



## **Coventry Children's Services Annual Adoption Report 2020-21**

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### **1. Introduction**

Each local authority is required by regulation to publish an annual adoption report. This provides an overview of adoption activity and performance for the year 2020-21.

Coventry Children's Services delivers adoption services in partnership with the Regional Adoption Agency – Adoption Central England (ACE), which has been operational since 1 February 2018. This accords with national policy that all local authority adoption services were required to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency by 2020.

ACE provides the following services as a local authority shared services arrangement hosted by Warwickshire County Council:

- 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 assessments 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 sub-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.

Coventry's 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 it.

## **2. Local authority update**

In the last 12 months Coventry City Council, alongside other local authorities, has been presented with unparalleled challenges due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Children's Services had to adapt and develop different ways of working with children, families, partners and the courts. In some areas of the service the impact of the pandemic is clearly visible, with delay in progressing specific pieces of work and some children experiencing delay in securing permanence. Despite the challenges, managers and social workers have been creative in how they have maintained contact with children and progressed plans where possible.

- *Continue to build on the number of children placed in foster to adopt placements*

Coventry has continued to promote foster to adopt placements, with three children being placed in the last year.

- *All children to receive life story books and later in life letters within 10 days of the celebration hearing*

All children who were adopted received life story books and later in life letters. Work continues to make sure all children get these in the expected 10-day period.

- *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*

Team managers and social workers completed a workshop on the quality of life story books. A more detailed training is planned to take place next year.

- *To improve the A2 indicator of the timeliness of a placement order being made and a match with an adoptive family*

The yearly A2 indicator has improved from the previous year, reducing to 357 days. This is outside of the national target and the service has a plan to continue to build on this year's improvements.

- *To ensure the new operating model for looked after children and permanence service reduces the time taken for children in their adoption care planning*

A new operating model came into effect in June 2020. The service has experienced some instability and inconsistency due to a change in team managers and social workers, and the challenge of recruiting experienced social workers across the region. Despite this challenge the new service structure has already begun to impact upon children's timescales for securing permanence. The A1 and A2 measures for the last twelve months have reduced despite some delays for children in the court process. To meet the increased demand in this area, Coventry City Council has increased the number of teams from 4 to 6 and has 5 dedicated adoption workers. This has proven to be successful in moving children into timely permanent placements.

## **3. Service activity**

Adoption recruitment activity is reported by ACE.

Overall children's services performance:

	2019-2020	2020-21
ADM decisions that a child should be placed for adoption	40	36
Placement orders granted by the court	28	24
Matched with prospective adopters	25	30
Number of children placed with adopters	25	28
Adoption applications submitted	21	33
Number of children adopted	31	19
Children placed with adopters at period end	19	29
Number of children with placement order awaiting match	23	13
Number of children subject to an adoption plan change	5	13
Number of adoptive placement disruptions	0	1

In summary, adoption work across the city has been significantly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Pressures within the judiciary has meant that children are not progressing to adoption as quickly as would be anticipated. Court delays have meant fewer placement orders being made and less children being adopted. However, the impacts of the court challenges appear to be starting to resolve as adoption applications have increased and there are more children placed with adoptive families. Coventry has been the most successful local authority in the ACE region for matching children with families.

In the last year Coventry experienced a higher number of babies being relinquished at birth than what would be usually anticipated. Further analysis will be completed to understand the reasons for the significant increase and how best the local authority can respond to the needs of this group of children.

This year has seen an increase of 61% in the number of children whose plan for adoption has changed. Coventry Children's Services always keeps children's plans for permanence

under review and does not allow children to drift. This has resulted in the changes of care plans for some children. To understand the needs of our children an audit was completed. This demonstrated that for some children subject to concurrent planning, concluded in alternative permanent outcomes. Four children's plans were changed, and they returned to live with birth parents, as risks had reduced, and evidence of change had been sustained. Three children also secured permanence with family members and a foster carer through a special guardianship order. These is excellent outcomes for these children. For the remaining six children, complex health and emotional needs resulted in no adopters being identified. These children's plans have changed to long-term fostering with proposals to link them long-term to their current carers.

One child experienced disruption in an adoptive placement. An independent disruption review was held and concluded the potential adopters were unable to meet the needs of the child due to their perception of challenging behaviours. The analysis of the child's circumstances afforded a better understanding of subsequent placement needs. Learning from all disruptions is disseminated across the service so social workers understand how best to make adoption placements work for all children.

As a local authority Coventry successfully placed 3 children in foster to adopt placements, with all children securing their permanent home at the earliest opportunity.

#### 4. Service Performance

National Performance Indicators	Government Target	Coventry Three Year Average (2017-2020)	Coventry performance 2019-20	Coventry 2020-21
<b>A1</b> - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days)	426 days	665 days	663 days	599 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)	122 days	331 days	367 days	357 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	32.9% (36/85 children)	30.9% (29 of 94 children)	42.4% (36/85 children)
<b>A10</b> - Average time in days between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer applications		461 days	This is a new measure	440 days (450 days 2019-2020)

<b>A20</b> - Average time in days between entering care and placement order		280 days	This is a new measure	256 days (288 days 2019-2020)
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The timeliness of children entering care and moving in with their adoptive family has improved from the previous year. Coventry's performance remains above national targets. However, the timescales are affected by a cohort of children who have a plan for adoption, that has been ongoing and still being pursued as it remains the most appropriate permanence plan. Coventry will always prioritise positive outcomes for children despite impact on performance targets.

For the first time the annual adoption report has included the A10 and A20 indicator, which provides a more accurate picture of children's progress in the last twelve months. The A10 indicator recognises outlier indicators, particularly where children who have been in placement and adopted by their foster carers. In 2019-20 the A10 indicator was 503 days. This has been reduced to 440 days in last twelve months. When compared to the A1 indicator of 599 days for the year, it is evident there is a significant improvement in the timeliness of children moving in with their adoptive families, enabling earlier security and stability for children.

The A20 indicator measuring the time a child entered care to a placement order being granted, in 2019-20 was 288 days. This again has been reduced to 256 days, further evidencing that practice is improving, and children are securing earlier permanence.

The proportion of children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive families has increased from 32.7% to 42.4%. (A3 indicator).

For 7 of the 19 children made subject to an adoption order by the court in 2020-21, took less than the government target of 426 days between the children entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. This is an improvement on the previous year.

All the adoption measure indicators demonstrate that permanence planning is becoming timelier, leading to children experiencing stability and security at an earlier stage of their care journey.

#### Good practice examples

During the pandemic there has been some examples of good social work practice that has provided children with positive outcomes.

1-Two siblings were adopted separately but live within a short distance of each other. Adopters facilitate regular family time ensuring the children continue to have a sense of their identity and birth family.

2-One child had been placed with foster carers from three days old. He has subsequently been adopted by his foster carer's grandson, enabling to remain within the same family from his birth.

In 2020-21 ten children were adopted by their foster carers. These children have experienced placements that have provided them with consistent people in their lives, affording them long-term attachments, with security and stability and ultimately a sense of identity, all of which provides excellent outcomes for children. Coventry will continue to explore all avenues of permanence that are in the best interests of children.

Of the 19 children adopted 9 were defined as 'hard to place' children. Social workers have been tenacious in pursuing adoption and achieving positive outcomes.

There are several children who are 'hard to place' for whom adoptive families have been secured. Four children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds were adopted last year. This represents 21.1% as a proportion of all children being adopted in 2020-21.

Children's Services is consistently looking to improve practise 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. The service has also employed an additional social worker with a focus on supporting social workers in completing child placement reports.

## **5. Coventry City Council Service Plan 2021-2022**

In partnership with ACE the local authority plans to improve and develop its adoption practise in the following key areas:

- Develop collaborative working across Children's Services to for effective pre-birth, pre-proceedings and care proceedings to ensure timely permanence is achieved for all children
- Ensure fostering to adopt is considered for every child where appropriate and a rationale for decision is recorded
- Ensure family finding information is recorded on the child's file which explains rationale for the choice of family for the child. This will make sure children understand their journey if they return to their files in later life
- Ensure team managers continue to have access to adoption scorecard data to enable regular monitoring and review of children's progress
- Develop an understanding of why there is a higher number of relinquished babies, to ensure processes meet the needs of these children improve the timeliness of the A2 indicator of a placement order being granted and a match with an adoptive family give social workers 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 Create learning workshops for social workers to develop skills in writing child placement reports

**Lisa Walsh**

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**Looked after children and permanence service**

**15 June 2021**