

Time 5.30 pm **Public Meeting?** YES **Type of meeting** Oversight

Venue Committee Room 3 - 3rd Floor - Civic Centre

Membership

Chair Cllr John Reynolds (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Martin Waite
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Rashpal Kaur
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Zee Russell

Conservative

Cllr Paul Appleby
Cllr Udey Singh

Quorum for this meeting is three Councillors.

Information for the Public

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the democratic services team:

Contact Shelley Humphries
Tel/Email Tel: 01902 554070 or shelley.humphries@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Address Democratic Services, Civic Centre, 1st floor, St Peter's Square,
Wolverhampton WV1 1RL

Copies of other agendas and reports are available from:

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Tel 01902 550320

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Some items are discussed in private because of their confidential or commercial nature. These reports are not available to the public.

Agenda

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

- | <i>Item No.</i> | <i>Title</i> |
|-----------------|--|
| 1 | Apologies for absence |
| 2 | Declarations of interests |
| 3 | Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2019 (Pages 3 - 10)
[To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2019 as a correct record.] |
| 4 | Matters arising
[To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2019.] |
| 5 | Schedule of outstanding matters (Pages 11 - 14)
[To receive the Schedule of Outstanding Matters.] |
| 6 | Children in Care Council
[To participate in workshops with members of the Children in Care Council.] |
| 7 | Adoption Service Interim Report (Pages 15 - 48)
[To receive the interim update report from the Regional Adoption Agency.] |
| 8 | Virtual School Head Annual Report 2019 (Pages 49 - 74)
[To receive the annual report from the Virtual School Head.] |
| 9 | Performance Monitoring Information (Pages 75 - 82)
[To receive the Performance Monitoring Information Report.] |
| 10 | Exclusion of the Press and Public
[That in accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972] |

PART 2 - ITEMS NOT OPEN TO THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

- | | |
|----|--|
| 11 | Councillor Visits to Establishments - Schedule of Visits
[To receive verbal feedback on any visits to establishments undertaken by Councillors since the last meeting] |
|----|--|

Attendance

Chair Cllr John Reynolds (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Paul Sweet

Cllr Paula Brookfield

Cllr Rashpal Kaur

Conservative

Cllr Udey Singh

Employees

Fiona Brennan

Shelley Humphries

Alison Hinds

Alice Vickers

Shaquille Spence

Designated Nurse, Children and Young People in Care

Democratic Services Officer

Head of Children and Young People in Care

Corporate Parenting Officer

Participation Officer

Members of the Care Leavers' Independent Collective (CLiC) also attended as guests.

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paul Appleby and Emma Bennett.

2 Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interest made relative to the items under consideration at the meeting.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2019

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2019 be confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

There were no matters arising in relation to the minutes of the previous meeting.

5 Schedule of outstanding matters

It was reported that invitations had been extended to visit a residential establishment to take place on 21 November 2019. Councillor Rashpal Kaur and Councillor Udey Singh requested to attend.

It was noted that the discrepancy with the dental checks would be addressed in the Performance Monitoring Information report.

Resolved:

That the Schedule of Outstanding Matters be received.

6 The REACH Local Offer for Care Leavers Aged 16-25 Annual Review 2019

Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer presented the REACH Local Offer for Care Leavers Aged 16 – 25 Annual Review report. The report outlined that The Local Offer for Care Leavers had been live for 12 months and a comprehensive review of the benefits and services accessible by care leavers had been undertaken in August and September 2019. This has been contributed to by care leavers themselves as well as a steering group set up to support the services provided as part of the Offer.

The report outlined the feedback received from a consultation event which had taken place on 10 August 2019 at Aldersley Leisure Village and provided an analysis of that feedback by the steering group. A number of recommendations based on the developments and additions discussed during the consultation were made.

The Corporate Parenting Board agreed the developments and additions that had been made to the Offer and approved the publication of the revised REACH Local Offer for Care Leavers Aged 16 – 25.

Resolved:

1. That the developments and additions made to the REACH Local Offer for Care Leavers Aged 16 – 25 be agreed.
2. That the publication of the revised REACH Local Offer for Care Leavers Aged 16 – 25 be approved.

7 **Care Leavers' Forum Workshop**

Members of the Care Leavers' Forum known as the Care Leavers Independent Collective (CLiC) delivered a presentation and provided an in-depth verbal update on the findings from the Care Leaver Offer review consultation.

It was reported that 13 care leavers attended the workshops held on 10 August 2019 out of the 280 care leavers that resided in Wolverhampton. 11 of the 13 reported that they were aware of the Care Leaver Offer. A concern was raised by the young people as it was felt this was not enough engagement. The Board and officers present acknowledged the request from the young people that Young People Advisors (YPAs) could promote opportunities and events more effectively in future.

It was noted that care leavers had requested face to face counselling on matters such as domestic violence and child sexual exploitation (CSE). It was felt that, as vulnerable young people living independently for the first time, they would need to be aware of how to avoid these situations or know what to do if they already felt at risk.

It was highlighted that the training flat had been found to be beneficial and had been well utilised by young people who felt ready to try living independently.

The combination of the WVLiving passes with free Swift travel cards had been welcomed by the young people as the included free travel had proved essential for young people to get to work and interviews. It had also enabled them to visit friends, which had a huge positive impact on social connectivity and wellbeing. Care leavers had also requested access to bikes as this was often the preferred mode of transport for shorter journeys.

It was clarified that the Swift travel cards were valid on West Midlands buses, trains and trams. It was noted that the scheme had been vital and was hoped that it would become permanent. The young people planned to write to the West Midlands Mayor in January to seek support from the Regional Care Leavers' Forum to continue the scheme or a similar one. It was reported that the Prince's Trust had become involved with young people in Greater Manchester to set up a similar scheme and a member of the CLiC had been tasked with liaising with them to support this in Wolverhampton.

It was reported that of the 13 young people attending the workshops, only one stated they held a Health Passport. It was clarified that this was a document issued to care leavers which provided valuable health information such as NHS number, blood type, any allergies, etc. It was clarified that this scheme had been operating for 18 months and Health Passports were normally issued to new entrants into care or their carer when attending their first health assessment. It was thought that young people who had been in care some time prior to the launch of this initiative may not have been issued one. It was clarified that the document could be requested retrospectively by a child or young person's social worker or Young Person's Advisor by contacting the

Gem Centre. It was agreed that this information be disseminated so everyone was aware of how to obtain one.

It was reported that a successful bid had been made for Wolverhampton to take part in the House Project and a video showing the pitch was screened. The video had been produced in collaboration with members of the Care Leavers' Forum and provided an outline of the benefits of the House Project to Wolverhampton Care Leavers and how they looked forward to being involved. The project involved young people being supported to renovate a property with the intention of living there once complete.

The young people in the video who had already taken part in other areas described how they had learned valuable skills from decorating to budget management as well gaining a feeling of independence and social connection. They also felt a sense of pride from maintaining their own property which all contributed to their mental health and wellbeing.

The young people present at the meeting anticipated that the life skills that would be developed would help to build confidence in self-sufficiency and would enable care leavers to support each other with the skills they had gained. It was noted that a steering group had been established with officers and members of the Care Leavers' Forum to support the House Project. It was requested that an update on the progress of the House Project be provided by the young people at a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

It was highlighted that in addition to this, a Co-chair of the Care Leavers' Forum, Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services and Spectra First had teamed up with Barclay's bank to produce finance workshops as part of the Care Leaver Covenant. It was noted that many young people were not always aware of money management and financial matters when the time came to live independently. It was thought that care leavers would be at a disadvantage if they had not received this guidance at home and the workshops had been designed to furnish them with the skills to manage their finances themselves.

It was noted that a Grandmentor Scheme had been established to match young people with an older person who would provide non-judgemental guidance and support them into independence. It was reported that the Scheme was now underway and one of the young people present had signed up and participated in their initial meeting. They reported that the meeting had felt positive and it was felt that their mentor was a good match. The young person recommended the scheme to others.

It was reported that officers had been working with the Rees Foundation Charity who had offered support to pay for driving tuition. A scheme had been devised in which the young person would pay for every fourth lesson and the Rees Foundation would provide the remainder. This would continue up until a successful driving test pass or up to the value of £750, whichever came sooner, on the proviso was that the driving theory test had been passed first. The steering group was exploring supporting young people in applying for their provisional licence and passing their theory test. It was clarified that the young person could use a company of their choosing and the charity would be invoiced. It was suggested that sourcing driving schools providing the option of female-only tutors would be beneficial if this made young women feel more comfortable.

It was noted that the high cost of insurance could sometimes be a barrier to young people owning a car and it was agreed that ways to support young people in this matter would be explored. It was suggested that Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer would explore possible options for obtaining either discounted insurance rates or compile a guide to choosing the best value policy to add to the offer.

Other positives included the new support software to replace the Mind of my Own (MOMO) app. It was reported that the new software would be web-based which meant it could be accessed from desktop computers anywhere. This was important as the use of phones or other hand-held devices often incurred data charges. It was clarified that the use of cross-platform chat groups had been considered, however issues with GPDR and verifying user identities in these groups, as well as the data charges had been barriers to this.

It had been planned to introduce discounted rent for working care leavers looking to take up tenancy with Wolverhampton Homes. It was clarified that a discount of 50% would be applied in the first year of tenancy and 25% discount in the second. Tenants would then be expected to pay 100% of their rent in the third year. This staggered approach had been designed to ease young people in gently until they were able to manage their living costs independently. It was noted that, even when working, young people may be on low incomes and would struggle initially.

To further support this, it had been planned to remove Universal Credit sanctions for care leavers. It was outlined that missed Job Centre appointments resulted in reductions to benefits, which had meant young people who didn't have the means to travel to the appointments had been unfairly penalised. It was reported that, in some cases, young people had needed to access food banks to make ends meet and it was hoped that the removal of these sanctions would prevent this.

It was noted that protected savings was also on the list to explore. The Wolverhampton City Credit Union was suggested with the Council acting as guarantor for loans.

It was reported that members of CLiC had been looking into discounted optical care and prescriptions. Discounted prescription forms for care leavers were being explored and the Beacon Centre for the Blind had been approached in respect of optical care as there had once been an in-house optometrist operating with the charity. It had been found that this was no longer the case, however a list of care leaver friendly opticians was being compiled in partnership with the charity.

In respect of health and wellbeing, CLiC members had been exploring the offer of discounted or free beauty treatments at local salons, such as hair styling or manicures. It was noted that the benefits of this included feeling confident and cared for as well as feeling presentable and prepared for job interviews. One high street chain had offered free cuts at one of its branches, however a miscommunication had meant clarification was needed on which branch this was.

The final request was that work be undertaken to ensure a smooth transition from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to adult mental health services so no-one was left without support during the transition period. It was noted that the Mental Health Trusts were combining, therefore it was advisable to await the completion of this before undertaking further work.

The young people were commended and thanked by Board members for their contribution.

Resolved:

1. That the process for obtaining a Health Passport be promoted to Young People Advisors, Social Workers and Young People.
2. It was requested that an update on the progress of the House Project be provided by the young people at a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.
3. That Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer explore possible options for discounts or advice on car insurance policies.
4. That clarification on the salons offering free appointments be sought.

8 **Assurance About the Use of Unregistered Placements in Wolverhampton**

Alison Hinds, Head of Children and Young People in Care presented the Assurance About the Use of Unregistered Placement in Wolverhampton report and highlighted salient points. The report provided reassurances to Board members regarding how the safety and wellbeing of young people aged 16-18 placed in unregulated supported accommodation was being promoted. It was clarified that unregulated accommodation was a placement in accommodation that was not Ofsted inspected.

It was noted that in March 2019, Nadhim Zahawi MP, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families had written to Directors of Children's Services and Chairs of Local Safeguarding Boards in all authorities highlighting the challenges face by many authorities in relation to these unregulated services and a report was presented to Children's Leadership Team to offer reassurances for how placements were made and monitored from a quality assurance perspective.

It was reported that since then, a number of improvements to placement processes had been devised as listed at paragraph 3.8 and the progress of these improvements monitored as outlined in paragraph 3.9 of the report.

It was noted that all young people in unregulated supported accommodation would continue to receive support with their health and wellbeing as detailed in the Local Offer for Care Leavers.

Resolved:

1. That the Assurance About the Use of Unregistered Placement in Wolverhampton report be received.

9 **Performance Monitoring Information**

Alison Hinds, Head of Children and Young People in Care presented the Performance Monitoring Information report and highlighted salient points.

It was highlighted that Wolverhampton was one of the only three local authorities that had been reducing the number of children and young people in care.

It was noted that there was more to the statistics than just the figures therefore it was requested that additional narrative be provided as an explanation to the figures represented in the dashboard.

The discrepancy with the dental checks had been resolved.

It was requested that Board members be provided with further information on the 24% of young people who were not available for education, employment or training for clarification.

It was noted that Wolverhampton were performing favourably when compared with statistical neighbours and engaging in good partnership working to achieve good results.

Resolved:

1. That the Performance Monitoring Report be received.
2. That additional narrative be provided as an explanation to the figures represented in the dashboard.
3. That Board members be provided with further information on the 24% of young people who were not available for education, employment or training for clarification.

10 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information contained in paragraph 2 of the Act, namely information that is likely to reveal the identity to an individual.

11 **Councillor Visits to Establishments - Schedule of Visits**

There had been no visits undertaken since the last meeting, however it was agreed that a report would be provided at the next meeting of Corporate Parenting Board for the visit on 21 November 2019.

12 **Assurance About the Use of Unregistered Placements in Wolverhampton**

Alison Hinds, Head of Children and Young People in Care presented the Assurance About the Use of Unregistered Placement in Wolverhampton report and highlighted salient points. The report provided reassurances to Board members regarding how the safety and wellbeing of young people aged 16-18 placed in unregulated supported accommodation was being promoted. It was clarified that unregulated accommodation was a placement in accommodation that was not Ofsted inspected.

It was noted that in March 2019, Nadhim Zahawi MP, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families had written to Directors of Children's Services and Chairs of Local Safeguarding Boards in all authorities highlighting the challenges face by many authorities in relation to these unregulated services and a report was presented to Children's Leadership Team to offer reassurances for how placements were made and monitored from a quality assurance perspective.

It was reported that, since then a number of improvements to placement processes had been devised as listed at paragraph 3.8 and the progress of these improvements monitored as outlined in paragraph 3.9 of the report.

It was noted that all young people in unregulated supported accommodation would continue to receive support with their health and wellbeing as detailed in the Local Offer for Care Leavers.

Resolved:

That the Assurance About the Use of Unregistered Placement in Wolverhampton report be received.

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Corporate Parenting Board 23 January 2020
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Report title	Schedule of Outstanding Matters	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All wards	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services	
Originating service	Governance	
Accountable employee	Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer
	Tel	01902 554070
	Email	shelley.humphries@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Recommendation for action:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive and comment on the Schedule of Outstanding Matters.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to appraise the Board of the current position with a variety of matters considered at previous meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board.

2.0 Background

2.1 At previous meetings of the Board the following matters were considered and details of the current position is set out in the fourth column of the table.

Date of Meeting	Subject	Lead Member / Officer	Current Position
14 November 2019	To promote the process for obtaining a Health Passport.	Fiona Brennan, Designated Nurse for Children and Young People in Care.	Correspondence has been sent to Social Workers in order to disseminate to children and young people and their carers.
14 November 2019	To clarify which salons are offering free appointments.	Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer	It has been clarified that this is no longer offered by the high street chain discussed at the meeting, however an alternative is being sought.
14 November 2019	That further information be provided on the percentage of care leavers not available for the labour market.	Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer	The cohort is being examined and figures will be provided when available.

3.0 Financial implications

3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

3.2 The financial implications of each matter will be detailed in the individual report submitted to the Board.

4.0 Legal implications

4.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

4.2 The legal implications of each matter will be detailed in the individual report submitted to the Board.

5.0 Equalities implications

5.1 There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report.

5.2 The equalities implications of each matter will be detailed in the individual report submitted to the Board.

6.0 Climate Change and Environmental implications

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

6.2 The climate change and environmental implications of each matter will be detailed in the individual report submitted to the Board.

7.0 Human resources implications

7.1 There are no direct human resources implications arising from this report.

7.2 The human resources implications of each matter will be detailed in the individual report submitted to the Board.

8.0 Corporate Landlord implications

8.1 There are no direct Corporate Landlord implications arising from this report.

8.2 The Corporate Landlord implications of each matter will be detailed in the individual report submitted to the Board.

9.0 Health and Wellbeing implications

9.1 There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.

9.2 The Health and Wellbeing implications of each matter will be detailed in the individual report submitted to the Board.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.1 Minutes of previous meetings of the Board and associates.

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CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Corporate Parenting Board 23 January 2020
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Report title	Adoption Service Interim Report	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds, Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All wards	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services	
Originating service	Adoption@Heart	
Accountable employee	Mark Tobin	Service Head, Adoption@Heart
	Tel	07970 266496
	Email	Mark.tobin@adoptionatheart.org.uk
Report has been considered by	Children and Young People's Leadership Team	9 January 2020

Recommendation for action:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive the Adoption Service Interim Report for Adoption@Heart.

Recommendation for noting:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to note:

1. The progress made in the first six months of the Regional Adoption Agency.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This interim report fulfils the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report attached at Appendix 2.
- 1.2 It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 30 September 2019.
- 1.3 Section two and three of the report is specific to adoption performance relating to the City of Wolverhampton Council children. Sections four onwards relate to service performance for the partnership as a whole.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Adoption@Heart is a Regional Adoption Agency providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. The service is hosted by Wolverhampton and went live on 1 April 2019. Following a directive from the Department for Education in 2015 all local authorities in England are required to enter into regional arrangements for their adoption services by 2020.

3.0 Progress, options, discussion, etc.

- 3.1 The report (Appendix 2) provides the detail of performance and the progress the new service has made during the six-month period up to 30 September 2019. The executive summary (Appendix 1) provides a summary of the report.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 The budget for 2019-2020 is £4,181,310, the agreed contributions from each of the partners are shown below:

Partner Organisation	2019-2020 Budget £
Dudley MBC	1,128,172
City of Wolverhampton Council	1,102,948
Walsall MBC	984,615
Sandwell Children’s Trust	965,575
Total	4,181,310

- 4.2 Any costs associated with the delivery of the service will be contained within the above allocation. Should additional costs be identified over and above the allocation then discussions will take with partners to agree additional contributions to fund the service.

[NM/08012020/M]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 The collaboration agreement which outlines the requirements of all partners was agreed with oversight from the council's legal service, prior to the service becoming operational in April 2019. This remains the underpinning legal agreement. Primary legislation is in place requiring all councils in England to enter into regional arrangements by 2020.
[TC/15012020/W]

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 There are no equalities implications to highlight at this stage.

7.0 Climate Change and Environmental implications

- 7.1 There are no climate change or environmental implications in place at this stage.

8.0 Human resources implications

- 8.1 Staff in the service are employed by the City of Wolverhampton Council following a Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) exercise in April 2019.

9.0 Corporate Landlord implications

- 9.1 The Adoption@Heart service is located at Priory Green Offices, Pendeford. There are no property portfolio implications at this stage as the service will remain at this location for the foreseeable future.

10.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 10.1 There are no health or wellbeing implications at this stage.

11.0 Schedule of background papers

- 11.1 Appendix 1: Executive Summary
Appendix 2: Interim Annual Adoption Report

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Executive Summary
for Corporate Parenting Board
Interim Adoption Service Report – 1 April to 30 September 2019

Introduction

Adoption@Heart is a Regional Adoption Agency providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. The service is hosted by Wolverhampton and went live on 1 April 2019. Following a directive from the Department for Education in 2015 all local authorities in England are required to enter into regional arrangements by 2020.

This report fulfils the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report below.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 30 September 2019

Section two and three of the report is specific to adoption performance relating to children in Wolverhampton Council. Sections four onwards relate to service performance for the partnership as a whole.

Key Areas of Performance to highlight

Children

The number of children waiting on a Placement Order and not matched or placed at 30 September 2019 is twenty-four. Of these only eight are the subject of active family finding as the others were in the process of being placed for adoption at the end of the six-month period.

The number of Placement Orders Granted has reduced with ten granted during the six months against one-year performance of fifty-two, forty and fifty-five over the previous three years.

The Number of SHOBPA Decisions has also reduced with fourteen given in the six months compared with fifty-three, forty-five and fifty-nine over the previous three years.

The number of children placed for adoption in the six months at 9 is lower than previous years, with forty-two, forty-five and forty-five over the previous three years.

The three-year Adoption Scorecard average figures are above thresholds as well as the national averages and the six months performance for the thirty-five children adopted is also above the thresholds. The context regarding the characteristics of the children adopted is contained in the report.

Early Permanence Placements are significantly lower than previous years with a need to develop and embed this practice moving forward.

Adopter Recruitment

The Adoption@Heart service one-year performance for adopter recruitment has been significantly affected by the low numbers of legacy adopters in the system who transferred across when the service went live. The targets were considerably higher than the combined performance of the four local authorities and the transition challenges in year one have further impacted on performance. The service is likely to approve between fifty and sixty adopters in year one against a target of one hundred and twenty.

The range of activities planned to address this challenge within the marketing strategy are outlined in the report.

The Department for Education has provided additional funding to assist adoption services nationally with recruitment due to the continued low numbers of adopters in the system.

Family finding

The family finding service has been operating on lower staffing capacity during the first six months due to the fact that the numbers of children in the system waiting for adoptive placements are higher than was expected before the service went live. Additional capacity has been agreed for twelve months and further assessment of demand is needed to reach a clear understanding of the resource needs of the service.

Forty-seven children were placed for adoption in the six-month period, against a projection of one hundred and forty nine from data provided before 1 April.

Numbers of children requiring adoptive placements in Sandwell are higher than expected whilst the number within Dudley is lower. The higher demand regarding children waiting, along with delay for some of these children in Sandwell has had an impact on the other partners.

Adoption Support

The Adoption Support service has established itself across region in the first 6 months. Demand has been high and further data analysis is needed in understanding the resource needs of this service area. Managers and staff have been determined and resourceful in ensuring the families in the greatest need are being prioritised for support. Ninety Adoption Support Fund applications have been made in the first six months.

Further development work is needed in reaching the point where a clear accessible adoption support offer is available across the region in line with innovative approaches that are being adopted by other regional services.

Service Development

The service has been challenged by ICT related issues restricting access to children and adopter information. These are now in the process of being resolved.

Staffing retention is positive with low vacancy rates following the TUPE exercise in April.

The adoption panel service has been operational since April and clear processes have been developed for ADM decisions.

Considerable practice development work is needed to reach a point where clear practice guidance is in place for all service areas. Discussion is taking place at board level to ensure funding is available for this.

Good progress has been made in developing the culture and vision for the new service with full involvement from staff.

Further work is needed across the partnership in engaging with staff and improving understanding of the service, with a view to improving communication and joint working.

Clear governance structures are in place within a Strategic Commissioning Board and a Management Board with representation from all partners.

Summary

During the first six months of operating the Adoption@Heart service has made significant progress and there are many successes that should be acknowledged in placing children with adoptive parents. The service has also faced some significant challenges with regard to the transition phase in establishing the new agency. Performance regarding family finding and adopter recruitment at the end of September 2019 is reflective of these challenges and it is likely the impact of the transition will continue to have an impact during the remainder of year one.

Key priorities as the service moves forward and becomes more established are:

- The development of improved and established practice guidance for all areas of practice.
- Improved access to children's information and communication between the service and partners in progressing family finding for children more effectively.
- Further development of the adopter marketing and recruitment strategy with a view to increasing the "in house" pool of adopters and reducing inter-agency usage.
- Further development of the Adoption Support "offer" for the region.
- Improved engagement and partnership working within the region.

Mark Tobin, Service Head

13 January 2020

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Adoption Service Six Monthly Report

1 April to 30 September 2019

Report for	City of Wolverhampton Council
Produced by	Mark Tobin Head of Service
Service	Adoption@Heart



1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report

This report fulfils the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report below.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 30 September 2019

Section two and three of the report is specific to adoption performance relating to children in Wolverhampton Council. Sections four onwards relate to service performance for the partnership as a whole.

Adoption@Heart is a Regional Adoption Agency providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. The service is hosted by Wolverhampton and went live on 1 April 2019. Following a directive from the Department For Education 2015 all local authorities in England are required to enter into regional arrangements by 2020.

2. Number, type and age of children waiting for adoption and length of time waiting

As at 30 September 2019 there were 24 children subject to placement orders but not yet placed for adoption. The breakdown of timescales for these children is below:
24 children in total waiting

Less than 3 months	2
Between 3 and 6 months	13
Between 6 and 12 months	7
Between 12 and 24 months	2
Children waiting over 2 years.	0

Summary / Analysis Regarding Children Waiting:

Of the 24 children who are subject to Placement Orders eight are in the process of being adopted by their foster carers. Five children are in the process of being matched and placed with adoptive parents and three have been subject to a change of plan and awaiting revocation of their Placement Orders. There are eight children who are in the process of active family finding. All of these eight children have a hard to place characteristic and none have waited longer than six months as at 30 September 2019.

2.1 Children Made Subject to Placement Orders:

April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Total
0	3	5	1	1	0	10

During the three previous years, the number of Placement Orders granted were as follows:

Financial Year:	16/17	17/18	18/19
	55	40	52

The number of Placement Orders Granted has reduced considerably in the six month period in comparison with previous years.

2.2 Children Subject to Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions:

As at 30 September 2019 there are 21 children with the decision to be placed for adoption (SHOBPA) but not yet subject to a placement order.

2.3 Number of Children who had a SHOBPA during the period:

April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Total
2	2	5	4	1	0	14

Financial Year:	16/17	17/18	18/19
	59	45	53

The number of SHOBPA decisions in the six month period is significantly below the number given over the three previous years. This indicates that the reduction in Placement Orders evident during the first 12 months will continue during the remainder of the year.

2.4 The Numbers of Children who had a Change of Plan in the Period:

Three children were subject to a change of plan away from adoption during the six month period.

2.5 Number of Children Placed for Adoption during the period:

April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Total
2	3	1	2	1	0	9

12 Children were matched in the period and three were not placed prior to 30 September.

Financial Year: Children Placed	16/17	17/18	18/19
	45	45	42

The number of children placed with adoptive parents in the six month period has reduced significantly in comparison with the previous three years.

The transition process to the new service, in particular family finding capacity, has been a significant factor impacting on the first six months performance. The projected number of children that the service expects to place before year end is 23 (*Based on children already matched and placed or linked / matched and due to be placed prior to 31 March 2020, as at December 2019*).

It is evident from the analysis of children waiting that the number of children placed will be half of the number for the previous year and the similar in relation to the two years prior to that.

The transition process to the Regional Adoption Agency will be a factor impacting on family finding performance in this period, as outlined in section 4.2 (Family Finding).

3. Number of Children Adopted (year to date):

The number of children already placed with adoptive parents and legally adopted by them in the year to date is 35.

Number of children adopted in the three previous years is below:

Financial Year:	16/17	17/18	18/19
	47	40	41

The number of children adopted has increased based on half year performance in comparison to the three previous years. Due to the time delay in a child being placed and adopted this does not at this stage relate to Adoption@Heart practice. The numbers of children leaving care nationally via adoption has reduced continuously since 2017.

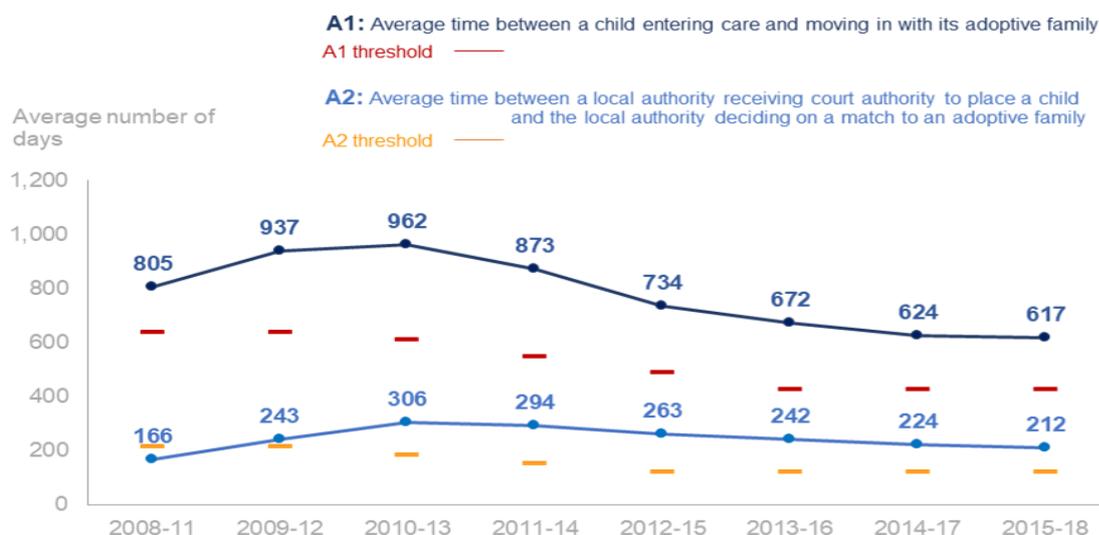
Adoption Scorecard Performance:

In 2014, as part of its' Adoption Reform Agenda, the government introduced Adoption Scorecards to track local authority performance and to tackle delay in the adoption system. Scorecards are produced for a three year rolling average with the latest data being published for the period April 2015 to March 2018. Wolverhampton performance is detailed below. Data for April 2018-March 2019 is expected to be published in Spring 2020.

The indicators are:

A1 – number of days between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. The current threshold is 426 days.

A2 – the number of days between receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and the Agency decision about a match to an adoptive family. The current threshold is 121 days.



This shows that although the length of time between a child entering care and moving into the adoptive family (A1) has reduced slightly over the last three years. At 617 this is 191 days above the target and 131 days above the national average of 486 days. A low number represents good performance. With regard to the A2, this has continued to reduce slowly over the last eight years. At 212 this is 91 days but only 11 days above the national average of 201 days.

For the 35 children adopted in the six months to date, the Scorecard performance is as below:

A1 - 814 days average

A2 – 205 days average

All but two of these children were placed prior to 1 April 2019. In view of the fact that the scorecard thresholds are not met for these children it is important to understand that:

- 80% had one or more hard to place characteristic
- 49% from a minority ethnic group
- 40% part of a sibling group - six sibling groups consisting of two/three CYP
- 20% were over the age of five
- 3% had some form of disability

37% took longer than 426 days between entering care and date of placement

Of these, 54% had entered care on average seven years prior to the date of placement

3.1 Early Permanency:

There were no children placed in early permanence placements during the six month period. Where notifications of the need for a Foster for Adopt placement have been made these have been siblings of children already placed which have not progressed due to adopter led decisions not to proceed on this basis. One child was not placed on the basis of legal / court related decisions. Further work is being undertaken to fully understand and address the reasons why notifications to the service are low in relation to the numbers of children placed in early permanence placements in years.

4. Recruitment of Adopters:

4.1 Introduction / Background:

The Adoption@Heart service went live as a Regional Adoption Agency on 1 April 2019. At that point adopters who were already in the process with either Dudley, Sandwell or Walsall, transferred across to the new service located in Wolverhampton. The combined pool of adopters from the four local authorities therefore became the available “in house” resource for children within the group from that date. This included adopters in the assessment process, as well as those approved and waiting to be matched with a child.

Prior to the service going live during 2018/19 the marketing was undertaken collaboratively on behalf of the four services under the Adoption@Heart brand. Prior to this there was a strong history of collaboration under the Adoption in the Black Country (ABC) brand, involving the same four local authority partners.

Following the DFE decision to regionalise adoption services nationally in 2015, a decision was made to integrate the adoption services fully for Sandwell, Dudley, Wolverhampton and Walsall Councils. The service went live on 1 April 2019.

4.2 New Enquiries:

The service started taking new enquiries as a regional agency from 1 April 2019. From April to September 2019, 160 enquiries via a web-based contact form have been received, 72 of these resulted in an initial home visit.

4.3 Information Events:

Information events provide an opportunity to find out more about Adoption@Heart, children in need of adoption and the adoption process, as well as having questions and concerns answered.

Changes have been made to the style of the events since the service went live, by improving the presentation and delivery to ensure a clear message is shared with prospective adopters. The presentation has been rebranded and redesigned in line with the Adoption@Heart brand.

Feedback from attendees has been positive, with many saying all the information they needed was delivered via the presentation.

New marketing material has been created including a presentation, sidewinders, leaflets and adoption jargon buster. The new material has helped with brand awareness and consistency. The events take place every two weeks across the region. 53 individuals attended the events in the four months, June to September. The key venues have been Walsall Leather Museum, The Lighthouse Media Centre in Wolverhampton and Priory Green in Wolverhampton.

For the next phase of development, it is intended that we will further extend our catchment area and encourage people from outside Wolverhampton, Walsall, Sandwell and Dudley to attend the events. This will enable the service to reach people outside of the region, who may be interested in adopting.

4.4 Initial visits:

Social workers have carried out 72 initial home visits to people who had made enquiries to adopt in the 6-month period. Following the visits, a management decision is made about inviting the applicant forward to register their interest to commence stage one of the assessment and preparation process.

4.5 Registrations of Interest:

There have been 43 adopter Registrations of Interest received in this six month period. Following Registration of Interest, checks and references are completed within stage one and applicants are invited to attend the three day adoption preparation training which takes place monthly at venues across the region.

4.6 Current position:

At the end of the period (30th September 2019), there were 34 families in Stage One or in a break between stage one and two and 19 in Stage Two.

These are made up of a mixture of adopters who transferred to the service at 1 April 2019 and new Registrations of Interest since the service went live.

4.7 Adopters Approved:

There have been 20 adopters approved in this period. Given this is the first six months of the service being operational, there is no previous period to make a comparison with. The majority of adopters approved by the service to date are those who transferred across from the local authority services at 1 April 2019. The four adoption services for Walsall, Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Dudley approved 73 adopters combined in the year 2018/19 and 49 in the year 2017/18.

Based on numbers of adopters in stage one and two of the assessment process at 30 September 2019, the projected number of approvals in the pipeline is likely to be between 60 and 70. It is difficult to say how many of these will be approved before 31 March, as not all will be completed in timescales. The performance of the service in the first year has been significantly affected by the low numbers of transferring adopters in the assessment process as at 1.4.19, as well as the impact on performance of the significant transitional issues that were experienced during April, May and June.

Approved March to September 2019	Stage 1	Stage 2	Projected Number Approved in Year 1
20	34	19	Between 50 and 60

4.8 Adopters Required (Analysis):

Prior to the service going live, a target was set for the number of adopter approvals in year one at 120 (105 for A@H children plus 15 for income generation). This projection was based on the expected numbers of children that each local authority would need to place with adopters recruited by the service (105) and some additional adopters who would have children placed by other local authorities to generate income (15). In view of the number of transferring adopters and performance of the service in the previous two years, further consideration has been given to the projected numbers of adopter approvals for years one and two and the Service Head is working closely with the Management Board in communicating clear expectations about the likely performance regarding adopter recruitment. Given this is lower than projected, more children have been placed on an inter-agency basis, than expected in the first six months.

4.9 Step Parent adoptions:

It was agreed that the service would undertake four Step Parent Adoption cases for each local authority each year. This will be considerably below the demand for each local authority. Work has been undertaken to embed consistent practice in screening enquiries in the local authorities and Adoption@Heart staff offer consultation on all enquiries received. To date the numbers referred to the service are in the table below.

Walsall	2
Sandwell	0
Dudley	1
Wolverhampton	0

5. **Marketing Report:**

Marketing figures for this period are:

- 98 enquiries received between 31 May – 30 September.
- 53 information events attended since 31 May (70 approx. since 1 April)
- 321 Twitter followers (+49 from 1 April – 26 November)
 - Average reach per day – 4,016
 - Average impressions per day – 90,915
- 2,048 Facebook likes (+120 from 1 April – 26 November)
 - Average reach per day – 1,557
 - Average impressions per day – 383,927
- Website statistics for the period April 2019 to September 2019 (new website launched in November 2019)
 - Unique visits – 5,623 (31 daily)
 - Page views – 21,384

Marketing Activity:

Marketing activity for the last six months has mainly focused on the Adoption@Heart brand, ensuring that all materials distributed have a consistent look and feel. This has been achieved through the creation of the Adoption@Heart brand guidelines. Work has been scheduled with the design team at City of Wolverhampton Council, to rebrand all our materials which should be completed early 2020.

A marketing 'tracker' has been established to monitor the number of enquiries received, how far along the process adopters get and where the drop off point is. The new tracker will be used to closely track progress against how many enquiries are needed each year to reach our approved adopter target.

Changes have been made to information events, improving the presentation and delivery to ensure the right information is shared with prospective adopters. Feedback from attendees has been extremely positive.

A new website was launched in November, offering a much better user experience, whilst providing valuable information to those who are considering adoption. Within the first week of launching, the site had 348 (50 daily) unique visitors compared to 178 (25 daily) for the last week of the old site. The new site includes information on the adoption process, criteria to adopt, the different types of adoption and support available, as well as latest news and adoption events.

An internal newsletter has been created with the first edition sent out in October. The newsletter will update management board, Adoption@Heart employees and employees across the four LA's and Trust, on Adoption@Heart.

Leading with a digital by design approach, a big emphasis has been placed on the social media channels (Facebook and Twitter) to ensure we are putting out, not only relevant, but

creative and consistent content. The service is reaching on average 1,557 people via Facebook and 4,016 via Twitter.

Department for Education campaign:

Over the summer, the DFE awarded each RAA £25k to help with their adopter recruitment strategy. RAA leaders met and decided it would be better to pool all the money together (650k) and create a national campaign, particularly focusing on finding adoptive families for harder to place children and recruiting BAME adopters.

A National Adopter Recruitment steering group has been set up with representatives from across the UK, to help adoption agencies with recruitment campaigns, locally, regionally and nationally, to increase the number of relevant enquiries received.

The selected approach for the campaign is being developed for a national launch 2020, with three subsequent bursts of activity, with a campaign toolkit and channel recommendations to support local areas. The marketing campaign will launch in February 2020 with three subsequent bursts of activity (LGBTQ+ week in March, mothering Sunday, Easter). All marketing to be completed by the end of May 2020.

Planned Adoption@Heart activity for 2019/20 and into the next year:

- Meeting planned with communication leads from each of the four LA's and Trust to help plan the recruitment and marketing strategy for Adoption@Heart and tap into their knowledge and expertise of their areas. The plan going forward is to meet with the group once a quarter.
- A meeting has been set up with Adoption Counts in Manchester for December as they have successfully run a bespoke family finding campaign via social media, which is something we are looking to emulate.
- Joint work is planned with the four other Midlands based RAA's regarding opportunities for joint marketing activity and sharing of practice. The aim of this is for the Midlands five RAA's to share best practice and work together in placing children in the region going forward. The plan going forward is to bring together marketing officers across the region to establish a Midland steering group.
- Establish a successful Google AdWords campaign to increase traffic to the new website and generate adopter enquiries.
- Promotional video for Adoption@Heart to be shared across our channels. Adopters to share their experiences on camera, why they chose adoption and why they would encourage others to adopt through Adoption@Heart. Following on from this, we will establish a list of 'adopter champions', those adopters and adoptees we can call upon to help with marketing recruitment activity.
- Bespoke social media campaign profiling particular children who are taking longer to be placed for adoption to generate child specific enquiries.
- Week-long campaign, planned for March, to highlight LGBT Fostering and Adoption Week.
- Month long campaign, planned for April 2020, to celebrate Adoption@Heart's year anniversary.

- A reference group from within the staff team to be established to consult on marketing activity going forward, share ideas and best practice. One member from each team at Adoption@Heart to be involved.
- Google AdWords Campaign to raise the profile of the Adoption@Heart brand.

6. Requirements on the Preparation of Adoption Report Regulations:

6.1 Complaints:

There were two complaints about the service during the six-month period, which were dealt with within stage one of the formal complaints process within Wolverhampton (as host local authority). Both of these were concluded in stage one.

One of these was from adopters in stage one of the recruitment process, where a decision was made not to proceed. Their complaint related to this decision and delays in communicating this in a timely way. The complaint was partly upheld due to the delay, but the decision not to invite to stage two was not changed. Learning has been identified and discussed with the relevant staff.

The second stage one complaint was from an adoptive parent who had received unauthorised contact from a birth parent, who had obtained their contact details. It was believed by the adopter that this breach had come from within Wolverhampton Council. Following an investigation by the Service Head, it was concluded that this was not the case. The complaint also highlighted issues in communication during the service transition process with the adopter regarding post adoption contact. This part of the complaint was upheld and learning discussed with the relevant team manager.

There have been 17 informal complaints during the six month period. These related to a range of issues relating mainly to the transition between the local authorities and the new service. Many of these were caused by delays in accessing information about adoptive parents who were in the process of either assessment or being matched with a child at the time the service went live, but where their case was not allocated to a social worker who transferred into the service, the information was not immediately accessible. Delays in progressing adoption support requests and Adoption Support Fund applications were also included along with delay in progressing agency decision following panel, due to reduced panel administration resources when the service went live. Managers have resolved these in discussion with adopters and avoided escalation to the formal process. As the impact of the transition has reduced, the volume of these issues arising has also reduced.

6.2 Staffing:

There are 61 staff in the service and the staffing in each team is as per below:

Adoption Support:	Adopter Recruitment:	Family Finding:	Business Support:	Panel:
1 Manager	1 Marketing Executive	1 Manager	1 Manager	2 Panel advisors (1 is Agency)
1 Senior Social Worker	1 Manager	1 Senior Social Worker	5 Business Support Officers	2 Panel Administrators (1 is Agency)
9 Social Workers	1 Senior Social Worker	7 Social Workers		
1 Adoption Support Worker	11 Social Workers	5 Family Support Workers		1 Panel Coordinator
3 Family Support workers		1 x Agency SW 1 x Student SW		
4 x Agency: (3 x SW & 1 x FSW)				
Total: 19	Total: 14	Total: 16	Total: 6	Total: 5
1 Head of Service				
Total: 61				

Staff in the service have continued to settle, following the initial period of transition. The service is now in a position where staff are allocated the work relevant to their team's remit, rather than the mixed caseload, that was the case when the service went live. This has assisted progress towards establishing staff in new roles and creating a greater sense of team identity. The summer period has been challenging, due to many staff transferring significant amounts of annual leave at the point of TUPE and pre-booked leave being honoured. This has created significant delay and additional pressure on managers in progressing work in all three service areas, while allocated staff are not at work.

Despite considerable challenges during the process of transition, vacancy levels are very low and no staff have resigned from the service.

An all staff service event took place in June with another one took place in October. The focus of these events is on "whole service" team building, partnership and developing and embedding a clear vision and culture relating to the way the service will work with children and adoptive parents.

Business support:

The business support team is fully staffed, following a high vacancy rate in April. The Business Support Manager started in May and under her management this area is becoming a very established team with each team member having clear designated areas of responsibility and agreed processes are in place for most areas of work. There have been challenges for the team regarding ICT and in supporting the process of embedding adopter and children's tracking, but good progress is now being made in these areas. Ongoing issues in developing Eclipse have also had an impact.

Vacancy Recruitment & new starters:

The vacancy position remains positive, as no staff have resigned since the TUPE exercise. New staff recruited to the social work vacancies via interview in July started during October and November. Interviews are planned to take place in October for the one social worker in adoption support and 0.5 in family finding. A social worker from within the service was appointed to the permanent senior social worker role in Adoption Support and it is hoped that her substantive social worker role will be filled from the interviews in October. The vacant panel administration and panel advisor roles remain vacant and are subject to a recruitment process.

6.3 Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM):

There have been no referrals to the IRM in this period.

7. Development of Adoption@Heart:

7.1 Practice:

Practice development work:

In addition to the policy development work that took place during the project phase, there is a significant need to complete detailed practice guidance, which will provide a clear understanding of the expected and agreed practice within the service for the staff in Adoption@Heart, as well as across the partnership, within the local authorities.

A detailed family finding practice guidance document has been developed with the staff in that service area, following a series of development sessions. This has been shared with the management board and family finders are working to the process within this. A panel policy has also been developed by the panel advisors, in discussion with the three panel chairs.

Clear processes have been agreed for pre-stage one and stage one of the adopter recruitment process, with a view to ensuring that enquiries are effectively screened and robust management decision making is in place regarding decisions to progress adopters into stage two of the process.

Baseline policy guidance is in place for the Adoption Support service area and there is a need for further work regarding the range of activities and services that are to be developed, within a comprehensive regional offer for adopters accessing this service.

Further work is needed with regard to Early Permanence, with a view to ensuring that a clear agreed understanding of Foster for Adopt procedures and regulations is in place across the partnership.

Agreement has been reached with the management board for an additional interim role to be created to lead on practice development for 12 months. An initial attempt to recruit to this role has been unsuccessful, but continued efforts are being made to add this resource to the management team with a view to progressing this in years one and two of the service being operational.

7.2 Family Finding Activity:

The numbers of the children that the service was expected to place in year one was 150. The numbers expected over the first three years are outlined in the table below.

Placements required	2019/20 (Year 1)		2020/21 (Year 2)		2021/22 (Year 3 onwards)	
Total children to be placed for adoption	150		155		160	
Placed by RAA	105	70%	116	75%	128	80%
Placements provided by another agency*	45	30%	39	25%	32	20%
Placements found by RAA for other children (income)	15		15		16	
Total placements to be 'made' by Adoption@Heart:	120		131		144	

Summary of progress:

The process of transition had a major impact on performance during April and May 2019, due to difficulties accessing information and the service not having access to ICT systems in Dudley, Sandwell or Walsall. Despite this, considerable progress has been made and there has been a small, but steady, overall increase in children notified for Family Finding over the first six months.

The demand for family finding, in particular regarding children in proceedings, has been higher than expected overall. This is highly significant given the activity rate and amount of time

spent for the family finders, input increases significantly from the point of issue / children in care compared with pre-proceedings.

The number of children with an adoption decision (SHOBPA) or Placement Order has been greater than expected overall, therefore the staffing capacity within the service has been insufficient to meet this demand.

The table below contains the numbers of children waiting with a plan of adoption in each LA / Trust as at 30 September 2019. This data provides an indicator of the family finding demand from each LA / Trust and how this differs from the expected demand, prior to the service going live.

LA / Trust	Number of Placements Required for Year 1	Children Matched by A@H April to Sept	Children on SHOBPA	Children on Placement Order	Total children waiting
Sandwell	34	25	28	33	61
Dudley	40	9	9	17	26
Walsall	35	4	20	22	42
Wolverhampton	40	10	17	31	48
Totals	149	48	74	103	177

47 children were placed by A@H in the first six months. The split by LA / Trust is below:

Dudley	Sandwell	Walsall	Wolverhampton
9	24	2	12

The number of children placed for Walsall and Dudley are lower than expected, with those for Sandwell being significantly higher. The allocation of family finding resources to the children waiting the longest is a factor in this position. It is expected that the numbers placed over the remainder of the year will see an increase for Walsall and Dudley.

Of these 47 children, 32 were placed inter-agency and 15 in house. Inter-agency usage is therefore significantly above the target for year one (68 percent against target of 30 percent) and given the pool of available “in house” adopters remains small it is expected that this will remain high during the remainder of the year.

As the marketing activity progresses there is every expectation that the “in house” pool of adopters will increase. The expected inter-agency usage for year two has been revised to 40 percent with a view to placing 60 percent of children with an Adoption@Heart adopters.

Given staff have previously been working in four different services, there are inevitable differences in practice and the procedural approach to family finding. As an RAA there is a need to define the service approach clearly in order to ensure effective tracking, early profiling and matching takes place. Considerable work has therefore already been undertaken in developing clear practice guidance for family finders, building on the policy development work that took place in the project phase. This is now completed in draft and has been shared with the management board and key staff in the local authorities.

Practice workshops are taking place in each local authority / trust during quarters two and three with a view to improving understanding of the model and developing and embedding a clearer sense of partnership.

Child Notifications:

A system was developed in early April, whereby managers from the service attend key meetings in each LA with a view to being notified of children potentially in need of family finding. This is viewed as preferable to a referral process as it ensures A@H are including in planning and discussions about children.

By July it was understood that the service did not have staffing capacity to maintain this approach based on the numbers of children in the system and in need of an allocated family finder. A decision was therefore made after discussion with both boards to implement a notification system whereby a family finder is allocated at a later stage when it is known that the child has a “single track” plan of adoption. This process was put in place in July to ensure that family finder time was focused on the children most likely to need an adoptive placement, however it is not considered best practice and is only in place while further analysis of the likely long-term demand and subsequent staffing needs is undertaken. Board agreement was given to recruit an additional two family finding social workers to the team for a 12-month period while this work takes place. The interim family finding process is likely to remain in place for the remainder of the year 2019/20.

7.3 Information Technology:

Eclipse:

The Eclipse system is the RAA platform procured for the service. It was quickly realised following go live that it did not meet the service needs in a number of areas. In particular the reporting function for both adopters and children, does not enable reliable data to be generated for performance reporting. Consequently, the service will continue to run Excel spread sheets for both and data will be entered into both Eclipse and the spreadsheet, whilst work continues with a view to making Eclipse effective. A business analyst is currently assessing how well the system meets the needs of the service and this work will assist further decisions.

Access to LA Systems:

The lack of access by Adoption@Heart staff to children’s electronic files in Walsall, Dudley and Sandwell has presented a significant risk to performance in the first six months. In addition, family finding activity is held on the Eclipse system but this is not visible to local authority social workers or managers in any of the four partner agencies. A joint ICT and Information governance workstream was convened in June with involvement for all four services. In October 2019 it is expected that the service will have read only access to the local authority systems. Further work will then be undertaken in moving to a position where staff have full editing access to the systems so that the child’s file can be held in one place with visibility to both services.

Considerable progress has been made in resolving ICT difficulties the service has experienced since April.

7.4 Adoption Panels:

Panels have operated since early April across the four Local Authority / Trust locations on a weekly basis. Panels have approved 20 Adopters and matched 47 children. Panels have been robust in raising issues about practice where appropriate.

The service has three panel chairs and a further chair is being recruited. The two panel advisors and the panel coordinator have driven the development of clear processes and a draft policy has now been completed. The Service Head has held two quarterly meetings with the chairs and a joint staff / panel member development day is scheduled for January 2020.

An agreed ADM process has been circulated to ADMs and their business support in August. There had initially been some delays in providing documents and minutes to ADMs due to panel administration vacancies. Support from Dudley and Walsall in providing staff to undertake minuting has relieved pressure created by this. The delay in successfully recruiting to the vacant panel administration position has impacted on timeliness and consistency of minutes but agency cover for this post is now in place.

There have been challenges in ensuring panels are quorate therefore additional panel members are being recruited from within the local authorities. This will reduce dependence on independent panel members, improve quoracy and enable effective involvement by partner agencies in panel delivery.

Further work is being undertaken on the quality assurance process via the use of a CPR audit tool and feedback forms.

7.5 Establishing Culture:

Very positive progress has been made in establishing a “whole service” staff culture. Staff have developed a series of vision and culture statements which are due to be reviewed by the management board and Strategic Commissioning Board before being circulated within the partnership. A Team Charter has also been developed by staff within the service, following work on this at the first all service event. An Adoption@Heart conference is planned for Spring 2020 to include staff from the four local authorities in developing the joint culture and identity across the regional service.

7.6 Voice and Influence of adopted children and young people, parents and adopted adults:

Following agreement with the Management Board the service plans to work with Participation Officers in each Local Authority and Trust to progress a range of activities designed to involve

young people in the development and delivery of the service during the next phase of service development.

A young person who is a care leaver within Wolverhampton has been involved in staff recruitment by sitting on an interview panel.

7.7 Partnership Working:

Further work is needed across the partnership in engaging with staff and improving understanding of the service, with a view to improving communication. The Service Head has been attending key meetings with senior managers and over the next six months staff workshops will be held in each location to brief and consult with social workers. This will focus initially on the family finding model and seek to improve joint working between social workers and family finders in progressing linking, matching and placement of children.

Management Board members have a key role is linking and communicating between the two services and strong links are now being developed with other key managers across the two services.

Family finders are routinely in the Local Authority / Trust locations working closely with social workers for children and managers regularly attend meetings to review children's care plans and obtain tracking and updated information regarding children.

A joint staff / partner conference is planned to take place in Spring 2020.

A joint Early Permanence partnership event is also planned for Spring 2020.

8. Adoption Support:

The Government has committed to reform the adoption system to improve the quality and consistency of support. In respect of regionalisation, the government's vision is for, "enough high-quality adoption support services available nationwide." Adoption@Heart recognises that adopted children and their families need to be able to access appropriate and sensitive adoption support at any time in their lives. Guidance is clear that adoption support services need to be available to all parties affected by adoption, including birth families and adopted adults.

The Government's vision for adoption support services as set out in the Children and Adoption 2002 Act outlines that adoption support is the entitlement to an assessment of need for specific groups of people affected by adoption. A Vision for Change report 2016 outlines that: Every adoptive family has access to an ongoing package of appropriate support with a right to a high quality, specialist assessment of need. This proposal is that support is delivered from day one and continues throughout childhood whenever it is required.

The remit of Adoption@Heart Adoption Support service was to provide adoption support services pre and post order to all those affected by adoption. Adopter support transfers from

the Recruitment and Assessment Service at the point of approval panel in recognition of the need to promote adoption support to adopters from the outset. Social workers therefore take supervisory responsibility for adopters from the point of approval. The social work service undertakes assessments of adoption support needs as required, undertakes post adoption contact, access to records for adopted adults and birth parent support.

The Adoption Support Fund provides funding for therapeutic support for families whose children left care through adoption or special guardianship arrangements. These children are likely to have experienced severe trauma prior to coming into care and need therapeutic support to help them thrive.

The Department for Education (DfE) announced in March 2019 an extension to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) beyond its original end date of March 2020. The DfE has taken the unusual step of making this commitment before the annual Government Spending Review, which will take place in the Autumn.

The allocation and backlog of adoption support cases only became apparent once the RAA went live. It was much higher than anticipated and within the modelling exercise. The SW's undertaking post order cases only, have in excess of 30 cases however due to geographical issues this is very challenging to maintain regular contact with all allocated families. Adopters are often in crisis at the point they make contact with the service and are often dissatisfied with previous involvement and demanding a service immediately.

Due to capacity there is a waiting list for assessment of need to be undertaken, cases are dealt with due to complexity so there have been cases waiting in excess of four months. The cases can be located all over the country and this contributes to the challenge of allocating.

A significant number of workers were not proficient in undertaking post adoption support duties prior to the launch of the RAA, they were new to the role, and inexperienced.

We are committed to addressing waiting lists and we are considering using creative ways of consultations, to enable adoptive families to access a service as quickly as possible and recruiting a duty work with knowledge of adoption support.

Regionalising the Adoption Support Fund (ASF):

In May 2019 Adoption@Heart Regional Adoption Agency became responsible for the single portal for Adoption@Heart Adoption Support Fund (ASF) applications, which enables applications to be submitted on behalf of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton families. Access was provided to each Local Authorities legacy data for historic applications.

A system for processing ASF applications with administrative support is established which has supported Adoption Support Workers and has enabled applications to be made in a timely manner.

There have been 90 applications to date for a range of therapeutic interventions including Developmental Dyadic Psychotherapy, Theraplay, Sensory Integration therapy, therapeutic parenting work and therapeutic life story work.

Many families have struggled with the needs of very challenging children/young people and the therapeutic intervention has enabled the family to stay together with improved outcomes. There has been an increase in referrals involving child to parent violence, we have identified training and parenting support and will be considering delivering in house training.

Adoption Support Fund Applications:

Local Authority	Number of ASF Applications April 2019 – September 2019
Walsall	16
Sandwell	13
Wolverhampton	23
Dudley	38

Referrals / Enquiries for Adoption Support:

The transition of casework from each local authority and Children Trust Case Management system to using Eclipse has been fraught with challenges, as most adoption support cases had to be added manually. To date, we are still discovering cases that are receiving therapeutic support by a provider yet were not transferred and allocated to the RAA.

There have been 44 new referrals for assessment of need since April 2019, many of these requests have resulted in delivering specialist intervention, additionally there have been a significant number of reviews of therapeutic intervention and we have made 106 applications to the ASF and requested £366,577 funding for therapeutic support. The following therapy is being provided; Theraplay, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), Family Therapy, Therapeutic life story work.

An Adoption Support Therapist is delivering the following therapeutic support; Therapeutic Life Story work, Nurturing Attachment Parenting Programme and DDP informed practice and we have applied to the ASF for £75,917.

The future plans for development in this area will be to recruit the Clinical Psychologist who will act in an advisory capacity to social workers undertaking adoption support assessments, advising on appropriate therapeutic interventions, provide a professional opinion/challenge regarding reports and recommendations for therapeutic provision provided by external providers. Additionally, the clinician will deliver training and nominal therapeutic support reclaimable from the ASF. It is intended that this post will be recruited to early in the second year of the service being operational. It has been delayed due to budgetary pressures in year one.

Number of open cases:

There is the equivalent of eight and a half social workers in the service.

We currently have 117 adopters allocated which includes;

- 62 approved adopters with children placed
- 33 approved adopters not yet matched / placed
- 199 pre and post order children referred to the service. This is made up of 123 single children, 29 siblings' groups of two and two sibling groups of three.
- 22 unallocated adoption support cases at 30 September (plus four requests for birth parent counselling).

When the RAA launched there were no permanent Family Support Workers (FSW) in the Adoption Support team, so agency workers were recruited. Following successful interviews, permanent FSW's took up their posts in October/November. The FSW's have had to manually record all post adoption cases onto the electronic system and devise databases which has generated a significant amount of work. Furthermore, there have been a number of cases that did not have a post adoption agreement and birth parents have contacted us querying arrangements so there has been close liaison with agencies regarding this work.

We are proposing amending the post adoption contract to include information about social media as since the launch we have received notification from some adopters that birth parents have traced them and their child via social media.

Adoption@Heart are responsible for the following post adoption contact arrangements. The table shows the number of children and the work generated as some children will have multiple post adoption recipients.

Council	Number of Adoptee	Number of Contacts for Adoptee
Dudley	343	906
Sandwell	509	1008
Walsall	668	1756
Wolverhampton	269	833

We are in the process of collating figures for direct contact arrangements, that will need to be supervised by Adoption@Heart, to date we have identified six arrangements, however, we do not believe this is an accurate figure.

Sibling relationships are amongst the most significant and potentially important bonds that individuals have in the course of their lifetime (Allan, 1979). Unless placed together for adoption, children cease to have a legal relationship with the birth family. Therefore, any contact between an adopted child and a birth sibling living elsewhere is almost always reliant on an informal agreement between the involved parties (Cossar and Neil, 2013). Some children placed apart from their birth siblings have plans that have not yet materialised, having FSW's administering post adoption contact enables us to prioritise this and we are currently

reviewing arrangements and will be liaising with adoptive families to explore setting up sibling contact arrangements.

We have received 44 new referrals for post adoption support since the launch of Adoption@Heart, this does not include referrals for birth parent and access to records. In addition, there were a significant number of cases that were waiting for therapy to be applied for or a review of therapeutic support at the time of the launch, which has created capacity issues.

Local Authority	Adopted Adult	Adoptive Family	Birth Family	Signposting
Walsall	7		3	
Sandwell	5		0	
Wolverhampton	8		7	
Dudley	10		0	
Total	30		10	

Group work:

An Adopter support group is run in Wolverhampton on a monthly basis that has been running prior to Adoption@Heart's launch, the group has been advertised however, there is currently a low take up. We are continuing to advertise and hope to develop the group further, the members find it invaluable and supportive and are keen to recruit more members. It gives adopters an opportunity to meet with other adopters and share experiences and build a network. We have recruited Family Support Workers recently and they are in the process of developing a similar adopter support group in Halesowen or surrounding area, to enable adopters in Dudley and Sandwell the opportunity to meet and network.

Additionally, we are in the process of setting up stay and play groups in Wolverhampton and Halesowen and it is envisaged they will be commencing in January 2020.

We are working in partnership in Wolverhampton with a Primary School, who is committed to supporting former and looked after children in their school and within the local community and will be utilising the venue for training sessions also.

We are in the process of setting up adoptee support groups in Wolverhampton and Dudley/Halesowen and will develop a participation group, so adoptees understand what services are available to them and are able to influence their development.

Training:

We have developed an Adopter Training and Development programme and have delivered the following training;

Introduction to Theraplay.

Nurturing Attachment Parenting Programme – a 16-week programme.

Due to capacity issues and low take up training sessions were cancelled, sessions are rescheduled for January.

We have a calendar of events for the next year and will be advertising the groups on the website to expand reach. Adoption support workers discuss the training programme when they meet approved adopters for the first time and any new referrals receive a programme following their contact with the service. We will be creating a booking facility on the website.

The model necessitates cases are allocated when prospective adopters move to stage two, social workers undertake two joint visits prior to attendance at panel. Once the case is transferred, social workers prioritise links, including for example, visits to adopters and all the associated practice and they are routinely neglecting completing assessment of need visits and reports due to capacity issues. To combat this, we have made applications to the ASF without a full assessment of need being written up. To date there have been 147 ASF applications made, however there are a significant number of assessment of needs not completed.

All workers with a mixed case load including pre order post adoption support cases and post order adoption support cases prioritise pre order cases, there is no option as links, necessitate paperwork, once a link is presented at panel it progresses to plan of introductions, visits and completion of Annex A. Timescales are enforced and the expectation is they are adhered to. The duty system has operated in a rotating system will all social workers tasked to undertake one primary and one back-up session a month. However, as the number of referrals increase it has now become a pressing issue.

We would like to develop the use of the ASF to support placements from the outset or at the earliest point, it enables therapeutic support to be delivered post placement without delay.

9. Focus on Outcomes for Children:

9.1 How do we involve adopters in matching, linking and subsequent planning?

The matching process within the Adoption@Heart Family Finding policy requires full information about the child to be shared with adopters after a linking decision has been made. Adopters will meet the key professionals for the child as well as their foster carer and have the option of meeting the placing agency's medical advisor. Child Appreciation Days are held wherever possible to promote best practice in sharing the full history of the child with adoptive parents. There is also sometimes an opportunity to meet the child through 'Chemistry Meetings' at which adopters meet and interact with children prior to formal introductions as part of the matching process.

Adopter led family finding is undertaken via Link Maker and activity days. The service is planning to hold its first in-house Activity Day in March 2020.

9.2 How do we involve adopters in the development of your agency?

Adoption@Heart has agreed with the management board that Adoption UK “Adopter Voice” will be used to assist in accessing adopters’ views about a range of issues related to the delivery and future development of the service. This service will be in place prior to the year end.

Work is underway to develop a promotional video for the service and a number of adoptive parents are involved in this.

The service takes feedback from prospective adopters after attendance at panel. The feedback is then collated and fed into practice.

Further work will be undertaken in during the next 6 months within the Adoption Support service to increase adopter involvement via buddying and peer support arrangements.

10. Learning from Disruptions:

There have been two disruptions in the six month period. Both of these were during the introductions process and not children who had been placed. Disruption meetings are scheduled to take place and the learning will be included in the end of year report. One of these involved a Wolverhampton child.

11. Accountability:

Management board:

The Service Head reports on a monthly basis to Adoption@Heart Management Board, attended by Assistant Directors or Heads of Service from the three local authorities and Sandwell Children’s Trust. The board has met monthly since the service went live and regular communication has taken place between the service head and board members in between meetings and via teleconferences. Further work is taking place to improve communication and engagement with board members and a board “away day” is planned to take place in the second 6 months period of 2019/20. This will be used to consider key service priorities for the coming period.

Purpose:

The RAA (Regional Adoption Agency) Management Board’s purpose is to oversee the functioning and performance of the RAA at an operational level, ensure the full participation of a range of key stakeholders, and provide an interface between the RAA and the Strategic Commissioning Board (SCB).

Key Tasks of Board Members:

- To oversee the day to day working of the RAA and support service development.
- To support the RAA with stakeholder relationship building.
- To monitor performance particularly in terms of how it is meeting the agreed requirements of each LA/Trust.
- To ensure that in the running of the RAA, there is due account taken of stakeholder views, including the voice of adoptees and birth families, and via the Adopter Advisory Group.

Strategic Commissioning Board:

The Strategic Commissioning Board is attended by the Directors of the four local authority services and has met once during the six month period. A further meeting is due to take place in October.

Purpose of the Strategic Commissioning Board (SCB):

The purpose of the Strategic Commissioning Board (SCB) is:

- To provide strategic oversight and direction of all aspects of adoption services within the four local authority areas including:
 - The jointly commissioned services and
 - Other adoption related services which will continue to be delivered by the local authorities (or their agents).
- To take responsibility for planning the way Black Country authorities (and their agents) work together to commission adoption services.
- To take responsibility for contract monitoring, management and review in relation to the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) which has been commissioned to meet the adoption needs of children in the care of the four partner local authorities / trusts.
- To oversee joint and efficient commissioning of activity which will improve outcomes for those children and young people living in the Black Country who have a plan for and/or have been adopted.
- To ensure that services offered to “those affected by adoption” e.g. adopters, adopted adults and birth families, living in the Black Country, are jointly and efficiently commissioned and delivered.
- To ensure that the voice of all those affected by adoption is considered.

12 Summary

During the first six months of operating the Adoption@Heart service has made significant progress and there are many successes that should be acknowledged in placing children with adoptive parents. The service has also faced some significant challenges with regard to the transition phase in establishing the new agency. Performance regarding family finding and adopter recruitment at the end of September 2019 is reflective of these challenges and it is likely the impact of the transition will continue to have an impact during the remainder of year one.

Key priorities as the service moves forward and becomes more established are:

- The development of improved and established practice guidance for all areas of practice.
- Improved access to children's information and communication between the service and partners in progressing family finding for children more effectively.
- Further development of the adopter marketing and recruitment strategy with a view to increasing the "in house" pool of adopters and reducing inter-agency usage.
- Further development of the Adoption Support "offer" for the region.
- Improved engagement and partnership working within the region.

Report completed by: Mark Tobin

Role: Service Head

Date: 19.12.19

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Corporate Parenting Board 23 January 2020
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Report title	Virtual School Head Annual Report 2019
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People
Wards affected	All wards
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services
Originating service	Inclusion Support
Accountable employees	Darren Martindale Tel: 01902 556951 Email: Darren.martindale@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Children and Young People/Education Joint Leadership Team 9 January 2020

Recommendation for action:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive the Virtual School Head Annual Report 2019.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To inform Corporate Parenting Board of the educational progress and achievements of our Children and Young People in Care, and previously in care, and the steps that the local authority has taken to support those achievements.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The local authority has a statutory responsibility to promote the education of Children and Young People in Care and previously in care. This is a key part of its corporate parenting responsibility.
- 2.2 The Virtual School Head (VSH) is responsible for ensuring that the council effectively discharges the above duty. The VSH manages the Virtual School Team, which is dedicated to supporting that duty and ensures that the educational outcomes of children and young people in care are maximised.
- 2.3 This report summarises the educational outcomes of Wolverhampton City Council's Children and Young People in Care for the 2019/18 academic year. It also outlines the ways in which the Virtual School Team have worked to raise the achievement of children and young people in care in 2018-2019 and outlines plans for further development.
- 2.4 This report also seeks to inform knowledge and understanding pertaining to this area.

3.0 Report Contents

- 4.0 Cohort Information
- 5.0 School Ofsted Ratings
- 6.0 Supporting academic progress and achievement
- 7.0 Raising Aspirations – Aspire2Uni
- 8.0 Personal Education Plans (PEPs)
- 9.0 Pupil Premium Plus
- 10.0 Attendance
- 11.0 Inclusion
- 12.0 School Transition and Stability
- 13.0 Attainment and Progress
- 14.0 Post-16 Achievement
- 15.0 Participation
- 16.0 Strategic Development
- 17.0 Conclusions and Next Steps

4.0 Cohort Information

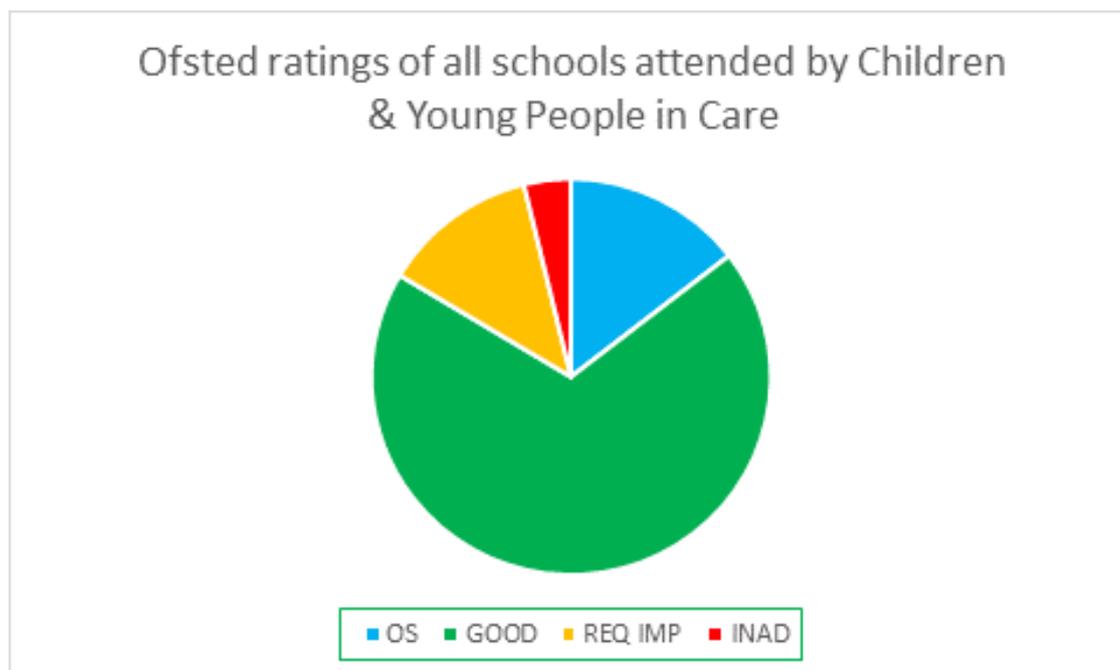
4.1 At September 2019, the following cohort characteristics apply to Wolverhampton's Virtual School. The arrows next to Total pupils and Total ethnic groups indicate that those numbers have reduced since 2018 (total ethnic groups reduced by 1). The arrows following the other characteristics indicate whether they have increased or decreased since 2018, as a percentage of the cohort:

Total pupils (Reception – Year 11)	429 ↓
Placed in Wolverhampton	209 – 49% ↓
Placed out of City	220 - 51% ↑
Attending primary schools	182 – 42% ↓
Attending secondary schools	247 – 58% ↑
Attending Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)	16 – 4% ↑
Attending Special Schools	59 – 14% ↑
Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) for Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND)	95 – 22% ↓
Total ethnic groups	15 ↓
None White British	34% ↓

5.0 School Ofsted Ratings

- 5.1 Statutory guidance states that Children and Young People in Care should attend schools that are rated as either or Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.¹
- 5.2 At September 2019, 83% of children and young people in care attend a school which is rated as good or better by Ofsted. The ratings are summarised in the chart over the page:

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>



5.3 We aim to place Children and Young People in Care in the best schools available to them. However, it is sometimes appropriate for a pupil to remain in a school rated as less than good or outstanding by Ofsted, for reasons such as placement stability. These factors can be particularly valuable to a vulnerable child's wellbeing and success in school. In such cases, an informed assessment is carefully made, in the best interests of the pupil.

6.0 Supporting Academic Progress and Achievement

6.1 Wolverhampton's Virtual School team are committed to improving educational outcomes for children and young people in care through a combination of direct, advisory and strategic work with children, schools, social workers, carers and other stakeholders.

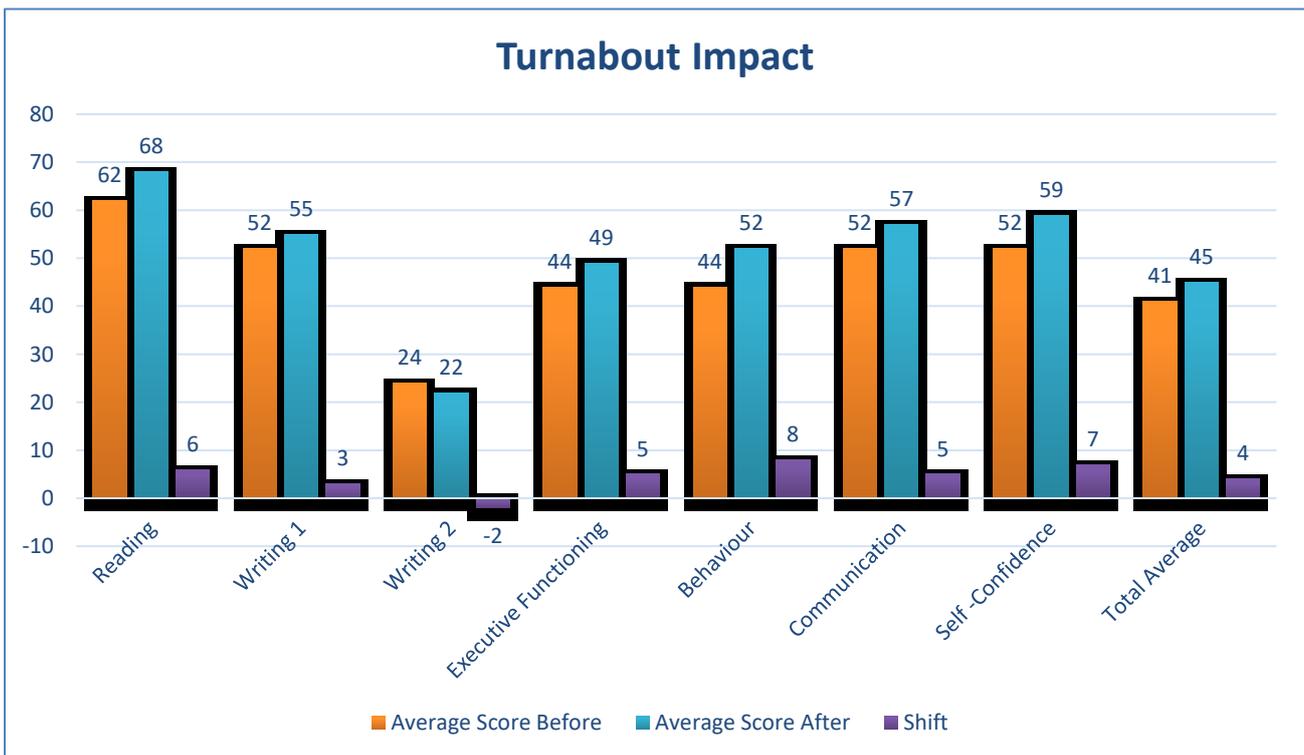
6.2 The team consists of one full-time equivalent (FTE) Senior Education Advisor, 3.5 FTE Education Support Officers (ESO), one 0.5 FTE Data Officer and one full-time Administrator together with the VSH. We also benefit from the support of three Educational Psychologists (.9 FTE) and a 0.3 FTE Assistant Educational Psychologist, as well as strong links with other key agencies.

6.3 The Senior Education Advisor (SEA) provides support and challenge to schools, social care and other key partners to promote the inclusion and raise the achievement of children and young people in care. She also line-manages the ESOs and acts as a deputy to the Virtual School Head, providing operational direction and management. The SEA has been instrumental in ensuring that permanent exclusions remain at zero in 2018-2019, ensuring that appropriate school placements are secured in a timely manner and that children's support plans are strong and appropriately joined-up.

- 6.4 One ESO (.5 FTE) is dedicated to children in early years, while the other ESOs support the year 1-11 cohort, one of which is focussed on children who are educated outside Wolverhampton. A full-time Education, Employment and Training (EET) Co-ordinator in the Children and Young People in Care Transitions team acts as an extended member of the team in her support for Children and Young People in Care post-16.
- 6.5 Education Support Officers contact the Designated Teachers in Wolverhampton schools on a termly basis to discuss the progress of Children and Young People in Care in their school. Personal Educational Planning (PEP) meetings, care reviews etc are regularly attended and any educational issues are addressed without delay. The Virtual School track the school attendance and attainment of all Wolverhampton Children and Young People in Care and support the PEP process, including auditing PEPs for quality. They also deliver 1:1 learning interventions to remove pupils' barriers to learning and support their educational progress. One of the ESOs also delivers training to foster carers and acts an operational lead on the Aspire2Uni project (section 7.0).
- 6.6 One of the key interventions delivered by the team is the **Turnabout** Programme, an intensive programme of two to three weekly sessions for eight weeks, which helps pupils - usually at primary school age - to overcome barriers to learning and develop *executive functioning*, or problem-solving strategies. Pupils are assessed by teachers at the start and end of the Turnabout programme in key areas – reading, writing, executive functioning, behaviour, communication and self-confidence.
- 6.7 Of the 13 pupils completing the Turnabout programme in 2018:
- 63% improved in their reading, 36% improving by 2 levels or more (no pupils decreased)
 - 40% improved in their writing, 20% improving by 2 levels or more (no pupils decreased)
 - Interestingly, 67% improved in maths, with 33% improving by 2 levels or more. Maths improvement is not a direct aim of the programme but it is likely that resulting increases in confidence etc will also improve pupils' performance in that area.

6.8 The chart below illustrates the average levels of improvement made, in each of the identified areas, by pupils receiving the Turnabout intervention programme in 2018 - 2019:

Skill Area	Average Score Before	Average Score After	Shift
Reading	62	68	6
Writing 1	52	55	3
Writing 2	24	22	-2
Executive Functioning	44	49	5
Behaviour	44	52	8
Communication	52	57	5
Confidence	52	59	7
Total Average	41	45	4
Total	330	362	32



6.9 Teachers and carers have made many very positive comments about the impact of Turnabout and other interventions by the Virtual School Team. For example: “A has made nearly a year’s progress in one term. I think that shows how Turnabout has impacted on learning”.

Another compliment which reflected the wider work of the team was:

“This year Jasmin has worked very closely with myself and the children at Brownhills

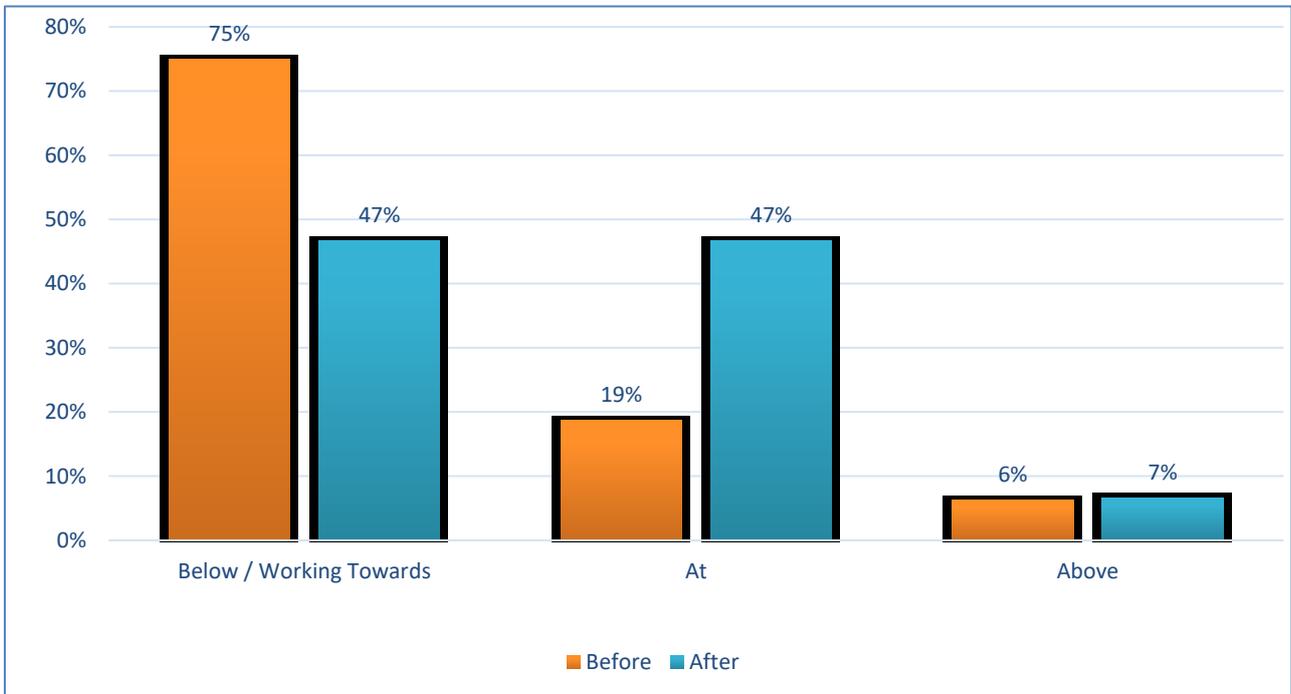
School. Jasmin has always been extremely supportive and has been an excellent ambassador for the Virtual School. The children have benefitted from the resources and contacts that the Virtual School has been able to provide. I wish every authority had a Virtual School and a 'Jasmin' as committed and as dedicated to improving the life chances of the children".

6.10 The activities of the **Educational Psychologists (EPs)** working within the Virtual School included:

- **217 Consultations** with Social Workers, teachers, support staff from a range of agencies and with children
- **87 Assessments** of children and young people in care, placed both within City and out of City
- **25 Interventions** either directly or indirectly that relate to learning, social emotional and mental health needs
- **Seven Training sessions** for professionals and carers
- Attendance at **79 multi-agency meetings** where specialist psychologically based input is required, along with **reflective practice and solution focused case(s) meetings implementing restorative practice principles**

6.11 Another intervention that the Virtual School funds with Pupil Premium Plus (see section 9) is **Coram Beanstalk Volunteer Reader Help**. In 2018 - 2019, this project supported 78 children in school years one to six with their reading progress, across 21 schools in Wolverhampton, through the assistance of 30 reading helpers. Reading Helpers provide 1:1 reading help to children in school, twice-weekly. "Beanstalk" aims to achieve three main aims: to accelerate children's reading progress, to improve their attitudes to reading and learning generally, and to improve their reading and speaking confidence.

6.12 Schools are asked to assess the children's reading levels in relation to age-related expectations when they start with the reading helper and again at the end of the intervention. The chart below illustrates the significant improvements made by pupils receiving this support:



6.13 Reading helpers also collect data on changes in the children's subjective attitudes towards reading and learning. The percentage of children expressing positive feelings about reading, following Beanstalk intervention, had increased from 73% to 86%.

6.14 Various other improvements were observed following Beanstalk intervention. For example:

- Key Stage 1 children exhibited a marked growth in their abilities to independently ask and answer questions pertaining to the text (58% to 78%) and to interpret the character's feelings (50% to 67%).
- The percentage of children able to modulate their voice when reading out loud nearly doubled (36% to 67%), and those able to discuss what they had read increased by 41%.
- There were also notable improvements in the children's confidence in choosing books to read on their own, which went up from 64% to 89%
- 77% said that they were more likely to put their hands up in class to answer a question

6.15 The Virtual School has received several positive comments on the Coram Beanstalk intervention, including the following comment from the class teacher of a year two pupil:

“D has benefitted so much from Beanstalk this year. His face lights up when he sees his Beanstalk Reading Helper! His confidence has grown, as has his reading ability. This specialist programme has been just what he needed!”

7.0 Raising Aspirations – Aspire2Uni

- 7.1 The **Aspire2Uni (A2U) Programme** is now in its fifth year and continues to raise aspirations, as well as supporting improved attainment and creating exciting bespoke opportunities for children and young people in care. A partnership project with the University of Wolverhampton and four Local Authority Virtual schools - Sandwell, Stafford, Walsall and Wolverhampton - A2U is targeted at pupils who are reaching expected standards at the end of KS2 and offers them additional support through their secondary school years. Four cohorts were following the programme in the 2018-2019 academic year, from years 7 to 10, totalling 29 pupils. A2U has been recognised in various national forums as an example of good practice.
- 7.2 The VSH provides strategic oversight of the project from Wolverhampton’s perspective, while one of the Virtual School Support Officers acts as an operational lead and all members of the team provide staffing, organisational and administrative support as required.
- 7.3 There are three main elements to the programme:
- **Outreach** - a series of university visits and other events, designed to raise aspirations, break down barriers and inform progression to higher education.
 - **Mentoring** - a dedicated mentor is allocated to the young person and works with them in their home either once per week or once per fortnight. In 2018-2019, group and online mentoring sessions have also been organised for some older students who have been accessing A2U mentoring for a long time and are ready to move on to a different form of support.
 - **Work Experience and Enrichment** - Working with local businesses, accesses high quality, bespoke work placements and group visits to local employers such as Jaguar Land Rover. In addition, the project offers enrichment experiences, such as visits to the theatre or outward-bound experiences, to broaden students’ horizons and build their confidence.
- 7.4 Of the 29 children and young people in care from Wolverhampton who were participating in A2U in the summer of 2019, 75% are at the age-related expected standard in English and 72% in maths. This is an excellent outcome which reflects the positive impact of A2U support on the confidence, progress and achievement of these vulnerable children. The project is helping to raise aspirations for children and young people in care, which is contributing to the high numbers of care leavers in higher education (HE) and other positive post-16 outcomes.
- 7.5 When asked specifically about the impact of mentoring on A2U, pupil feedback from the whole cohort of 110 pupils (including the other 3 virtual schools), 75% of pupils felt their attitude to learning had improved. 50% of pupils felt their ability in Maths had improved and 67% of pupils felt their English ability has improved. 75% of pupils felt they had

improved abilities in other subjects and 67% said their confidence and self-belief has improved, as a result of the mentoring support.

- 7.6 Feedback from students on A2U also included positive comments such as “it helps me with homework, revision or tests... Nerves, frustration and how to deal with it” (year nine pupil) and “I think having these sessions has helped me a lot. It has help me build confidence and not be afraid to try new things even if I get it wrong” (year eight pupil).

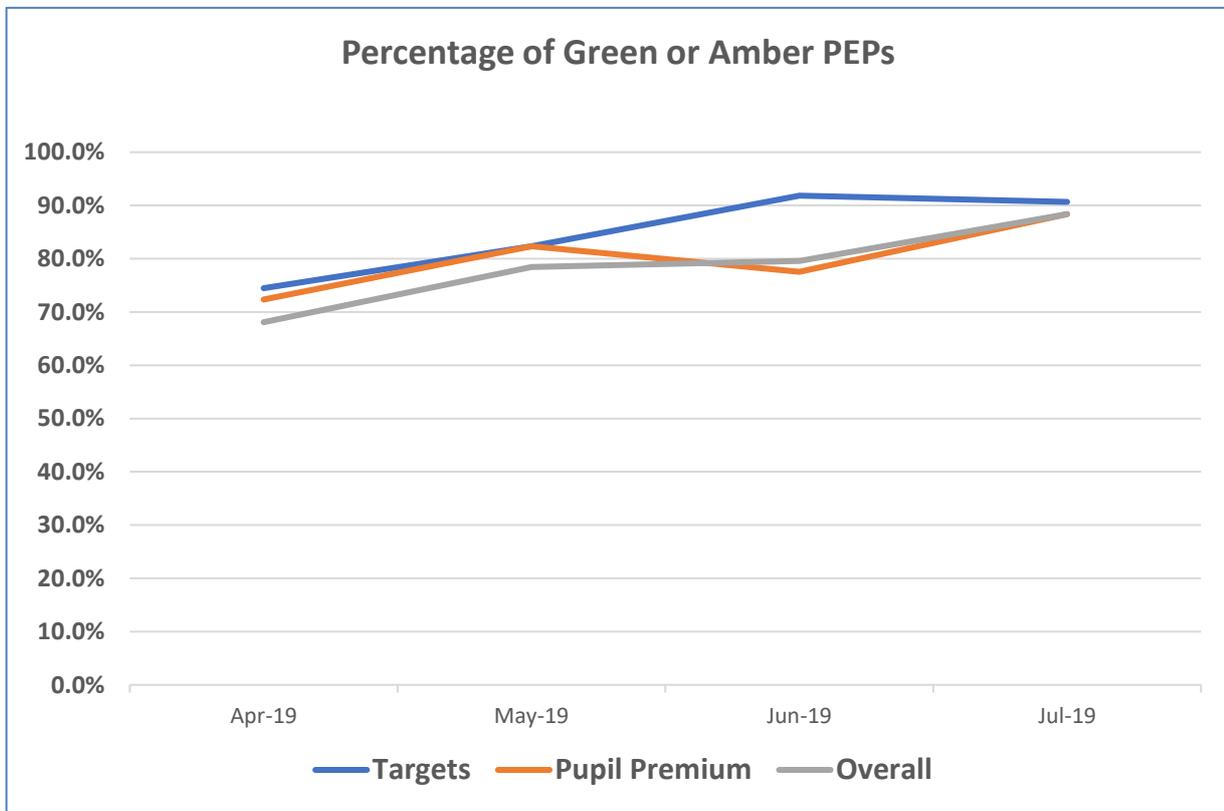
8.0 Personal Education Plans

- 8.1 It is a statutory requirement of local authorities to ensure that all children and young people in care have a quality, up-to-date Personal Education Plan (PEP). At July 2019, the Insight and Performance Team reported 96% of school-age PEPs, 63% of early years PEPs (this percentage was partly affected by a recording issue which has since been addressed, and the completion rate thus improved) and 54% of post-16 PEPs (this has since improved with an increased focus by the management team, virtual school and EET Co-ordinator) having been completed within statutory timescales. The overall completion rate for all PEPs was therefore reported as 88.4%.
- 8.2 At the beginning of 2018, the VSH introduced a new, fully electronic PEP form, using the Eclipse data management system, from pupil in school years 1 to 11. There are separate, dedicated PEP forms for children in early years and post-16, and those versions are still paper documents in WORD format. Fully electronic versions will be developed, however, as Eclipse replaces Carefirst as the social care information management tool.
- 8.3 Despite implementation challenges and ‘teething problems’ - such as the large number of schools needing to securely access the system, changes of staff or the availability of internet access in schools - the Eclipse PEP has been successfully implemented and has contributed to a steady improvement in quality. Wolverhampton is the only virtual school, to the best of our knowledge, that has created its own electronic PEP ‘in-house’ – other local authorities have purchased e-PEP systems from commercial suppliers. While it was labour-intensive in its implementation, having developed our own bespoke system gives Wolverhampton Virtual School far greater flexibility and control over the PEP system.
- 8.4 Training in the use of the Eclipse PEP is delivered for groups social workers and Designated Teachers on a half-termly basis and 1:1 support is regularly provided for individual workers. An online course on Effective Personal Educational Planning, written by the Virtual School Head, is also available on the council’s Learning Hub and face-to-face training on this is delivered to newly-qualified social workers as part of their induction.
- 8.5 In the past, however, the quality of PEPs has been frequently uneven and sometimes poor. This is a reality for many virtual schools, and often highlighted by Ofsted. To support the continual drive to ensure quality PEPs, the Virtual School Team audit individual PEPs for quality. Approximately 50 PEPs are audited each month. Different children are audited each time, so that all will have had at least one PEP audited by the end of the year (ESOs are expected to be sighted on all of the PEPs for children in their

cohorts, but formally audit at least one per pupil). Individual audit results are sent to social workers and Designated Teachers for their information and guidance.

8.6 The team changed the way that PEPs were audited in 2019. Instead of scrutinising all sections of the PEP equally, attention was focussed primarily on two key areas: (1) whether the PEP targets are appropriate and SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related) and (2) whether Pupil Premium Plus funding has been properly and effectively utilised by the school, as recorded in the PEP. PEPs are rated Red, Amber or Green according to their quality in these areas (Amber is considered to be of an acceptable standard, while Green is very good or outstanding. If the standard is not good enough they are rated Red). A sample of the results of these audits – from April to July 2019 - is illustrated in the table and chart below:

	Are targets SMART? PEPs rated Green or Amber		Is Pupil Premium Plus effectively used? PEPs rated Green or Amber		Overall PEP Quality PEPs rated Green or Amber	
Apr-19	35	74.5%	34	72.3%	32	68.1%
May-19	42	82.4%	42	82.4%	40	78.4%
Jun-19	45	91.8%	38	77.6%	39	79.6%
Jul-19	39	90.7%	38	88.4%	38	88.4%



8.7 The data in the graph at 8.6 shows a clear general improvement in quality throughout the summer term. A true comparison with previous years is not possible in all areas because audits were completed and recorded differently. However, the data does indicate that a greater proportion of PEPs have SMART targets than previously (79% overall for the above sample, compared to 63% in 2018 and 50% in 2017). The Virtual School team, teachers and social workers have also reported, anecdotally, that PEP quality is improving and that the introduction of the electronic PEP format is supporting this.

9.0 Pupil Premium Plus

9.1 The Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) is the funding allocated to local authorities, and managed by the VSH, to support improvements in the educational attainment of children and young people in care. Like many local authorities, Wolverhampton Virtual School allocates most of the grant to schools (£1,700 per pupil, per annum in termly instalments) and also retains a portion of the grant. The retained funding is utilised to fund most of the posts in the Virtual School Team and also for specific projects and resources to raise engagement and achievement, such as:

- Aspire2Uni (e.g. a stipend for student mentors, venue and delivery costs, “Brightside” online mentoring platform, training, administration and management)
- Beanstalk Volunteer Reading Help (reading support for pupils at KS1-2)
- Training of Designated Teachers – venue, refreshments etc
- Britannica School - an interactive, online version of the Encyclopaedia Britannica which we provide to facilitate safe, effective study support at home. Carers receive training in the use of the resource and it is also provided to our adoptive parents
- Assistant EP support to raise attainment at KS4
- Additional support for pupils with higher levels of need.

9.2 Any unspent grant must be returned to the DfE at the end of each financial year. As a result, several local authorities have had to return unspent grant to the DfE in the past. However, this has never happened in Wolverhampton Virtual School, as the funding is efficiently and successfully managed throughout the year.

10.0 School Attendance

10.1 The average school attendance of Wolverhampton children and young people in care in years 1-11 in 2018-2019 is outlined below:

<u>In-City pupils</u>	<u>94.73%</u>
<u>Out-of-City pupils</u>	<u>94.44%</u>
<u>All pupils</u>	<u>94.59%</u>

10.2 School attendance improved in 2018-2019 for pupils educated in Wolverhampton, and for the cohort overall, though is slightly lower for out-of-City pupils specifically. The average attendance for 2017-2018 was 93.23%, 95.07% and 94.15% respectively.

10.3 The following percentages of pupils were classed as persistently absent, or had attendance of less than 90% in 2018-2019:

<u>In-City pupils</u>	<u>8.88%</u>
<u>Out-of-City pupils</u>	<u>6.07%</u>
<u>All pupils</u>	<u>7.55%</u>

10.4 Rates of persistent absence are consistently lower than in the previous year – the % of pupils with less than 90% attendance in 2017-2018 were 11.53%, 9.46% and 10.49% respectively). They are also well below the national average for children and young people in care who were classified as persistently absent in 2018 (10.6%).

10.5 This improvement reflects the increased, proactive monitoring of attendance by the Virtual School Team, which ensures that any emerging attendance issues are addressed without delay. Attendance monitoring is also supported by daily telephone calls to all out-of-City schools by 'Welfare Call', a service funded by Pupil Premium Plus, which ensures that Children and Young People in Care who are educated outside Wolverhampton (and therefore potentially more vulnerable) benefit from even closer monitoring than those in Wolverhampton schools.

10.6 The Virtual School Team also work closely with School Admissions, and with schools, alternative education providers and admissions teams in other local authorities where children are placed outside Wolverhampton, to ensure that appropriate education is secured as quickly as possible whenever a change of school is necessary.

11.0 Inclusion

11.1 There were no permanent exclusions of Wolverhampton children and young people in care in 2018-2019. Permanent exclusions are very rare for Wolverhampton children and young people in care – 1 in 2017-2018, 2 in 2016-2017 and 1 in 2015-2016. This is a notable outcome (statistically, children in care are far more likely to be excluded than their peers) which reflects the concentrated, proactive work by the Virtual School, supported by social care and other key partners, in challenging exclusions, promoting inclusive practice and ensuring that the right support is in place for children and young people in care.

11.2 64 children and young people in care received one or more fixed-term exclusion during 2018-2019. This is in line with 2017-2018, when 61 pupils were excluded. 163 fixed term exclusions were issued to the cohort in total, which is also comparable to the 168 fixed-term exclusions issued in 2017-2018.

11.3 As illustrated the table below, physical assault was the most common reason for fixed term exclusion in 2018-2019, followed by persistent disruptive behaviour. Very few exclusions were for drug / alcohol-related, in contrast to a general increase in this type of exclusion for pupils generally.

11.4 This is likely to reflect both the high levels of social, emotional and mental health difficulties within the cohort, and the additional protective factors which help to safeguard children and young people in care:

REASON FOR EXCLUSION	Total number	In-City	OOO
Excluded for DB Persistent Disruptive Behaviour	28	16	12
Excluded for Disruptive Behaviour	6	0	6
Excluded for DM Damage	8	7	1
Excluded for Non - Cooperation with staff	7	0	7
Excluded for OT Other	20	14	6
Excluded for Physical aggression towards staff and pupils	2	0	2
Excluded for Physical Assault - Adult	32	27	5
Excluded for PP Physical Assault Against a Pupil	23	16	7
Excluded for RA Racist Abuse	2	0	2
Excluded for Unacceptable Behaviour	4	0	4
Excluded for VA Verbal Abuse / Threatening Behaviour Against an adult	23	13	10
Excluded for VP Verbal Abuse / Threatening Behaviour Against pupil	4	3	1
Bullying	1	1	0
Drug and Alcohol Related	1	1	0
Sexual Misconduct	1	1	0
Theft	1	0	1

11.5 A greater number of exclusions were issued to pupils educated in Wolverhampton (99 in total) than those educated out-of-City (64 in total). However, 46 of the exclusions of Wolverhampton-based pupils were issued by Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). For the out-of-City cohort, a smaller % were excluded from PRUs – 6 of the 64.

12.0 School Transition and Stability

12.1 Research shows that children and young people in care who changed school in Years 10 or 11 scored over five grades less than those who did not.² The Virtual School works closely with social workers, schools and carers to maintain existing school placements, wherever possible and appropriate. If a change of school is the best option, then we help to ensure a successful transition and support good, joined-up working with all key partners.

12.2 Social workers are expected to consult the Virtual School Head prior to any change of school for a child in care, so that advice can be given as to the suitability of any potential school placement. This requirement is highlighted in PEP training, as well as in the new education policy for Children and Young People in Care and our Model School Policy. We provide support for children and young people in care if they do have to move

² http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/EducationalProgressLookedAfterChildrenKeyMessages_Nov2015.pdf

schools, ensuring a successful transition through 1:1 support, in-class support and close partnership working with all key agencies.

- 12.3 The transition from primary to secondary school can be particularly difficult for many children and young people in care. The Virtual School ensure that all are supported with a successful transition through 1:1 meetings with year 6 pupils and their teachers, and follow-up meetings in their new secondary school before and after secondary induction sessions. We also help to ensure that children are given their preferred choice of secondary school. Out-of-City pupils are given additional information and support by a dedicated Education Support Officer.

13.0 Attainment and Progress

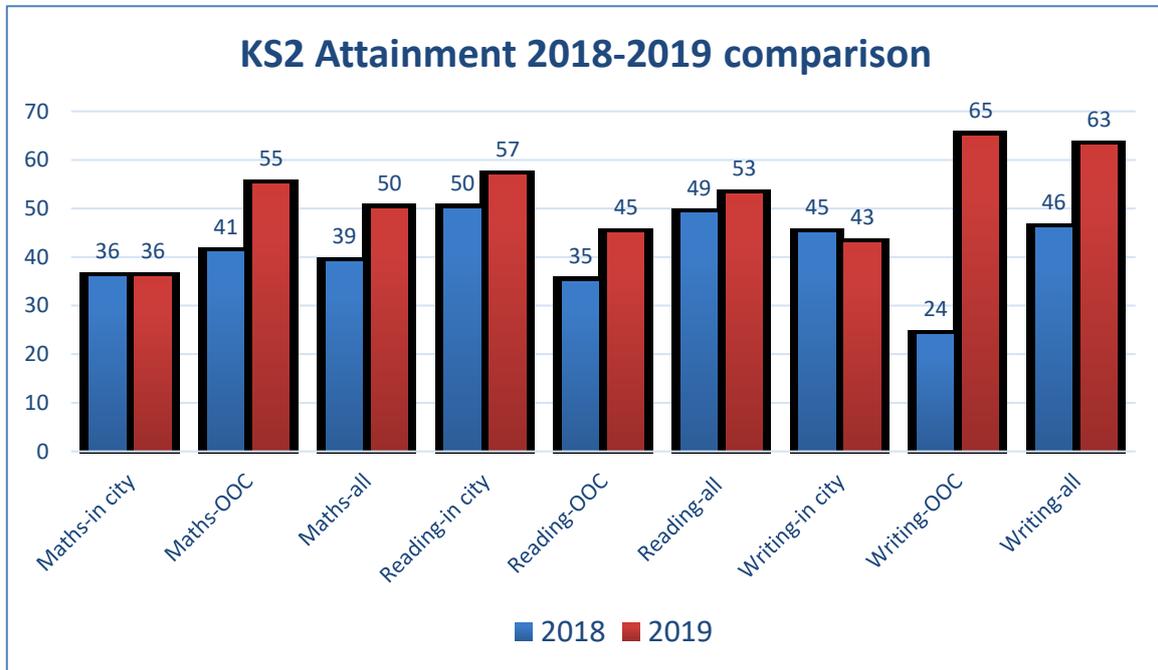
- 13.1 The data below outlines the academic performance of children and young people in care in 2018, both those educated in Wolverhampton schools and out-of-City in standard assessments. Only children who have been in care for more than 12 months at 1 April 2019 (or 'eligible' children) are included. All 2018 outcomes are currently provisional.
- 13.2 At **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)**, 50% of pupils educated in Wolverhampton achieved a good level of development. 100% achieved an early learning goal in reading, 75% in writing and 50% in number. 20% of pupils educated outside Wolverhampton achieved a good level of development in all of the above areas; 29% if we remove one pupil who is living overseas. However, this is a very small cohort – 12 children in total – so small changes to the cohort can have a significant impact on outcomes.
- 13.3 57% of children and young people in care educated in Wolverhampton schools achieved the standard of check in the **year 1 phonics check**, while 83% of pupils educated outside Wolverhampton achieved this benchmark. 69% of the whole cohort achieved age-related expectation. If we remove one pupil who was disapplied from the assessment due to attending a special school, the overall figure is 75% achieving ARE – 5% higher than 2018.

Key Stage 2 (KS2)

- 13.4 The table over the page illustrates attainment of all children and young people care at the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2). The figures in brackets show the attainment of the cohort of pupils who attended schools where standard assessments were applied, i.e. a number of pupils attended special schools where they do not sit standard assessments; they are discounted for the bracketed figure. The rows highlighted in purple show attainment data for Wolverhampton children and young people in care in 2018, enabling comparisons to be made. The following graph then illustrates the same data, but in a way that allows a direct comparison between KS2 attainment at 2018 and 2019. Of the nine outcomes shown, seven have improved since 2018.

2019 Attainment of Children and Young People in Care at Key Stage 2

Cohort	Maths	Reading	Writing	math/read/writ
In-City 2019 - 14 pupils)	36% (42%)	57% (66%)	43% (50%)	36% (42%)
In-City 2018	36% (38%)	50% (58%)	45% (63%)	21% (33%)
OOC 2019- 22 pupils)	50% (55%)	41% (45%)	64% (65%)	36% (45%)
OOC 2018 (removing schools that do not sit assessments)	(41%)	(35%)	(24%)	(6%)
All 36 pupils 2019	44% (50%)	47% (53%)	56% (63%)	39% (44%)
All pupils 2018	(39%)	(49%)	(46%)	(22%)



13.5 The above data shows that Wolverhampton’s overall attainment in writing was 14% higher than the national average for children and young people in care in 2018, and 11% higher in reading/writing and maths. Overall attainment was 4% lower than the 2018 national average in reading and 3% lower in maths.

- 13.6 The **percentage of children and young people in care making average or better progress at KS2**, followed by their average progress score, is illustrated in the table below (0 represents average progress for all children at the key stage – a figure above 0 is better than average and negative figures are below average):

Subject	In City	OOC	Combined
Maths	38.46% (average score = -2.2)	47.36% (average score = -1.84)	43.75% (average score = -2.02)
Reading	61.53% (average score = 2.32)	47.36% (average score = -1.6)	53% (average score = 0.35)
Writing	46.15% (average score = -2.61)	78.94% (average score = 0.96)	65.62% (average score = -0.83)

- 13.7 The average progress score for children and young people in care attending Wolverhampton schools in 2019 has improved in reading by 0.19, when compared with the 2018 progress measure, and is 2.1 higher in maths than in 2018, though it is 2.16 lower in writing (progress scores were only collated for the in-City cohort in 2018).

Key Stage 4 (KS4)

- 13.8 The table below illustrates the % of children and young people in care at Key Stage 4 (KS4) achieving GCSEs at grade 4 or above in maths and English in 2019. 2018 outcomes - Wolverhampton and national - are included to enable comparison:

Cohort	Maths	English	Maths and English
In-City Children and Young People in Care (18 pupils)	22%	28%	6%
OOC Children and Young People in Care (27 pupils)	30%	30%	22%
All Children and Young People in Care (45 pupils)	27%	29%	16%
All Children and Young People in Care, removing pupils attending special schools that do not sit GCSE examinations	30%	32%	19% (the 2018 outcome was 18%)
All Children and Young People in Care 2018			12%

Cohort	Maths	English	Maths and English
National Children and Young People in Care average 2018			17.5%

13.9 The average **Attainment 8 (A8)** and **Progress 8 (P8)** scores for children and young people in care at KS4 is illustrated in the table below. 2018 Wolverhampton and national figures are included to enable comparison:

Cohort	Attainment 8	Progress 8
In-City Children and Young People in Care (18 pupils)	20.56	-1.32
OOO Children and Young People in Care (27 pupils)	21.3	0.75
All Children and Young People in Care (45 pupils)	20.93	-1.035
All Children and Young People in Care, removing pupils attending special schools that do not sit GCSE examinations		
All Children and Young People in Care 2018	17.48	-1.15 (in-City only)
National Children and Young People in Care average 2018	19	-1.2

13.10 GCSE outcomes have improved in 2019, compared to 2018, with an overall 4% increase in pupils achieving GCSEs at level 4 and above in both maths and English. Attainment 8 and Progress also show clear improvement, and average A8 and P8 scores for Wolverhampton children and young people in care are above national averages in 2018 (2019 national data is not yet available).

13.11 At the same time, however, there is still a wide attainment gap between children and young people in care and their peers, and the % of pupils achieving GCSEs at level 4 or above is slightly below the national 2018 average.

13.12 An analysis of children and young people in care who did not achieve GCSEs at level 4 or above in 2019, however, reveals that this was a very complex cohort with high levels of need. It also highlights a clear correlation between, for example, stability of care placement and higher attainment. For example:

- 56% had SEND and/or an EHCP
- 59% had received counselling and/or other therapeutic input
- 48% were living, or had previously lived, in a residential setting

- Only 44% attended a mainstream school
- The average number of previous changes in care placement was 5.5
- The average number of previous changes of social worker was 5.9
- The average number of previous changes of school was 1.68

13.13 Despite such challenges, most of these young people did achieve GCSEs or other accredited qualifications, and many made good progress in relation to their starting points when they entered care. Several pupils, for example, achieved a level 4 or 5 in either maths or English, but not both. With this in mind, the Virtual School Team will place an even stronger focus on 1:1 tuition and exam preparation at KS4 in 2019/20, ensuring that Pupil Premium funding is prioritised and utilised in the most effective way to raise attainment.

14.0 Post-16 Achievement

14.1 In **Further Education (FE)**, of the 26 young people in year 13 (aged 18) who were studying for recognised qualifications during 2018-2019, 77% either achieved a qualification or progressed to the next year of their course. Several other young people achieved FE qualifications. In total:

- 13 students achieved Level 3 (A-level or equivalent) qualifications
- 8 students achieved Level 2 qualifications
- 9 students achieved Level 1 qualifications
- 3 students passed GCSE resits
- 9 students achieved Level 1 qualifications
- 2 students achieved entry level qualifications

14.2 In **Higher Education (HE)**, five care leavers achieved degree level qualifications:

- A graduated from her SKITT, PGCE primary school teaching programme with a 2.1 in English Literature, she is now completing her NQT year as a primary teacher.
- B graduated from Loughborough, having studied psychology. She passed her degree with a 2.1 and is now working as an assistant EP.
- C graduated from Loughborough with a sport and PE degree and graduated with a 2.2. She is currently working with a charity-based company in Bristol.
- D graduated from Wolverhampton with a 2.1 in psychology and sociology. She is currently working part time and considering a Masters' degree in the future.
- E studied criminology and social policy at Wolverhampton university. She graduated with a 2.2 and is currently seeking employment.

- 14.3 Wolverhampton currently have **31 care leavers in higher education (HE)** - 18% of the whole cohort. This % is three times that of the generally-recognised national average, which is 6% of care leavers progressing to HE. Retention on university courses is also high for Wolverhampton care leavers (nationally, care leavers are nearly twice as likely to drop out of university than their peers).
- 14.4 10 care leavers entered HE in 2019. Their choices of university courses are summarised in the table below:

Institution	Start	End	Subjects(s)	Duration
Sheffield University	Sep-19	2022	Criminology, social policy	3 years
Worcester University	Sep-19	2023	Forensic Studies	4 years
Wolverhampton University	Sep-19	2022	Primary education	3 Years
Wolverhampton Uni	Sep-19	2022	Psychology and Counselling	3 years
Swansea	Sep-19	2023	Chemical Engineering	4 years
Coventry	Sep-19	2023	Engineering	4 years
Liverpool John Moors	Sep-19	2023	Criminology, Policing	4 years
UOB	Sep-19	2023	Physics	4 years
Falmouth	Sep-19	2022	Fashion Design	3 years

- 14.5 At November 2019, 90% of Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers in year 12 and 13 (aged 16-18) were in Education, Employment and Training (EET). This is a notable outcome, particularly considering the complex needs of many young people in the 2019 year 11 cohort, as outlined in 13.12.
- 14.6 A high number of children and young people in care and care leavers are in Education, Employment and Training. At November 2019, 76% of the cohort aged 17-21 were in EET, excluding those not available to the labour market (NALM – e.g. due to illness or disability). 67% were in EET, inclusive of NALM. The national % for this measure is 61%
- 14.7 The Children and Young People in Care Service and key partners ensure that all children and young people in care and care leavers have access to impartial Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) at the appropriate stage, and are consistently supported with a pathway through education, enabling them to positively engage in the labour market. The VSH attends a monthly EET panel and chairs a strategic EET group and action plan which ensures that all key partners are working together to create opportunities, enhance support and break down the barriers to EET. Numerous other initiatives are underway which are consolidating this support, including:
- A weekly **EET Drop In** session, involving Housing, Health and Education
 - A designated **Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) Impact Worker**, alongside a named Connexions officer, supporting NEET young people into positive EET destinations. Additional funding for specialised support such as counselling, mentoring or arts therapy to increase confidence and engagement.

- **DWP (Department of Work and Pensions) Protocol** has been reviewed and signed off, providing post-18 Care Leavers who are accessing worklessness benefits with Work Coaches and other bespoke support from day one (other recipients of these benefits have to wait six months to access this support).
- A full-time **EET Co-ordinator** is a well-established post and an EET Apprentice is being recruited currently. The EET Co-ordinator also leads on support for HE students, conducting visits to students and completing personal education plans.
- Three **ringfenced apprenticeships** are available within the Children and Young People in Care Service. Additional support, and pre-apprenticeship support, is available.
- **Guaranteed interviews** for Care Leavers and Children and Young People in Care are offered for apprenticeship roles in the local authority.
- The **Workbox** website is being developed to highlight pathways and support into EET for Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers.

15.0 Participation

- 15.1 Wolverhampton has a very strong and well-established Children in Care Council (CiCC) which benefits from close links with the Youth Council, and with elected members via the Corporate Parenting Board. The CiCC is actively involved in Participation at a regional and national level, enabling our children and young people in care to act as a real force for change and the improvement of services.
- 15.2 The 2019 attainment data outlined above was shared with the Children in Care Council in the autumn term 2019 and educational issues, such as the PEP process, are regularly discussed. Work is ongoing, for example, to strengthen young people's contribution their PEPs - to ensure the plan is properly informed by their views and that the PEP process feels meaningful to them. The VSH has discussed this issue with the CiCC and led a workshop on supporting the young person's contribution to the PEP at a Designated Teachers Forum in the summer term. Indeed, the Virtual School Senior Teacher Advisor completed a dissertation on the subject as part of a post-graduate diploma in the Education of Care Experienced Children in 2019, and regularly advises teachers and social workers on ways to promote meaningful participation. The issue is also addressed as a priority action in the 2019 Attainment Improvement Plan for Children and Young People in Care.
- 15.3 The Virtual School Team are heavily involved in organising and running Wolverhampton's annual Awards Ceremony for children and young people in care, the *I-Awards*, which saw a large number of young people receive recognition for their successes throughout 2018-2019.

16.0 Strategic Development

- 16.1 The Virtual School Head's role includes strengthening the awareness of key professionals around the needs of children and young people in care, building strong working partnerships and developing policy and procedure in this area. This involves a combination of advisory and strategic work with a range of agencies.

- 16.2 In 2018-2019, the following training sessions were delivered by the Virtual School Team:
- Half-termly 'PEP clinics' for social workers and Designated Teachers for Children and Young People in Care
 - A termly twilight Forum for Designated Teachers
 - Two half-day training sessions on the role of the Designated Teacher
 - Half-termly sessions for foster carers on supporting education
 - Two sessions for school governors on supporting Children and Young People in Care in school
 - Three sessions for school governors on understanding challenging behaviour and preventing school exclusion
 - A range of online courses made available to Designated Teachers and other school staff in key areas, such as attachment aware and trauma-informed practice.
- 16.3 Positive feedback from the above training included the following comments on the Designated Teachers' Forum, which is consistently well-received with approximately 30 attendees on average:
- "I thought it was excellent"
- "I found it very useful and informative. I was especially interested in the video you shared regarding brain development... I'm keen to share it with staff"
- 16.4 In 2019 the VSH has updated all the council's policies which relate specifically to the education of children and young people in care, and consolidated them into one policy to enable easy access and clarity for social workers and other council staff. This policy covers all key components of the council's statutory duty to promote the education of children and young people in care, such as school admissions and attendance, promoting school stability, PEPs, Pupil Premium Plus and the role of carers, along with advice on good practice in these areas.
- 16.5 The above policy also includes the council's duty to ensure that **children and young people who have left care via an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order** receive additional support with their education, as set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017. This duty, which came into force in 2018, is now covered in Designated Teachers training and the Designated Teachers Forum. The Virtual School team regularly respond to requests for advice and information regarding the education of children previously in care, in accordance with the duty.
- 16.6 Virtual School Heads have continued ongoing work with Ofsted in 2018-2019, to strengthen inspectors' understanding of the needs of children and young people in care. Termly meetings have been held and the West Midlands Ofsted team have a lead HMI for children and young people in care. Schools are now increasingly aware of their responsibilities and inspectors understand that it may be advisable to consult with the VSH as part of a school inspection, e.g. if there are a large number of pupils in care on the school roll.

- 16.7 The VSH helped to organise the fourth annual conference of the West Midlands Virtual Schools Network in the summer term 2019, leading a workshop on effective personal educational planning and a discussion on promoting EET at post-16, and delivered workshops on effective use of the Pupil Premium Plus at two national conferences in 2018-2019. All members of the Virtual School Team attended the regional conference and participated in workshops and discussions, sharing effective strategies and good practice. Quality continued professional development is a high priority for the team and members have completed training in a range of approaches in 2018-2019, such as attachment/trauma awareness and restorative conversations, and the Senior Education Advisor completed a post-graduate diploma in the Education of Care-Experienced Children.
- 16.8 In Autumn 2018, the Virtual School Team was moved from the Children and Young People in Care Service to the new Inclusion Support Service, as part of a wider service restructure. The VSH now reports to the Head of Service for Inclusion Support, and Principal Educational Psychologist. The VSH also now has a wider role, as Service Manager for Vulnerable Learners, and also manages the Inclusion and Attendance Team which discharges the council's statutory duties regarding school attendance, exclusion, children missing education (CME) and elective home education (EHE). Additional capaCity has been added to the Inclusion and Attendance team, to enable more proactive work to reduce school exclusions, and the newly-expanded team will become fully operational in January 2020.
- 16.9 The VSH has continued to work closely with the Youth Offending Team (YOT) to improve the educational engagement of young people in the criminal justice system in Wolverhampton. This work started in 2016, prior to which the school attendance of young offenders in Wolverhampton was low, with around 50% attending education full-time. By the summer 2018, that figure had improved to 73% and at summer 2019 it had risen by a further 3%. The council's Model School Policy for Children and Young People in Care and Young People in the Youth Justice System was updated in 2019 to reflect changes to statutory guidance and local policy.
- 16.10 The establishment changes outlined in 16.8 are promoting better joined-up planning and working between different services that support the education of vulnerable children. This is helping us to share knowledge and expertise and support the development of more inclusive practice in schools, to the benefit of children and young people in care as well as other disadvantaged young people.

17.0 Conclusions and Next Steps

- 17.1 Once again, there is much to celebrate regarding the educational achievement of the children in our care in 2018-2019. A very small percentage of Children and Young People in Care are attending schools which are rated as requiring improvement or inadequate by Ofsted. Attendance rates are generally high and improving, while persistent absence rates are low and falling. No children or young people in care were permanently excluded. Attainment has generally improved since 2018, with excellent progression to FE and HE. The attainment gap between in-City and out-of-City pupils has significantly narrowed and, in many cases, disappeared or reversed. Personal

educational planning is improving and children and young people in care benefit from a high level of awareness, among schools and other partners, of our corporate parenting responsibilities. The positive impact of the Virtual School Team's interventions on so-called 'soft outcomes', such as children's confidence, self-esteem and attitude to learning is also clearly demonstrated in this report.

- 17.2 There have been continued improvements in the educational engagement of young people in the youth justice system (including several who are/were in care) and the Virtual School continues to make a significant contribution to the education of children and young people in care, and of vulnerable pupils more widely, on a local, regional and national level.
- 17.3 As always, there are areas for improvement and further development. Achievement at Early Years Foundation Stage is lower than in 2018 (though it was very high in 2018 with 70% achieving a good level of development, and 2019 was higher than other previous years). Maths is the weakest subject for attainment at KS2 and progress in writing is a priority for improvement, while the attainment gap at KS4 is still far too wide (though in line with national outcomes). PEP quality is still an area for prioritisation, particularly in terms of the young people's engagement with the process, while the completion rate of post-16 PEPs is an area for improvement.
- 17.4 It should also be understood, however, that there will always be fluctuations in the achievements of relatively small and volatile cohorts. A realistic aim is to see a general upward trajectory from year to year, with the ultimate objective of improving the life chances of young people as they transition into adulthood. This report demonstrates that these goals are being achieved by the City of Wolverhampton Council and its partners. At the same time, however, we continue to learn, refine our approach, and work hard to address any areas for improvement, as outlined in the Children and Young People in Care Attainment Improvement Plan 2019-2020.

18.0 Financial implications

- 18.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
- 18.2 Any costs associated with the educational outcomes of children and young people are funded from within the net budget for 2019-2020 held within the Inclusion Service of £1.2 million.
[NM/15012020/M]

19.0 Legal implications

- 19.1 The Local Authority's statutory responsibilities are set out in the body of the report. There are no direct legal implications arising.
[TC/15012020/B]

20.0 Equalities implications

20.1 An equalities analysis will be undertaken if required, in partnership with the Equalities and Diversities Team. As the work that underpins this strategy is to overcome any inequality, the analysis is aspirational and will need to be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the work undertaken.

21.0 Climate change and environmental implications

21.1 There are no immediate climate change and equalities implications.

22.0 Human resources implications

22.1 There are no immediate human resources implications.

23.0 Corporate Landlord implications

23.1 There are no Corporate Landlord implications.

24.0 Schedule of background papers

24.1 There are no background papers.

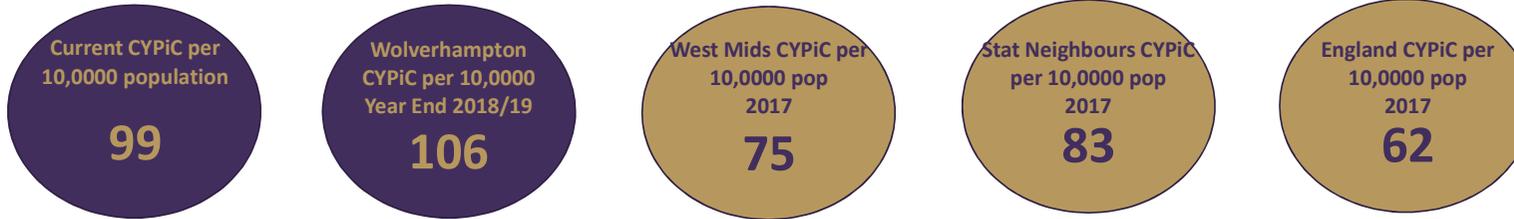
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CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

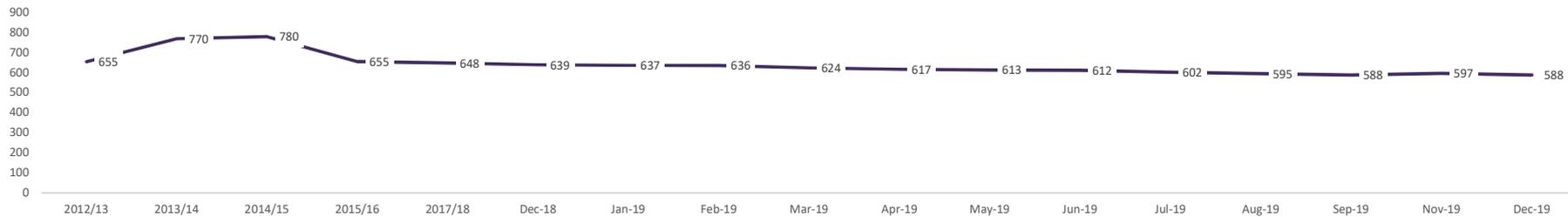
PERFORMANCE PRESENTATION

JANUARY 2020
(DATA AS AT 30TH NOVEMBER 2019)

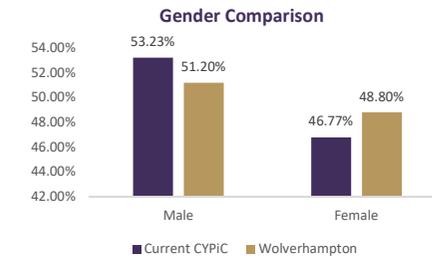
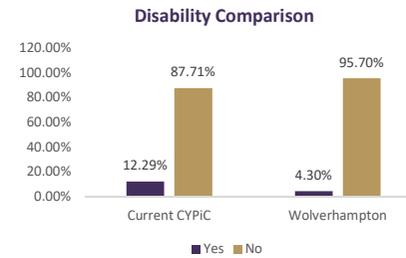
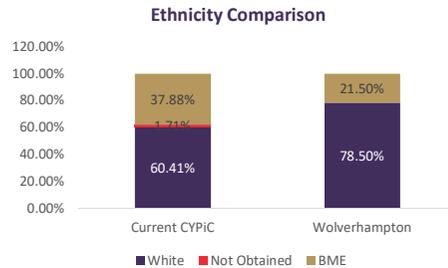
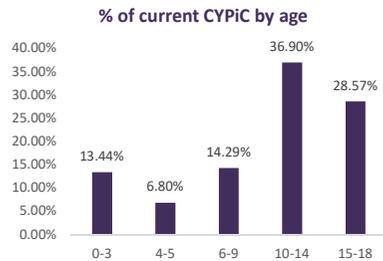
Current CYPiC Profile



Number of Children and Young People in Care in Wolverhampton



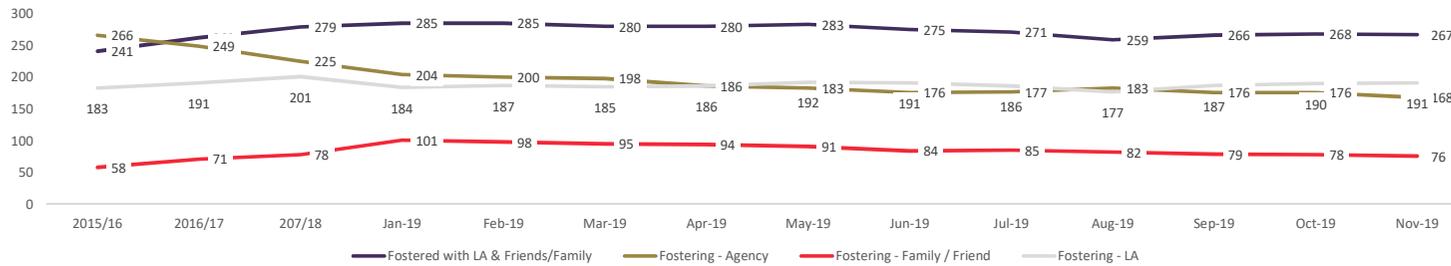
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The numbers of children and young people in care have decreased in the year to date from 624 to 587. This is the first year Wolverhampton's Children and Young People in Care population has been below 600. This is due to an increase in the number of children leaving care and the rate of children entering care becoming more stable than it that has been seen over the past 18 months. Just over 65% of Wolverhampton's children and young people in care are aged 10 and above with 29% aged 15 or above. There is an over representation on BAME children in the current children and young people in care cohort compared to the overall city population of 0-18 year olds. This trend can also be seen in disabled children and males.

CYPiC Placement Analysis

Breakdown of Foster Placements



There are now more children placed with internal foster carers than agency carers

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% CYPiC placed within 20 mile + from home
16%

2017/18 = 14%
2016/17 = 14%
2015/16 = 16%

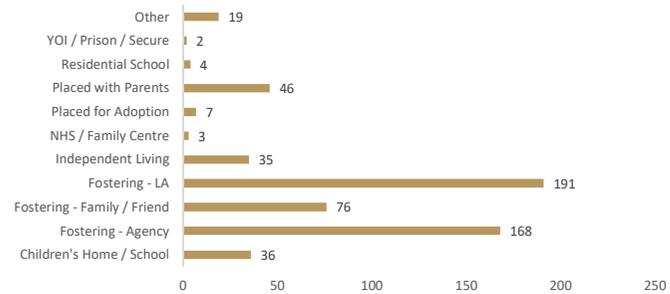
% CYPiC with fewer than 3 placements in last 12 months
89%

2017/18 Wolverhampton = 84%
2017/18 West Midlands = 89%
2017/18 Stat Neighbours = 90%

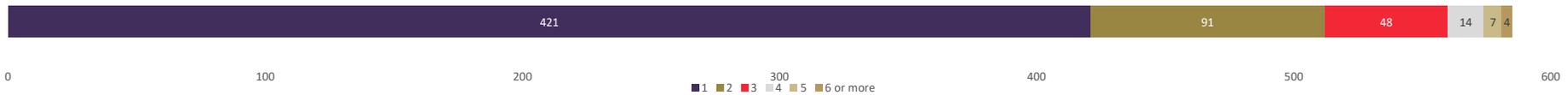
% CYPiC in same placement for 2 years or more
72%

2017/18 Wolverhampton = 70%
2017/18 West Midlands = 68%
2017/18 Stat Neighbours = 70%

Current CYPiC by Placement Type



Number of placements for current CYPiC in past 12 months



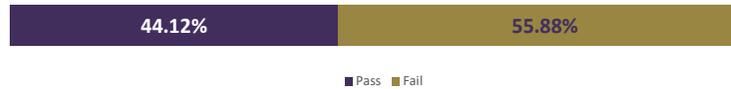
Through the performance of Family Values Project, the number of mainstream placements continue to stay higher than those with agency foster carers, this has seen further increase this month as there has been a large decrease in agency placements from to 168. This is almost a reduction of 100 places since March 2016.

Both the long and short term placement stability continue to improve again with long term increasing to 72% and short term showing a slight decrease but below 12%. Analysis shows the majority of young people who have had more than 3 placements are 16 and 17 years olds who have moved between independent placements addresses.



CYPiC with an up to date assessment

Where a new assessment has been completed within 12 months



2018/19 Year Out-turn = 41.03%
 2017/18 Year Out-turn = 31.33%



CYPiC with an up to date review

Where the First Review is within 20 working days. Second review within 3 months. Third and subsequent reviews every 6 months

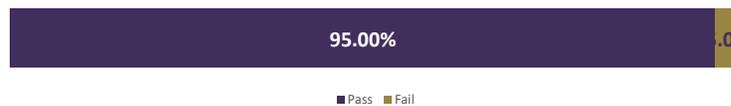


2018/19 Year Out-turn = 95%
 2017/18 Year Out-turn = 92%

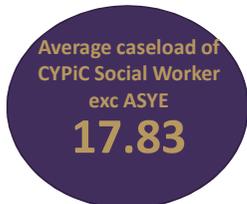


CYPiC who participated in the review

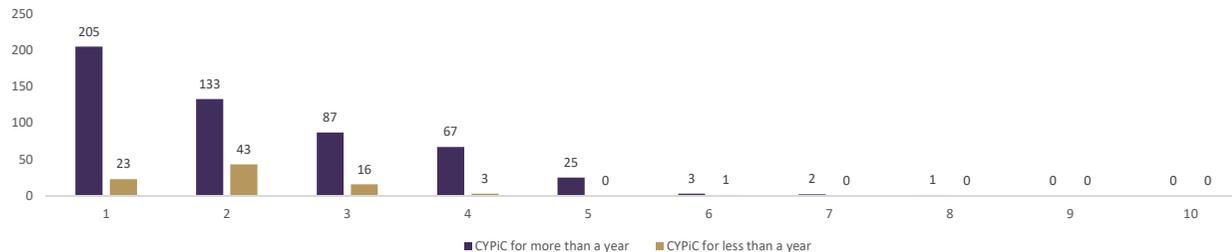
The proportion of CYPiC reviews where the child was present or contributed by other means in their review



2018 Year Out-turn = 94%
 2017/18 Year Out-turn = 94%



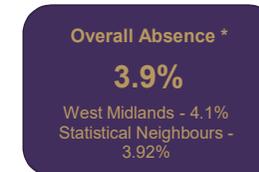
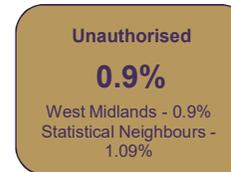
Number of Social Workers CYPiC have had in the past 12 months



The definition for assessments has changed which has resulted in performance looking a lot lower than previous. The indicator now looks at those who have had a new assessment within the past 12 months (this does not include a Care Plan Review as previous). Performance against this indicator is low however is expected to rise as it is monitored closely by managers. There has been a slight decrease in the percentage of young people with an up to date assessment, however this equates to fewer fails due to there being a smaller CYPiC cohort this month. Reviews have again improved to over 96%. Visits have seen a decrease to 88% from 92% in the month and Care Plans have started to see a decline after the continuous improvements over the previous month

17% of young people who have been looked after for more than a year and 5% who have been looked after for less than a year have had more than 3 social workers in the past 12 months. This is a decreasing trend.

KS2	Maths	Reading	Writing	Reading, Writing and Maths
CYPiC Wolverhampton 2018	36%	50%	45%	21%
Wolverhampton 2018	76%	77%	75%	65%
CYPiC West Midlands 2018	46%	50%	47%	33%
CYPiC Stat Neighbours 2018	49%	53%	48%	36%
CYPiC England 2018	47%	51%	49%	35%
KS4	9-4 Pass in English and Maths	Attainment 8	Progress 8	
CYPiC Wolverhampton 2018	12%	17%	-1%	
Wolverhampton 2018	58%	44%	0%	
CYPiC West Midlands 2018	18%	19%	-1%	
CYPiC Stat Neighbours 2018	20%	19%	-1%	
CYPiC England 2018	18%	19%	-1%	



CYPiC with an up to date PEP

The proportion eligible CYPiC with an up to date Personal Education Plan (PEP)

The 2018 KS2 an KS4 results show that Wolverhampton CYPiC has fallen behind comparator performance. There remains a significant gap between the performance of CYPiC and all Wolverhampton children however small numbers in the cohort can make these measurements volatile. Wolverhampton is in the bottom quartile of performance for both CYPiC Expected Standard for Reading Writing and Maths and CYPiC 9-4 Pass in English and Maths. For further information about the education attainment of CYPiC in Wolverhampton please refer to the Virtual School Head teacher annual report.

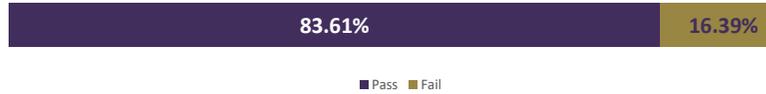
Attendance data has been updated for 2017 - attendance of Wolverhampton CYPiC at school is better than that of comparators. please note there was an error in previous reports where persistent absence was under-reported.





CYPiC with an up to date health check

Where a health check has been completed within 12 months



2018/19 Year Out-turn = 91%
 2017/18 Year Out-turn = 84%



CYPiC with an initial health check

Where a dental check has been completed within 20 working days of entering care (rolling 12 months)



2018/19 Year Out-turn = 95%
 2017/18 Year Out-turn = 91%

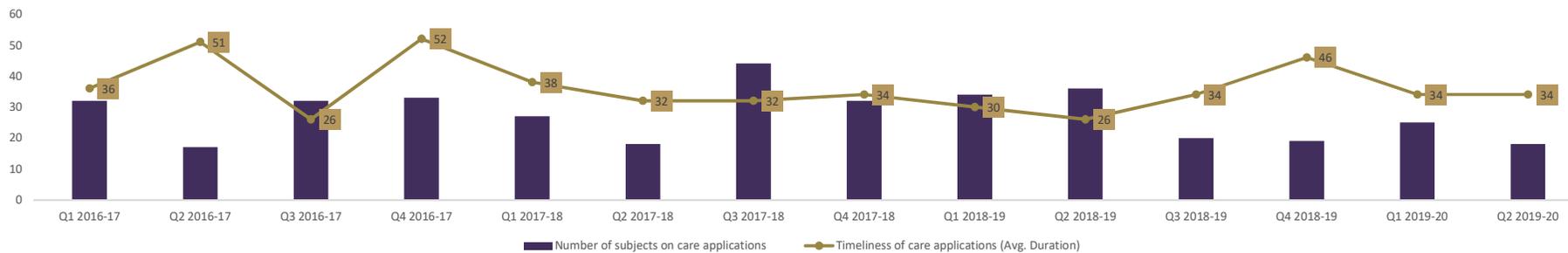


CYPiC with an up to dental check

Where a dental check has been completed within 12 months



Care Applications



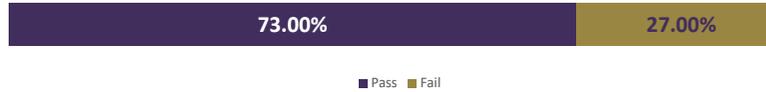
The percentage of dentals checks completed has been consistently good over the year and is currently at 94%. Medical checks which were previously an area of strength have yet again seen a further decline to 84% in the month. Of the new CYPiC in the past 12 months 24% had a health assessment within the first 20 working days, although this would not affect the other health percentages and due to an amendment to the reporting this has seen a significant improvement, this is still an area of concern. This has been flagged as an area of concern in internal performance management meetings

Adoption



CYPiC adopted within A1 indicator

Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family

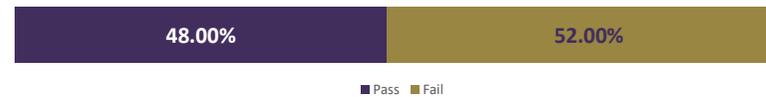


2018/19 Year Out-turn = 55%
2017/18 Year Out-turn = 60%



CYPiC adopted within A2 indicator

Average time between receiving court authority to place and finding a match

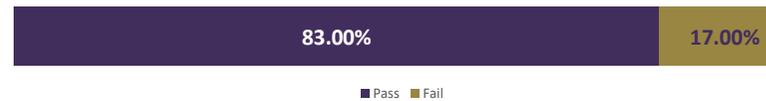


2018/19 Year Out-turn = 68%
2017/18 Year Out-turn = 55%



CYPiC adopted within A10 indicator

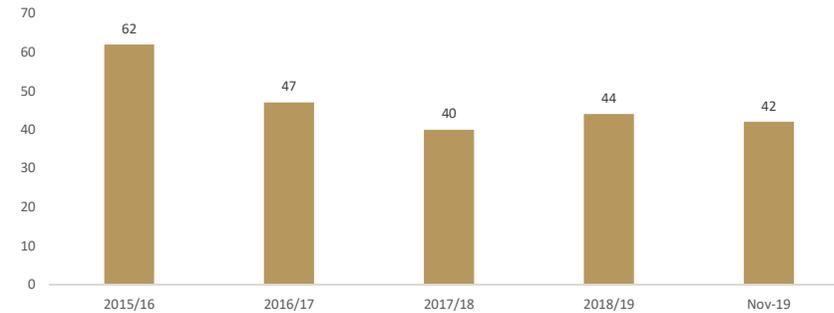
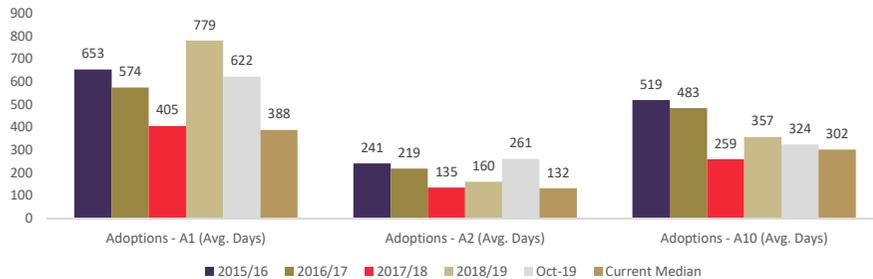
Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (stopped at point of fostering for foster carers adoptions)



2018/19 Year Out-turn = 73%
2017/18 Year Out-turn = 63%



Average Days against Adoption Indicators



Adoption timeliness continues to improve in 2019/20 against all indicators. Wolverhampton's A10 indicator is currently below national targets and improvement from last year has been seen in A1 and A2 indicators. This is promising performance especially when considering that Wolverhampton also compares favourably to comparators against the adoption of hard to place children. There have been 42 adoptions in the year to date to September 2019. This is a pleasing performance when considering Wolverhampton had just two more adoptions than this in the whole of 2018/19. Overall managers are pleased with performance although there is caution for adoptions that are set to take place later in the year with how changes in process due to the setup and initiation of the Regional Adoption Agency effect timeliness as the service is imbedded

Care Leavers



Care Leavers EET Status

Education, Employment and Training of Care Leavers aged 17-21

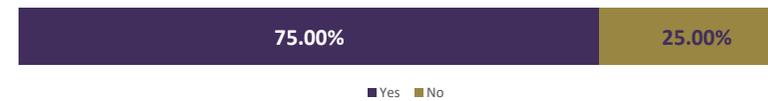


2017/18 Year Out-turn = 60%
 2016/17 West Midlands = 46%
 2016/17 Stat Neighbours = 47%
 2016/17 England = 50%



Care Leavers available to work

Care Leavers aged 17-21 who are available for education, training or employment

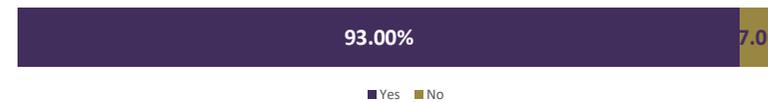


2017/18 Year Out-turn = 84%
 2016/17 Year Out-turn = 82%



Care Leavers in suitable accommodation

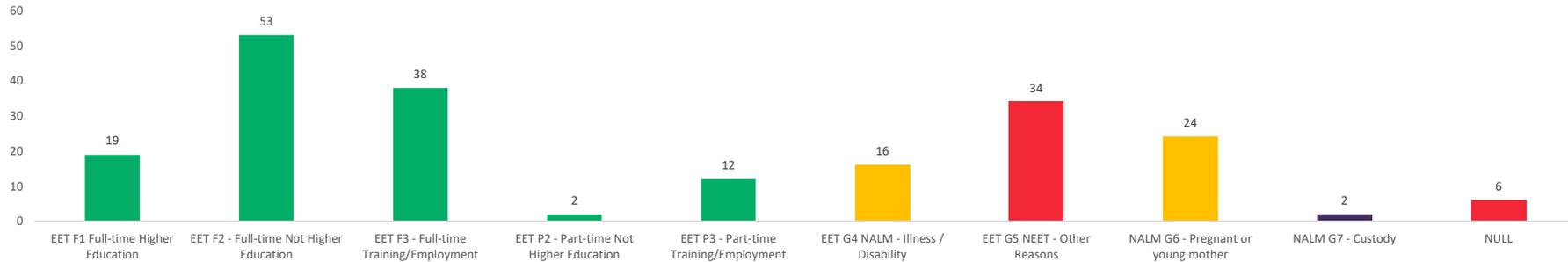
Care Leavers aged 17-21 who live in suitable accommodation



2017/18 Year Out-turn = 88%
 2016/17 West Midlands = 82%
 2016/17 Stat Neighbours = 83%
 2016/17 England = 84%



Current Care Leaver EET Status



Care Leaver data continues to be an area of strength for the authority. At the end of November 2019 68% of 17-21 year olds were in Education, Employment or Training. 74% of care leavers are available for work with 24% (52 young people) not available due to pregnancy or young motherhood, illness or disability or because they are in custody.

The proportion of care leavers currently deemed to be in suitable accommodation is also included and shows that 93% of the cohort are currently in suitable accommodation.