particularly poor that the adopters attending panel did not appear to know that the child in their care has a paternal half- sibling**

### 3. Adoption Placement Report

For the **86** matches presented to panel between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, panel provided feedback on the adoption placement reports relating to **73\***.

Of the 73 reports considered, panel members rated

**31%** of APRs as good

**34%** as adequate for panel purposes but could be improved

**35%** (42% in 2018-19) as requiring significant improvement.

*\*Feedback not collected 15 July 2019, 5 August 2019, 19 August 2019 due to technical issues*

Good to see in the report that therapeutic support for transition has been thought about.

Needs to evidence clearly why this family was picked for this child.

*Fairly generic - cut and paste.*

**Few questions to ask as paperwork in good order**

Panel had to ask why this family was chosen from the profiles shared: this is critical information that the child will want to know, but is not

## Panel feedback on Adoption Placement Report

WHAT WAS SHARED AT Panel would HAVE MADE the PLAN good

Education element is not explored in any great depth. Also no mention of the impact of DV on the child in the future. Left floating in brief sentences in support plan. Also, the dynamic of the other child is left out of the support plan.

Enough to make recommendation. Quite a few unknowns.

**Content wise all there, needed proofreading**

Would like to see more understanding of child's attachment needs. Talked of having sessions with ASW, but the couple clearly need a deeper understanding of attachment, and how to spot needs, ea independence vs

Perhaps more exploration of DV in utero impact: organisations who could support. Fairly generic plan

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# Feedback to Panel

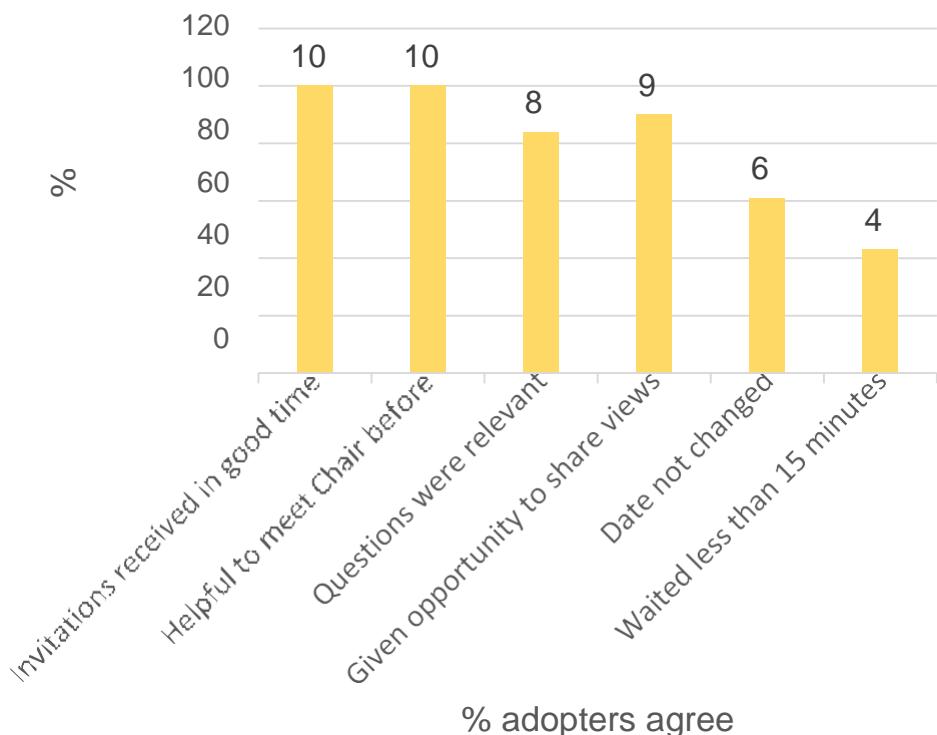
## 1. From Prospective Adopters

During 2019-20, the method of collecting feedback from prospective adopters about their experience of panel moved from a paper form with reply-paid envelope, to an online survey tool (Google Forms until October 2019; Microsoft Forms thereafter).

Adopters receive a form via email shortly after their ADM decision, which asks for comments on their assessment and panel experience (ie after approval) or matching and panel experience (after matching panel). Some survey questions were added part-way through the year. Feedback was sought from all prospective adopters who attended panel in 2019-20 for either approval or matching.

Of 185 agenda items presented to panel, feedback was received from prospective adopters relating to **44** (24%) of items (approvals or matches): the response rate was 11% in 2018-19.

### 4.1.1.1.4.1 Adopter Experience of Panel



Our panel experience was lovely -it will be a memory that stays with us forever - part of our journey. Thank you.

## Feedback from prospective

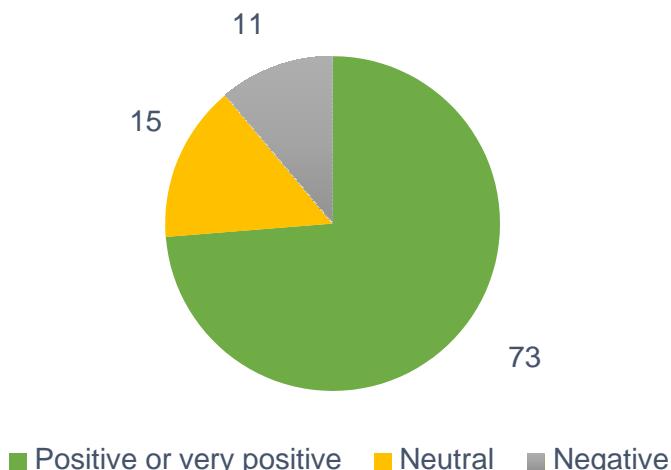
*We found the questions posed at panel to be quite narrow in their scope.*

We do feel that panel could have been more diverse. It was only made up of white females.

*Very well organised, professional and thorough process.*

4.1.1.1.4.1.1.1.1 The chair himself was lovely. He gave a personal anecdote about his own experiences as an adoptive dad which was great as his child had experienced similar things to my daughter.

### Overall experience of panel (%), n=26



...the panel were really good, warm and welcoming and asked relevant and considered questions. It was good to see them wanting to ensure that more information was gathered from social services where there were gaps.

Although highly nervous I found the panel to be warm, welcoming and positive in their receiving of me and my application. They offered positive contributions to me about my

4.1.1.1.4.1.2 a

application and this showed me that they had really read and taken on board the information in my PAR.

A real feeling of interest about me and not just the turning of process cogs/ ticking of boxes.

We found the panel a really positive experience and enjoyed the process far more than anticipated. Page 73

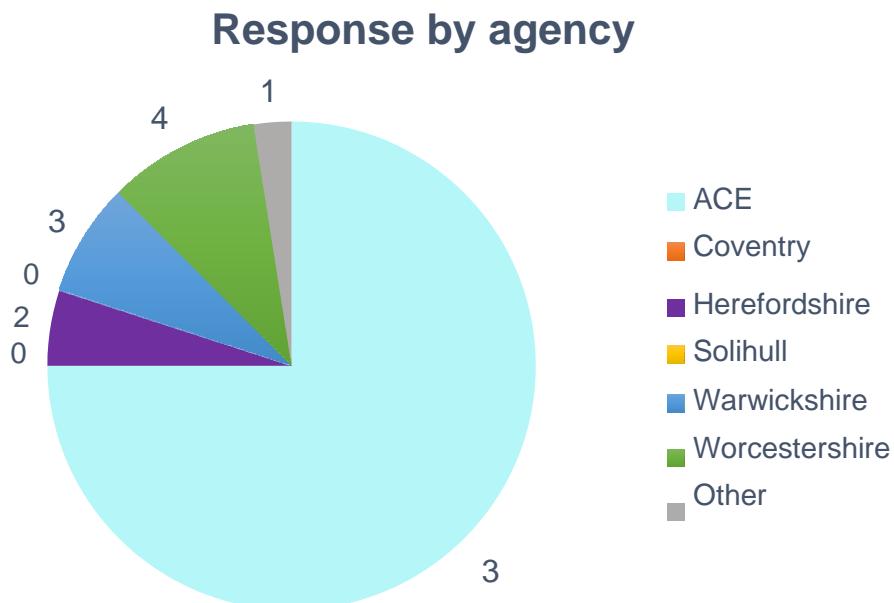
## 2. From Social Workers

An online survey template seeking feedback from social workers was developed by the Panel Adviser in January 2019 onwards, and its use has continued into 2020.

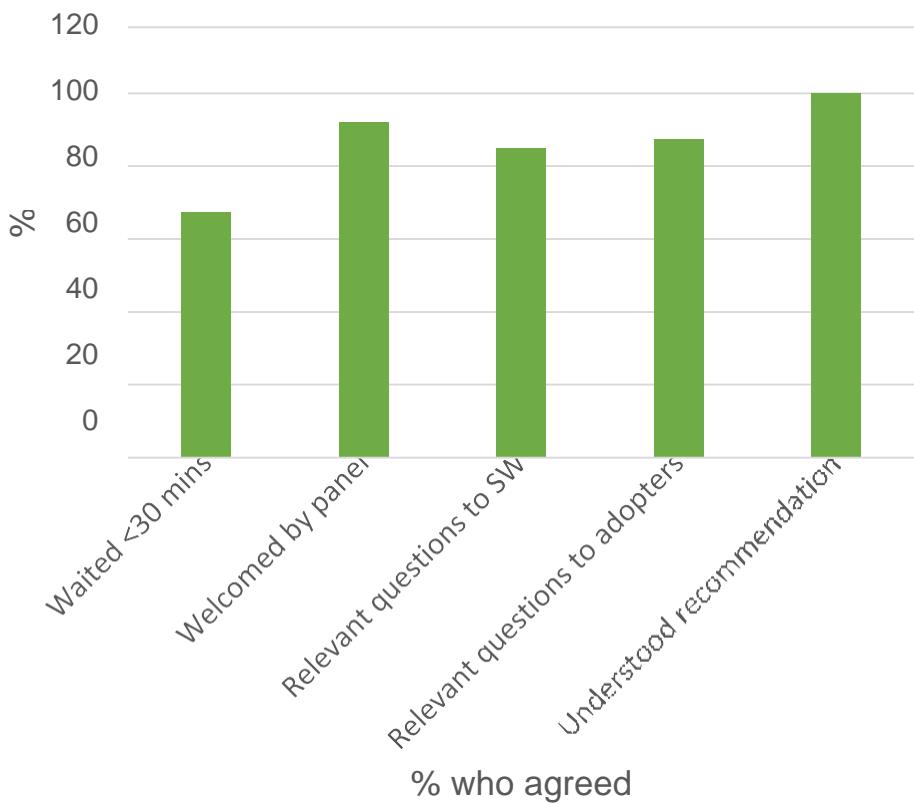
Social workers who attended panel were asked to comment upon:

- Panel's timekeeping
- Panel's welcome to them
- The relevance of Panel questions posed *to them*
- The relevance of Panel questions posed *to the adopters*
- Their understanding of the reasons for Panel's recommendations
- Ways in which the experience of attending Panel could be improved.

**Of 40 responses received between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020:**



#### 4.1.1.1.4.2 Social Worker Experience of Panel



Panel were very insightful into the needs of the children and this aided meaningful discussions to take place

## Feedback from social workers

Some of the questions were twofold and when people are nervous it can cause confusion. If possible, a question that is complicated or lengthy could be broken down to help the applicant answer fully.

*Although there was a long wait, we were informed and I feel that they made sure they saw us as soon as they could. They were mindful of how difficult it was to wait*

Panel recognised the need for both applicants to respond to questions and when a further question was posed it was done sensitively and respectfully.

I liked that the Chair came to meet the prospective adopters and gave them an overview of what panel wanted to explore and asked if they wanted time to consider this ~~before they came into panel~~

Waiting room with nothing to do but WATCH A ticking clock, 30 minutes feels like a VERY long time.

I felt that the experience for the prospective adopters was managed sensitively and respectfully. An open discussion was enabled and encouraged and the applicants felt they could respond honestly to the questions

1.4.2.1.1.1 The whole experience felt like a critique of my report

I ran over 1hr and 10 minutes late

I was impressed with the number of panel members who were also adoptive parents; panel asked relevant questions and were very positive and supportive throughout the process.

The Panel ran smoothly and it was an interesting learning experience for me as a student and for the prospective adopters.

### 3. From Agency Decision Makers

Feedback is collected from the Decision Sheet completed by the decision maker for each case. For approvals, the ADM is asked for 'Feedback to Panel'. For matches, the decision maker is asked if they are satisfied with the panel's process, and for any comments.

1.1.4.2.1.1.2

A sound exploration of the issues by Panel. Panel highlighted the issue of the approval recommendation being at odds with what the worker felt would be an appropriate placement match. This has been fed back to ACE managers. (Approval)

I am satisfied that panel explored the vulnerabilities raised in the assessment (Match)

## Feedback from Agency Decision

4.1.2 Makers

*I agree with the process and its fairness and that*

*Panel have properly addressed the arguments (Match)*

Panel explored the issue well of how they reach out and support each other and provided useful advice regarding the couple extending their network of support at the present time (Approval)

**I would like to thank panel for their robust and clear minutes (Match)**

Panel advice for further training is being followed and approval has been deferred (Approval)

The panel's discussion in around two key areas was extremely useful in clarifying that the adopters did really understand the uncertainty around A's needs and that their whole family was committed to A into adulthood. (Match)

***Useful discussion around their child care experience and the number of children they should be considered for (Approval)***

I am satisfied Panel has sought clarity around a number of issues before agreeing this match. Namely, the housing situation, identification of schooling, transfer of the PEP's and therapeutic support. (Match)

Useful that Panel explored in depth the and the health issues

30

## 5 Discussion

### 1.1.1.1.1 Prospective Adopter's Reports

- Aggregated panel feedback is made available to ACE managers when requested. Any significant issues with a report are raised with the social worker and manager before or immediately after panel.
- The professional relationship between assessing social workers and the adoption panel is to be kept under review in more regular meetings to take place between hub managers and panel advisers, with two-way feedback shared and consideration given to the ongoing learning and development of both social workers and panel members.
- Panel will be aided in its task by the further work, now nearing completion, to clarify and consolidate ACE's policies and procedures around the eligibility and assessment of prospective adopters. The Department for Education and Regional Adoption Agencies Leaders' group remain concerned to remove all unnecessary barriers to people coming forward to adopt: policy and practice changes are communicated to panel advisers and panel chairs with a view to panel recommendations absorbing agency and national priorities.
- Panel has also welcomed the reworking of the PAR template by the DfE-funded Practice and Improvement Fund (PIF) project (see 'Developments' below).

### 1.1.1.1.2 Child Permanence Reports

- ACE is pleased to note a significant increase in the percentage of CPRs that panel consider to be adequate or good.
- Neither panel nor ACE has a mandate to direct the practice or quality assurance measures used by Children's Teams in its five local authorities. However ACE endeavours to influence good practice through example, constructive and regular feedback processes and the building of respectful and professional working relationships. To this end, ACE continues to build relationships at all levels – from Heads of Service to individual social workers - across the local authorities of Coventry City, Solihull, Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

- ACE's agency advice role to the local authorities – in which an adviser from ACE scrutinises the plans of adoption for children and offers advice to the local authority's decision maker – has strengthened, with senior leaders in four of the five local authorities now welcoming this service. [The fifth LA has its own dedicated adviser.]
- ACE continues to offer a two-day training programme to its local authorities: '*Promoting Permanence through Adoption*'. This training includes a module on writing the Child Permanence Report with a view to building social worker confidence, knowledge and skills in creating a child's permanence plan. The course ran on 14 and 15 October 2019, and again on 10 and 11 February 2020.
- ACE convened a workshop for the Agency Decision Makers from the five local authorities served by ACE, held on 9 January 2020. The workshop included the sharing of a checklist quality assurance tool devised by ACE and feedback from panel.
- Detailed feedback from the adoption panel on the quality of the CPR is provided to the heads of service/senior managers every 6 months, with data bespoke to that local authority as well as overarching themes and suggested areas for improvement.
- On-the-spot feedback is provided to social workers and managers at, or immediately after, panel meetings, where a report has serious weaknesses or is exemplary.

#### 1.1.1.1.3

#### Adoption Placement Reports and Support Plans

- The personal and professional interest of panel members in adoption support plans is manifest during panel meetings, with members who are adoptive parents (15 at the time of writing) or social workers from post-adoption support, being particularly attuned to the scope, detail, precision and future-proofing of proposals to support adoptive families. In the majority of cases, Panel has noted that the report could be improved, and has on a number of occasions recommended a match while recording in the minutes quite significant concerns that the support needs of the child or the adoptive family have not been as fully explored or addressed as members feel is possible.

- Recurring areas of concern include
  - Scarce evidence of family-finding activity and/or a clear rationale for the choice of adopters, particularly where those adopters were selected for a Fostering for Adoption placement.
  - Lack of evidence of social worker preparing an older child for adoption.
  - Lack of social worker evidence gained post placement to verify the parenting capacity of prospective adopters caring for a child placed Fostering for Adoption.
  - Rationale for contact post-adoption not explained, or potentially key people left out of plans for no clear reason. Of particular concern is the often noted decision to rule out contact between siblings simply because they have not yet been supported by adults to meet.
  - Lack of clarity as to which professionals will pursue incomplete plans.
  - Generic plans, and a sense that more could be done to enhance support planning, or that important and helpful details are lacking (eg information about virtual schools, local adoption support groups, named contacts, pupil premium plus, specialist health provision etc).
- Panel's feedback on APRs is shared with the Heads of Service of ACE's five constituent local authorities, and also formed part of a presentation to Agency Decision Makers in January 2020 (at which one Panel Chair was also present).
- An annual overview of ACE's support offer to families post-adoption was provided at the annual training day though there is still room for more detailed information about provision to be shared with panel members to inform their understanding.
- Widely shared concerns around the fitness for purpose of the APR and Support Plan templates have informed a reworking of the template to try and enhance the report's clarity and level of detail (particularly around support proposals), while reducing repetition. The revised template is to be introduced in late Spring, 2020.

#### 1.1.1.1.4

#### Feedback from adopters on panel experience

- Summaries of feedback, including verbatim comments from prospective adopters and social workers, are provided to the chairs and Lead Manager at ACE, and discussed at quarterly meetings.
- Where professionals or prospective adopters have queried the panel's recommendation or advice, this is explored by managers, panel adviser and panel chair, with areas of development or learning agreed and minuted. For example, panel chairs regularly remind members to be sure that the answer to their question has not already been answered in a report, while the scope and tone of the advice that panels may offer adoption agencies (for example, around an adopter's training needs, or suggesting a specific adoption support provider) is kept under review.
- Written complaints from prospective adopters outside of the feedback tool but about their panel experience are directly investigated and responded to by the ACE Lead Manager. This would usually involve discussion with the panel adviser, chair, relevant team manager and social worker.
- The scope and nature of questions posed to prospective adopters by panel members is a key feature of every panel meeting, with the Chair and panel adviser remaining alert to issues of sensitivity and clarity as well as the applicants' nervousness. Many applicants praise the Chair's warmth and management of the meeting. In addition, most panel members have received some training in the agency's core approach, Dyadic Developmental Practice, and are encouraged to prepare questions in accordance with key principles of acceptance, curiosity and empathy.
- As a response to longer 'waiting room' times experienced between April and November, adopters were offered arrival times 10 minutes later than their social workers, and after panel had already commenced its consideration of the case. As a result, 20 of 26 adopters responding between November and March reported waiting less than 30 minutes (12 of which waiting less than 15 minutes).

- Venues (eg parking, appropriate panel rooms, reception facilities and waiting rooms) continue to be affected by wider local authority constraints on staffing and buildings. ACE will be reviewing its arrangements for panel meetings in the light of its enforced migration to online, 'virtual' panel meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic (ongoing since 23 March 2020).
- Diversity, and panel's representation of the communities it serves, remains an area for further development, and although the number of males on panel has increased over the past year, there is more to be done to demonstrate proportional representation from BAME, LGBTQ+ people, and people with disabilities (see Development Plan 2020- 21 below).

#### 1.1.1.1.1.5 Feedback from social workers on panel experience

- Social workers' feedback – including comments - is collated, anonymised and shared with the panel chairs on a regular basis at the Chairs' quarterly meetings and also between meetings. Particular issues are discussed and learning points shared with panel members before meetings where appropriate (for example observations about not smiling, facial expressions or wearing dark glasses).
- Two respondents, both independent social workers contracted by ACE, were more critical of the panel experiences (in 2 of 185 agenda items), one remarking "the whole experience felt like a critique of my report" and recalling questions raised that "had been fully covered in the report". Another felt that "Panel gave the impression of negativity towards the adopters". These criticisms were few and case-specific or concerned technical points. As stated above, comments – positive and negative – are shared.
- It is disappointing that so few social workers outside of ACE responded to the invitation to give feedback. This may be a reflection on the workloads and more pressing priorities of social workers in the field, but could also relate to the timing of the sending of the feedback form.
- The need for panel members to ask questions sensitively but succinctly too, avoiding questions with many dimensions, is noted and monitored. Panel members who may tend towards convoluted questions are encouraged by the Chair to formulate their thoughts more clearly before posing them, and this may form part of the member's annual appraisal. Similarly, panel members are encouraged to consider an open, curious and accepting questioning style, in line with ACE's core approach.

## 6 Developments in 2019-20

### 1.1.1.1.1.1.1 DfE Practice Improvement Fund (PIF) Project: Pilot of an alternative prospective adopter's report.

The participation of ACE in this project involved the pilot of a remodelled prospective adopter's report template by the agency. The 'PIF PAR' was presented to panel during the reporting period in respect of 6 applications, all of which progressed to a positive recommendation by panel and approval by the Agency Decision Maker.

Panel members were invited to give feedback to the project via an evaluation form devised by the project's lead worker. This will contribute to an evaluation of the whole project and be published separately in due course. Verbal feedback given at panel meetings was generally positive, praising a more intuitive 'flow' to the report and the inclusion of a 'personal statement' by the adopters, while noting that the quality of an adopter assessment still depends primarily on the social worker's professional skills as opposed to a template.

### 1.1.1.1.1.1.2 Panel Team

**Claire Duncombe** joined ACE as full-time Panel Administrator in June 2019 from a previous role as case conference secretary for Warwickshire's independent reviewing service. A gifted administrator and minute taker, Claire has provided outstanding support to the panel adviser, ACE staff and panel members, at times doing the work of two people when covering for staff off sick.

**Ruba Aktar** moved from her role as a part-time panel administrator covering Coventry and Warwick panels, to letterbox co-ordinator in the North Spoke of ACE. **Sue Griffiths** completes the panel administration team, working part-time to provide minuting for panels held in Solihull and Worcester.

In February, **Katie Nabbs** was offered a new post as a part-time Panel Adviser, to start in late April 2020. Katie had recently worked as a social worker in the recruitment and assessment team for ACE and before that in the adoption service of Worcestershire County Council. She worked in a range of Local Authority Children's Teams after completing her MA in Social Work at Warwick University in 2008. This has included specialist direct work with Separated Children and Young People (LAC), with Children in Care and in Fostering teams. Katie also completed training in the emotional and internal lives of children including a Post Graduate Diploma in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy (Tavistock Clinic), Nurturing Attachments training, DDP and Theraplay. Katie joins **Kate Cowell**, who has been ACE's full-time Panel Adviser since October 2018.

#### 1.1.1.1.1.3 Permanence West Midlands Conference

PWM held its Regional Adoption Panel Members' Conference on 3 December 2019 at the Priory Rooms in central Birmingham. The theme was "*Reducing the Risk of Disruption in Adoption*" and the conference included presentations from Jennifer Jones of Inspired Foundations, from Sue Armstrong-Brown, CEO of Adoption UK on '*The Role of Child to Parent Violence in Adoption Breakdown*'; from Fiona Collins of the POTATO Group on her personal experience; and from Professor Katherine Shelton of Cardiff University and the Wales Adoption Cohort Study on '*The Support Needs and Experiences of Newly Adoptive Families in Wales*'. Eight panel members attended, including all four Panel Chairs.

Review of 2019-20 Plan	
Year 2 priorities as on 31 March 2019	Update, 2019-20
The integration of Panel members from Herefordshire Council and three new members.	<p>The Chair and 7 members initially transferred to ACE in July 2020 (4 attending the training day), but 3 have since resigned due to the reduced number of panels held in Hereford and the challenges of travelling elsewhere in the ACE region.</p> <p>Seven new panel members (excluding those transferring from Herefordshire) were recruited.</p>
The re-arrangement of Panel meetings to convene up to 3 in Herefordshire between July 2019 and March 2020.	<p>Meetings were scheduled for December 2019, and then March 2020 (and thereafter June, September and November). Coronavirus restrictions forced panel meetings to become virtual, online events.</p>
To continue Panel recruitment to have a more representative Panel particularly including men and adopted people.	<p>Two adopted adults and four men joined the Central List in 2019-20.</p>
Recruit more independent social workers and social work members with fostering experience.	<p>Three independent social workers joined the Central List, plus a senior manager working for Warwickshire.</p> <p>Negotiations continue at service manager level to recruit social workers with fostering experience from the local authorities. (See Priorities for 2020-21 below).</p>
To firmly establish the quarterly feedback arrangements to ACE and the local authorities.	<p>Two meetings to discuss feedback arrangements within ACE took place, and a quarterly meeting schedule fixed for 2020-21.</p> <p>Feedback to local authorities via Heads of Service meetings was provided in October 2019. The second meeting of the reporting period was postponed due to other Covid-19 related priorities.</p>

To finalise the Adoption Panel Procedure incorporating ACE policies.	Completed in April 2019.
To review the feedback templates, to ensure that constructive and targeted feedback is available.	The move of ACE's host local authority from Google to Microsoft in October 2019 necessitated the re-creation of feedback templates, and offered an opportunity to refine the questions asked of panel, prospective adopters and social workers.
To complete Adoption Panel member appraisals within the period April 2019 to March 2020.	12 appraisals of panel members took place, conducted by a Panel Chair and the Panel Adviser. These are constrained by the need to schedule them after panel meetings: appraisals held at other times would incur additional cost (ie Chair's fee, travel expenses, time). In addition, Panels of 5 or 6 cases, followed by considerable distances travelled, often ruled out the addition of a further meeting. Where possible, the appraisals of members sitting the most frequently were prioritised.
The assimilation of Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP) principles into the Panel function, as facilitated by the agency's bid for certification and further training for Panel members.	Ongoing, as the assimilation of any approach will be (see Priorities for 2020-21).
Strengthen communication and feedback between the Panel and the agency decision makers through a planned joint training event.	A workshop for Agency Decision Makers was held on 9 January 2020: Panel was represented by Panel Adviser and one Panel Chair.

<p>To provide regular reports from ACE to the Panel to provide context on adoption outcomes, numbers of children waiting, number of adopters waiting, matches in last quarter, disruptions.</p>	<p>ACE continues to develop its reporting capacity with quarterly infograms produced by the agency's data analyst.</p> <p>The Lead Manager briefs panel chairs at quarterly meetings.</p>
<p>To improve the quality of information to prospective adopters ahead of Panel and their experience of attending the meeting.</p>	<p>Achieved in December 2019: all prospective adopters receive a leaflet with their online invitation explaining what happens at panel meetings.</p>
<p>To produce an electronic feedback format for adopters attending Panel.</p>	<p>Achieved: adopters receive a personalised email containing the link to a Microsoft Form.</p>
<p>To improve the procedures for managing deferrals or negative recommendations.</p>	<p>Regarding adopter approvals, the Agency Decision Maker, Panel Adviser, Panel Chair and Hub Manager review deferrals, negative recommendations and contentious panel advice as they arise.</p> <p>Where matches are concerned, contentious matters are managed by the Lead Manager or Operations Manager with senior managers and decision makers in the relevant local authority.</p>

## 7 Priorities for 2020-21

1. **To actively promote diversity in the Central List, with particular emphasis on recruiting more male panel members and members who can offer a perspective of BAME and LGBTQ+ communities as people from those communities are impacted by adoption.**

*This will be evidenced by analysis of the Central List in March 2021 and feedback from panel members, adopters, social workers and decision makers.*

2. **Related to 1, to help develop panel members' understanding of, and ability to explore the full range of diversity-related issues that can arise in adoption proposals, being aware of how unconscious bias, prejudice and ignorance can affect decision-making on a personal and structural level.**

*This will be a theme of the annual training day to be held on 30 September 2020, evidenced in training evaluations, and thereafter in feedback from panel members, adopters, social workers and decision makers.*

3. **To address the constructive criticisms provided by social workers and applicants about the panel experience, particularly those relating to inconsistent practice between panel Chairs, time-keeping, the relevance and clarity of questions and the way in which they are asked, the tone and direction of panel advice, panel's welcome and respectfulness, and members' careful analysis of reports to avoid unnecessary repetition.**

*This will be evidenced in future feedback from attendees at panel.*

4. **To further develop panel members' assimilation of Dyadic Developmental Practice\* as the approach underpinning Adoption Central England's practice, particularly in post-adoption support. This will be achieved in part by the recruitment of social work members from the ACE spokes, ie professionals with practice experience of DDP as a therapeutic approach.**

*This will be evidenced in induction materials, panel minutes, group supervisions, feedback to panel, the annual training event, panel members' self-evaluations, minutes of Chairs' meetings.*

5. **To recruit social workers with specialist knowledge of fostering in order to better equip panels for more informed scrutiny of adoption proposals that involve foster carers wishing to adopt a child in their care. This follows the recommendations of a Serious Case Review involving foster carers who, pre-ACE, adopted and then harmed a child. [This excludes Fostering for Adoption cases in which approved adopters are temporarily approved to foster.]**

*This will be evidenced by the Central List membership and panel members and decision makers reporting greater confidence with such cases.*

6. **To invest in panel members' personal growth and enjoyment of the role, recognising their generous commitment of time and care to children, adopters and ACE. With greater capacity in the panel team as a second panel adviser is appointed, this will be achieved through a review of how panel members are recruited, inducted and supported in their roles, leading to a development plan.**

*This will be evidenced by a development plan, detailed recording for each panel member, and a completed programme of appraisals at which panel members are supported to reflect on their growth in the role and any training needs.*

7. **Related to 3, to develop more responsive training opportunities for panel members beyond the mandatory annual training day, through the creative use of spare slots at panel meetings and virtual training events throughout the year.**

*This will be evidenced through panel agendas, evaluations of sessions held, and learning materials uploaded to the panel members' web portal.*

8. **To create and use opportunities to work in partnership with social work colleagues from ACE and its constituent local authorities, in order to understand each other's contributions, strengths and challenges in the shared quest to provide loving, safe and permanent families for vulnerable children.**

*This will be evidenced by: shared training and networking opportunities; quarterly meetings of Panel Advisers with ACE hub managers to share learning and feedback; contributions to team meetings; timely sharing of research, reviews and practice developments with panel members*

9. **To find ways to keep the child and their welfare at the heart of all of the adoption panel's activities.**

*This will be evidenced by a range of approaches, including DDP-informed questions, the recruitment of care-experienced panel members, and questions for adopters and social workers provided by adopted young people.*

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\* **Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP)** provides a framework for supporting looked after and adopted children to recover from trauma through the parenting and support they receive, supplemented by therapy when appropriate. Based on theories of Attachment and Intersubjectivity, DDP aims to help family members to feel safe and connected through the development of healthy patterns of relating and communicating. Of central importance is supporting parents to manage challenging behaviour whilst also staying emotionally connected with the children. This is achieved by helping parents with day-to-day parenting based on principles of PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy), as well as through therapeutic sessions.

**Kate Cowell**  
**Adoption Panel Adviser**  
July 2020

**Brenda Vincent**  
**ACE Lead Manager**

## Panel Central List as on 31 March 2020

### Members joining in 2019-20

**Margaret Powell**, Independent Chair, adoptive parent and member of the Independent Review Mechanism

**Eamon Moran**, Independent Chair, adoptive parent and foster carer, retired Civil Servant

**Heather Tobin**, Independent Chair, adoptive parent and retired senior police officer

**Avriel Reader**, Independent Chair, and retired Head of Children's Services, Worcestershire County Council

**Lorraine Cooksey**, Vice-Chair, adoptive parent and education specialist

**Dr Alison Rigler**, Agency Medical Adviser, Associate Specialist Community Paediatrician, Clinical Director, Children, Young People and Families, Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust.

**Dr Emma Thompson**, Agency Medical Adviser, Paediatrician, Children, Young People and Families, Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust

**Dr Lucy Coker**, Agency Medical Adviser, Senior Trust Specialist in Community Paediatrics, South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust

**Dr Viji Krishnamoorthy**, Agency Medical Adviser, Paediatrician, C&W Partnership Trust

**Dr Tanya Thangavelu**, Agency Medical Adviser, Specialist Doctor, Community Paediatrics, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

**Emma Wooldridge**, Social work member and Family Finding Social Worker, ACE

**Parveen Nagra**, Social work member and Post Adoption Social Worker, ACE

**Claire Coutts**, Independent social work member, Children and Families Social Worker

**Liz Newman**, Social work member and Team Manager, Stratford Children's Team, Warwickshire Children's Services

**Deborah Roden**, social work member and Social Worker in Connected Persons Team, Warwickshire Fostering

**Gini Harper**, social work member and team manager at Adopters for Adoption

**Cornelia Heaney**, social work member, Operations Manager Assurance and Practice Improvement - Children & Families, Warwickshire County Council

**Dr Peter Unwin**, social work member, former foster carer and social work academic

### **Independent Members**

**Andrea Candlish**, retired health visitor

**Charlotte Shadbolt**, adoptive parent of four children

**Daniela Visram**, foster carer with Warwickshire County Council

**David Burgess**, foster carer with Solihull MBC

**Janis McBride**, retired head teacher with personal experience of fostering and adoption

**Karin Burrage-Pitchford**, adoptive parent of three and

teacher **Leanne Warren**, adoptive parent and health

professional **Natasha Sutton**, adoptive parent

**Nigel Pendleton**, adoptive parent and foster carer

**Rob Rogers**, adoptive parent, educationalist and counsellor

**Sharon Bent**, adoptive parent

**Bob Duthie**, adoptive parent

**Cathie Prickett**, adopted person and fostering social worker

**Joanne Russell-Miller**, adoptive parent

**Elaine Stratford**, adopted person and health professional

**Mark Bayfield**, adoptive parent of one child

**Clare McArthur**, semi-retired SEN teacher

## **Non-voting attendees**

**Kate Cowell**, Panel Adviser (full-time)

**Melissa Rose**, Acting Operations Manager, ACE Hub and relief panel adviser **Louise Hathaway**, Operations Manager, ACE Spokes and relief panel adviser **Jemma Fordham**, Operations Manager, ACE Hub and relief panel adviser **Claire Duncombe**, Panel Administrator (full-time)

**Sue Griffiths**, Panel Administrator (part-time)

**Katie Nabbs**, Panel Adviser (part-time, from 27 April 2020)

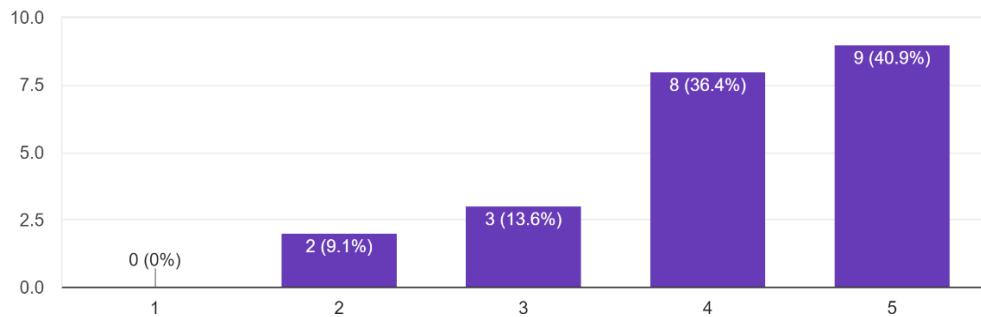
## **Legal Adviser**

**Marieluise Horne**, Solicitor, Warwickshire County Council

## Evaluation of DDP content, delivered by Dr Billy Smythe, and using case study prepared by Melissa Rose

Session 2: Introduction to DDP principles and the basis for this therapeutic intervention

22 responses



1: unhelpful; 2: useful; 3: good; 4: very helpful; 5: excellent

## Comments

12 responses

Excellent session

Fabulous intro into DDP

Very helpful Andy Murray video and group work helped to [illegible] how to word questions in a DDP way to fully understand adopters' view or understanding

Interesting - good explanation

Great presentation and exercise

Good update from last year

Good but already had a brief knowledge. Recognise this is difficult to get across in such a short space of time.

Less helpful to me as I have studied this intensely due to my daughter's emotional needs.

Good general overview

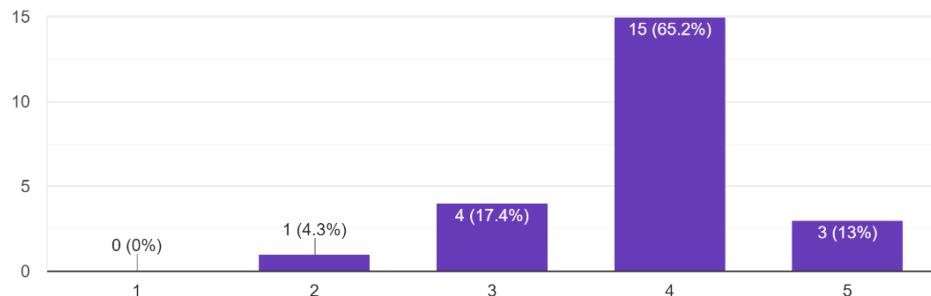
Excellent presentation - very thought-provoking. Looking forward to reading more and learning how DDP principles can support development in practice.

As usual very well put across by Billy

I would have appreciated a more structured approach to what DDP is about, case studies, the speaker's own experiences with children in care.

## Session 3: Case Study Exercise applying DDP to the work of the Adoption Panel

23 responses



1: unhelpful; 2: useful; 3: good; 4: very helpful; 5: excellent

### Comments

10 responses

Difficult that case study limited and rather unrealistic

Good session, harder to draft questions without seeing a full report as some issues may have been addressed which gave wide scope to exercise

Useful and thought provoking

It would have been more helpful to have been asked what panel need to know from a DDP perspective rather than being asked to frame questions

Very good as above

Will keep in mind when reading panel papers and understand the principle now

More difficult exercise as some questions defaulted to what panel would ask normally. Need permission to do this but also to frame appropriate DDP questions.

I need to think further about how we accommodate this approach given time constraints of agendas

Good opportunity for shared learning, discussion.

Helpful, and put into practice at yesterday's panel but not always easy to phrase questions / discussion in a DDP way during panel.

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Children and Young People Cabinet Member Briefing  
Corporate Parenting Board

23 September 2020  
30 July 2020

**Name of Cabinet Member:**  
Children and Young People Councillor Pat Seaman

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**  
Director for Children's Services

**Ward(s) affected:**  
None

**Title:**  
**Corporate Parenting Board- activity report 2019-20**

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**Is this a key decision?**

No - although the proposals affect more than two electoral wards, the impact is not expected to be significant.

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**Executive Summary:**

This report documents the activity of the Corporate Parenting Board for 2019 to 2020 and the impact it has had to improve outcomes for Coventry's looked after children.

**Recommendations:**

The Cabinet Member is requested to:

- 1) Note the content of the report and endorse the work of the Corporate Parenting Board from 2019 to 2020.

**List of Appendices included:**

The report of the Corporate Parenting Board in 2019-2020 is attached.

**Background papers:**

None.

**Other useful documents**

None.

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No.

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

Yes –this report has been considered by the Corporate Parenting Board on 30 July 2020.

**Will this report go to Council?**

No.

**1. Context (or background)**

1.1 The Corporate Parenting Board is constitutionally required to oversee the outcomes of children and young people who are looked after by Coventry City Council. It is the place where voices of children can be heard about the services they receive, and work goes on with partners to make sure that looked after children in Coventry get the best possible outcomes. This report is the opportunity for members of the public to see these improvements.

**2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

3. Note the content of the report and endorse the work of the Corporate Parenting Board from 2019 to 2020.

**4. Results of consultation undertaken**

3.1 Children and young people are an active part of the Corporate Parenting Board. In addition, the Participation Team reports back on the work that children and young people have undertaken with organisations. They are given an opportunity to ask questions of managers and promote their views on how to improve looked after services further. Questions are always given a written reply.

**5. Timetable for implementing this decision**

4.1 The work of the Corporate Parenting Board will continue and a work programme for 2020 to 2021 has already been approved.

**6. Comments from Director of Finance and Director of Law and Governance**

**6.1 Financial implications**

There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

**6.2 Legal implications**

There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

**7. Other implications**

**7.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan ([www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/))?**

This work contributes to the Council Plan in the following ways:

- Globally connected- the Corporate Parenting Board looks at how to improve the employment opportunities for looked after children and care leavers. It also makes sure that it facilitates routes into work including apprenticeships for care leavers, paid at the living wage
- Locally connected- The Corporate Parenting Board ensures that educational outcomes for looked after children are improved. It also promotes links with health colleagues to see that children get the best health opportunities they can, which includes their mental

wellbeing. The partnership arrangements available through the Board makes sure that looked after children get the best possible start in life

- Delivering our priorities with fewer resources- the Corporate Parenting Board and its partners work with looked after children and care leavers to develop services that meet their needs. It is part of an innovative system that works together to resolve problems for looked after children.

## **7.2 How is risk being managed?**

There are no identified risks to this work at the current time.

## **7.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

None

## **7.4 Equality and Consultation Analysis (ECA)**

Children young people and care leavers are key to the Corporate Parenting Board. Their views are canvassed on a very regular basis and contribute to the drive to improve the services they are offered.

## **7.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment**

None.

## **7.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

All the key partner agencies take an active part in the Corporate Parenting Board. A One Coventry approach is taken by the Board.

**Report author(s):**

**Name and job title: Paul Smith Strategic Lead- looked after children**

**Service: Looked After Children**

**Tel and email contact: 02476 976 744 paul.smith2@coventry.gov.uk**

Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

<b>Contributor/approver name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Service</b>	<b>Date doc sent out</b>	<b>Date response received or approved</b>
<b>Contributors:</b>				
Usha Patel	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	11.09.2020	11.09.2020
Paul Smith	Strategic lead – looked after children			27 July 2020
Other members				
<b>Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)</b>				
Finance: Tina Pinks	Lead accountant			8 September 2020
Legal: Julie Newman	Director of Law and Governance			10 September 2020
Director: John Gregg	Director of Children's Services			27 July 2020
Members: Councillor P Seaman	Cabinet Member			5 August 2020

This report is published on the council's website:

[www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings)

## Appendices



### Corporate Parenting Board- activity report 2019-20

#### Introduction

The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) is an advisory panel to Cabinet that operates to inform the Council about all aspects of the welfare of the children that it looks after. It consists of 7 Members and is supported by officers and partners. The voices of children in care are a key feature of the Board. This year has seen a consistent membership attending all meetings. Unfortunately, the December meeting had to be cancelled due to the scheduling of a general election on the night of the meeting. The CPB is a cornerstone to improving services for Coventry's looked after children and care leavers.

#### Changes in the CPB

The CPB has seen further improvements in the way that it has worked this year. The meeting of the Board meetings have now moved to a twilight session. This has meant that young people who could not attend due to education or work commitments are now able to come and represent the views of looked after children and care leavers.

Colleagues from the virtual school now attend each CPB. This has extended the partnership arrangements and makes sure that there is always a reference point to looked after children's education.

#### You said: we did

Issues raised by looked after children and care leavers have been considered by the CPB which has made sure that the issues have been resolved:

- Young people and foster carers asked for clarity around the looked after children savings scheme to make it fairer for all looked after children. A new scheme has been drawn up and agreed by the Board. This means that all looked after children will get the same amount saved whilst they are in care, regardless of whether they live with foster carers, in a children's home or in supported accommodation
- Young people asked for meetings that were more friendly to allow their views to be heard. The CPB meetings have now moved to a twilight session and food and refreshment is now arranged. Preparatory meetings take place before the Board with Through Care staff and young people meeting with Voices of Care to look at agenda items and reports. They

have an opportunity to prepare views and ask questions in a safe space before the formal meeting. Young people's questions are responded to in writing

- Young people raised concerns about how Adult Services were involved if they needed support as they become adults. As a result, the board has reviewed transition arrangements including those children with disabilities and those with mental health issues
- Through the CPB, young people requested a review of independence workshops so that they better meet their needs as they grow up. This has happened and the independence workshop programme has now been improved in conjunction with young people
- Young people asked for an improved range of apprenticeship options in the Council that pay the living wage and do not focus exclusively on administrative work. Action has taken place between Council departments and there is now a range of opportunities for looked after apprenticeships and work experience in all departments across the Council. All pay the living wage
- Young people asked for easy information to show them how to access health services. Health colleagues have worked with young people and 'grab guides' on topics such as having injections and registering with a dentist have been launched.

### **Additional activity**

In addition to the items identified for action by our young people, the Board has undertaken other work as part of its role. Members of the Board have:

- Gained an understanding of adolescent development including how brain development can impact on behaviour
- Received feedback and commented on the visit by Mark Riddell from the DfE who looked at care leaver services
- Reviewed feedback and commented on Ofsted's focused visit in February 2019
- Considered performance reporting
- Had a focus on health transition tools
- Reviewed the annual adoption report including an understanding of how adoption work has changed with the setting up of the Regional Adoption Agency (ACE). The Board assured itself that outcomes for adopted children continue to improve
- Been involved in the development and sign off of Coventry's Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2019-2021
- Reviewed the education and celebrated the achievements of looked after children
- Reviewed the support offered to looked after children in custody.

### **Voice of Looked After Children**

The voice of looked after children is critical to the CBP. Children's voices are heard through the children's champion who supports some young people to attend and offers support to Voices of Care. The chair of Voices of Care attends the Board. In addition, Through Care staff have also supported young people to attend the Board. Young people identify items for the board and meet before to consider agenda items and ask questions for members of the Board to answer.

Looked after children feature across the service as a whole and some examples of how they have been involved are:

- Recruitment and selection of staff across the entire looked after service

- Have been involved in consultations such as the redesign of hospital reception areas, tender bids and a new complaints procedure
- Have been able to test Go Ape and The Wave prior to public opening
- Have developed a board game 'Who Cares Wins' for staff to use to understand issues pertinent to looked after children
- Have offered a development session to social work students on what they want and expect from a social worker
- Produced a Makaton video to Katy Perry's 'Roar'
- Established a Little Voices for 8-11-year-old looked after children
- Developed a young people's guide to fostering
- Bid for and secured additional external funding for the group.

This has been a very successful year for looked after children and care leavers.

### **Next steps**

The CPB has had a very successful year. It has expanded the voice of looked after children in the Board. There has been a focus on improving outcomes for children and care leavers, taking account of what is important to them. The CPB will continue to use this approach with a view to making the board completely relevant to children and young people.

Paul Smith

Strategic lead- looked after children

June 2020