



Coventry Children's Services Annual Adoption Report 2022 -23

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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 2022-23.

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.
- Individual and couple counselling service
- Space2Talk – adoptive parents wellbeing.

This arrangement with ACE 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, counselling and wellbeing services 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 an 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. In January 2021 ACE became the first adoption service to be DDP certified.

2. Local authority update

Over the last 12 months, staffing has stabilised, and overall good progress has been made progressing permanence for children who had a care plan of adoption.

Review of Service Plan 2021- 2022

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

Continue to develop collaborative working across Children's Services for effective pre-birth, pre-proceedings and care proceedings to ensure timely permanence is achieved for all children.

In January 2023, the President of the Family Division re-launched the Public Law Outline, renewing the focus on timely permanence for children through resetting the importance of pre-proceedings and achieving the statutory 26-week timescale. In response to this, Coventry and Warwickshire Children's Services worked with the Designated Family Judge, HH Judge Walker to develop a tracker to support the timely completion of assessments within Care Proceedings. The Designated Family Judge facilitated a seminar about the relaunch of the Public Law Outline (PLO) and this was well attended by Coventry practitioners.

A pre-birth pathway is being developed, to strengthen the effectiveness of care planning for unborn babies and with the Pre-Proceedings strengthened over the last 12 months has ensured that families are supported effectively and timely.

For the financial year 2022 -2023, there was continued to be a marked improvement in the number of children entering pre proceedings following a threshold discussion at Legal Panel Meeting, with 78% of families where threshold is deemed met entering pre proceedings and only 22% requiring immediate issue.

There has been an increase in the number of families diverted from care proceedings at the conclusion of pre proceedings rising to 55% compared to 36% in the previous year.

There has continued to be an increase in the number of families subject to pre proceedings prior to the issuing of any care application to Court, rising from 34% at the end of 21/22 to 45% at yearend 2022-2023.

Continue to reduce the length of time that children wait to be matched following the court granting a Placement Order.

There has been considerable improvement against this indicator for 2022-2023. The average time that children waited to be matched following a Placement Order being granted was 172 days. This means that the average length of time that children waited (measured against this indicator) was reduced by a further 64 days from 2021-22. Works continues to further reduce timescales so children can be matched with adoptive families earlier. The introduction of weekly family finding meetings will continue to drive this forward. The Adoption Manager continues to meet regularly with team managers and social workers to monitor and review each child's progress.

To pilot a new Child Permanence Report that Coventry Children's Services have developed in conjunction with Warwickshire Children's Services and ACE

The new Child Permanence Report was piloted in Coventry and Warwickshire from September 2022 with the aim to improve its relevance and to include a trauma informed perspective. Staff have found the new format easier in terms of conciseness which lends itself to a better report for the child/young person to read and make sense of when they are older.

Training commissioned through ACE on "writing Child Permanence Reports" has been well attended by social workers and team managers. The training helped staff to fully understand how important "what good looks like" and how to achieve this. The impact of this for our children, families, and adopters means that the completion of the report, the information contained within, language, and quality continues to be good with an ongoing improving picture.

Pending an evaluation and consideration by the ACE Executive Board, it is hoped that the new format CPR will be cascaded across the ACE region.

Reduce the length of time that children wait between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.

The average time children waited between entering care and moving in with their adoptive families has increased slightly by 49 days from the previous year. A number of children experienced delay due to care proceedings taking longer to conclude, this was down to court listings, and further assessments or parents contesting the care plan of adoption. There was also a small cohort of children (5) who waited longer in the family finding stage and (1) transition stage. Family finding progressed to external searches for 5 of the children due to their complex needs and 1 child joined his sibling after further assessments.

Coventry remains committed and aspirational in securing permanence via adoption for all children who wait longer /have complex needs. From January 2023 there has been a renewed focus in meeting the 26-week statutory timescale for care proceedings so that impact of delay is minimalised.

To further increase and embed fostering for adoption.

Team managers and social workers have attended ACE training relating to permanency planning and early permanence. This has afforded them greater insight and embedded the importance of always considering foster to adopt/early permanence at the earliest opportunity. Senior managers also attended a Nationwide conference on early permanence with research

regarding early permanence, lending itself to better outcomes for children. This has been shared with team managers and social workers to better inform practice.

Pre-Proceedings work has strengthened over the last 12 months which has enabled an increasing number of children to be placed with foster for adopt families. This minimises moves for our children where there is a care plan of adoption. 9 children were placed for foster to adopt and increase of 5 from 2021-22.

Work with ACE and other local authorities in the ACE group towards ACE achieving the Early Permanence Quality Mark. The Early Permanence Quality Mark is a standard of excellence demonstrating a commitment to delivering early permanence for children where adoption is in their best interests.

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The Quality Mark is voluntary and available to all adoption agencies in England who wish to achieve good practice or strive for improvement in early permanence.

There have been several collaborative working groups with ACE partners to look at, discuss and work towards meeting the seven quality descriptors that capture key elements of early permanence delivery such as preparation and support, planning processes and collaboration with other professionals and organisations.

A recent audit undertaken by Adoption Central England identified some further areas of work for completion which is ongoing across the ACE region. Coventry remains an active part of the working group – working collaboratively with all ACE partners.

3. Service activity

Adoption recruitment activity is reported by ACE.

Overall Children's Services performance:

	2020-21	2021-2022	2022-2023
ADM decisions that a child should be placed for adoption	36	50	50
Placement orders granted by the court	24	39	50
Matched with prospective adopters	30	30	40
Number of children placed with adopters	28	30	34
Adoption applications submitted	33	26	38

Number of children adopted	19	38	32
Children placed with adopters at period end	29	18	25
Number of children with placement order awaiting match	13	26	33
Number of children subject to an adoption plan change	13	6	6
Number of adoptive placement disruptions	1	1 *sibling group of two children.	0

In summary, the number of children with an ADM endorsed care plan for adoption has remained the same from 2021-22 to 2022-2023. However there has been an increase from 39 to 50 children made subject to a Placement Order. This increase is attributed to the number of children who experienced delays in court from last year with the courts concluding on these proceedings during 2022-2023 and orders being granted.

The increase in children on Placement Orders has contributed to sufficiency challenges within ACE that have emerged over this year. There are more children needing adoptive families than adopters approved to be matched with children. Fewer potential adopters are expressing an interest in being assessed to adopt This is a national problem and not bespoke to ACE.

The number of children where permanency was achieved via adoption has also declined slightly by 6, due to an increase in single and sibling groups of children with complex needs meaning family finding is more intricate and has taken longer, however children placed with adopters has increased significantly due to timely transitions following matching panel and more adoption applications submitted at the 10-week period of the child being placed with adopters.

Coventry has continued to have the highest number of children matched with families within the ACE region. Attendance of social workers and the family finder at bimonthly adoption clinics and bimonthly adoption “catch ups” ensures that all children where there is a plan of adoption are kept under review to avoid any drift and delay.

Securing early permanence via foster for adopt, has remained a priority, ensuring where possible that children secure permanency at the earliest opportunity – 9 children were successfully placed on this basis.

There have been no adoption disruptions.

4. Service Performance

National Performance Indicators	Government Target	Coventry performance 2020-21	Coventry performance 2021-22	Coventry performance 2022-23
A2 - 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	357 days	236 days	172 days
A3 - Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)	14 months	42.4% (36/85 children)	37% (39 of 105)	35% (39 of 112)
A10 - Average time in days between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer applications		440 days	459 days	508 days
A20 - Average time in days between entering care and placement order		256 days	383 days	333 days

The average time children waited between entering care (A10) and moving in with their adoptive families increased by 49 days from the previous year. This is due to some children with complex health needs and sibling groups waiting longer to be matched with families. The sibling groups waited longer to move into their adoptive homes due to transitions planned over a longer period.

The A20 indicator has improved over the last year which has meant that children have waited 50 days less from entering care to Placement Order. The work that has taken place collaboratively between Childrens services, the Judiciary, and other stakeholders to reduce delays within the court process has meant that permanency has been secured in a timelier way.

Significant improvements, reducing the length of time that children wait, from Placement order to ADM match have seen that children have waited 64 days less than last year. This improvement has been down to the collaborative working relationships with ACE and the early identification of potential adopters, meaning that adopters can be identified for some children prior to the placement order. Once a Match had been identified, timely matching panels have been attended and the match ratified by the ADM.

The average wait of 172 days against the A2 indicator is slightly above the government target (122) and above some of the other local authorities in the ACE region. Coventry remains committed and aspirational in achieving permanence via adoption for our children with complex needs and those considered harder to place.

7.7% of children adopted during 2022-23 were from black and minority ethnic groups.

The following are some good examples of permanence being achieved for children during the last year.

Two siblings placed separately due to their individual complex needs have an ongoing and meaningful relationship. The social work team set up a chat forum to build the relationship between the adopters initially, which then progressed to the adopters facilitating regular direct contact most months between the brothers without social care involvement.

Family finding took considerable time for a child with global delay, the social worker worked hard to secure permanence for this child and the right family was identified and matched. Since being placed within her adoptive home as an only child, her speech has vastly improved, and development is progressing well. Health professionals have commented on how the gap in delay is becoming less.

A group of three siblings 4,3 and 1 ½ years were adopted together. One child has complex health needs and health uncertainties. Adopters have some personal knowledge of this syndrome and are equipped to advocate for the child.

A child aged 4 with complex health needs waited over a year for their right family. This family had shown an interest not long after Placement Order was granted however a connected persons family was explored, who later withdrew after many months. The original family remained committed, and the child is now living with them. This family has first-hand experience within their own family of their adoptive child's needs and the adoptive grandfather is a paediatrician who is always on hand for advice.

5. Coventry City Council Service Plan 2023-2024

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

- Continue to 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.
- Continue to ensure fostering for adopt/ early permanence is considered for every child where appropriate and a rationale for decision is recorded.
- Continue to collaborate with ACE on an operational and strategic level (via the ACE Executive board) regarding sufficiency challenges in ACE to minimise delay for children being matched with adoptive families.

- All social workers who are working with children who have a plan/potential plan of adoption will undertake permanency planning training offered by ACE to continue to promote good practice in this area.
- All social workers will undertake training on life story work, life story books offered by ACE to continue to promote good practice in this area.
- All Team managers to complete training on how to quality assure Childs permanency reports and know what good looks like.
- An action plan will be developed about promoting a more open approach to post adoption contact, as recommended in the National Adoption Strategy (27/9/23) and draft Best Practice Guidance from the Public Law Working Group

Helen Harper

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Looked after children and permanence service.

20th September 2023.