

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

**Venue** Committee Room 3 - 3rd Floor - Civic Centre

## Membership

**Chair** Cllr Chris Burden (Lab)

### Labour

Cllr Ciaran Brackenridge  
Cllr Jenny Cockayne  
Cllr Lovinyer Daley  
Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN  
Cllr Sally Green  
Cllr Jeszemma Howl  
Cllr Iqra Tahir

### Conservative

Cllr Paul Appleby

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](mailto:shelley.humphries@wolverhampton.gov.uk)  
**Address** Democratic Services, Civic Centre, 1st floor, St Peter's Square,  
Wolverhampton WV1 1RL

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**Website** <http://wolverhampton.moderngov.co.uk>  
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**Tel** 01902 550320

Please take note of the protocol for filming, recording and use of social media in meetings, copies of which are displayed in the meeting room.

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               | <b>Apologies for absence</b>  |
| 2               | <b>Declarations of interest</b>   |
| 3               | <b>Minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2023</b> (Pages 3 - 8)<br>[To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2023 as a correct record.]   |
| 4               | <b>Matters arising</b><br>[To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2023.]  |
| 5               | <b>Schedule of outstanding matters</b> (Pages 9 - 12)<br>[To receive the Schedule of Outstanding Matters.]  |
| 6               | <b>Adoption Service Annual Report</b> (Pages 13 - 38)<br>[To receive the Adoption Service Annual Report for 2022 – 2023.]   |
| 7               | <b>Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-2023</b> (Pages 39 - 70)<br>[To receive the Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-2023.]   |
| 8               | <b>Performance Monitoring Information</b> (Pages 71 - 76)<br>[To receive the Performance Monitoring Information Report.]  |
| 9               | <b>Exclusion of the Press and Public</b><br>[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

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 10 | <b>Councillor Visits to Establishments - Schedule of Visits</b><br>[To receive verbal feedback on any visits to establishments undertaken by Councillors since the last meeting.] |
|----|---|

## **Attendance**

**Chair** Cllr Chris Burden (Lab)

## **Labour**

Cllr Ciaran Brackenridge  
Cllr Jenny Cockayne  
Cllr Lovinyer Daley

Cllr Sally Green  
Cllr Jeszemma Howl  
Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN

Cllr Iqra Tahir

## **Conservative**

Cllr Paul Appleby

## **Employees**

Hannah Finch  
Becky Grainger  
Shelley Humphries  
Caterina Robinson  
Jazmine Walker

Corporate Parenting Officer  
Black Country ICB  
Democratic Services Officer  
Service Manager  
Head of Service for Children and Young People in Care

Corporate Parenting Board also welcomed one Foster Parent.

*Item No.*     *Title*

**1        Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Emma Bennett and Alison Hinds.

**2        Declarations of interest**

Councillor Barbara McGarrity QN declared a non-pecuniary interest as she is a Private Counsellor.

**3        Minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2023**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**4        Matters arising**

There were no other matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

**5        Schedule of outstanding matters**

Hannah Finch, Corporate Parenting Officer presented the report on current progress on matters previously considered by the Board.

It was also noted that the action in relation to the dedicated care leavers' nurse remained 'in progress' until the outcome of the Staying Close bid was announced in full. In response to a Board member query, it was confirmed that it would be a Band Six post.

Resolved:

That the Schedule of Outstanding Matters be received.

**6        Corporate Parenting Board Terms of Reference 2023-2024**

Hannah Finch, Corporate Parenting Officer presented the refreshed Corporate Parenting Board Terms of Reference 2023-2024 and highlighted changes from last year. It had been previously agreed to review the Terms of Reference at the beginning of each municipal year to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of the Board's decisions and actions.

It was noted that no vice chair had been named yet although it was clarified by the Democratic Services Officer that a decision was awaited from Full Council. The Chair requested that nominations or expressions of interest be received from Board members to recommend to Full Council for approval. The vice chair role was thought not to have Special Responsibility Allowances attached to it although it was confirmed it involved stepping in as Chair only if the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education was unavailable.

In terms of visits to establishments, it was clarified that there was currently only one establishment run by the Authority however there were plans to introduce two more, with further details and visiting opportunities to be shared in due course.

Resolved:

1. That the updated Corporate Parenting Board Terms of Reference 2023-2024 be approved.
2. That nominations and expressions of interest in the Corporate Parenting Board Vice Chair role be received for recommendation to the next meeting of Full Council.

## 7 **Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan 2023-2024**

Hannah Finch, Corporate Parenting Officer presented the Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan 2023-2024 and highlighted salient points. The Work Plan set out suggested activities and clear direction for the Corporate Parenting Board for the coming municipal year.

It was suggested that an item around child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) for children and young people in care be scheduled for a future meeting and concern was raised over waiting times for accessing these services. Rebecca Grainger, Black Country ICB confirmed that the Annual Health Report (scheduled for September 2023) already included a section authored by Wendy Harrison-Frazer of Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust which was dedicated to provision of mental health services for children and young people in care. It was agreed that there would be an inclusion to provide context and the response to the challenges around waiting times.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan 2023-2024 be approved.

## 8 **Foster Carers' Engagement**

Caterina Robinson, Service Manager for Children's Services delivered the presentation which provided Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of Foster Parents' Engagement undertaken by the Authority over 2022 – 2023 and planned activities for the coming year. The presentation covered events which ranged from seminars and award ceremonies for recognition of service for foster parents to family entertainment events aimed at fostering families and children and young people in care. It also outlined the ongoing schedule of foster parent training and development courses offered, as well as additional courses introduced this past year. It touched on the outcomes of the annual foster parent survey and the newly launched fostering bulletin to communicate with foster families.

In response to a query around whether the survey feedback was broken down by demographic it was stated it had not this time however this would certainly be a consideration for future surveys.

It was enquired whether there was any change in take up following the Fostering Fortnight and it was reported that the campaign often generated an increase in interest, although data on this was delayed as enquiries often came in gradually

following the event. It was also noted that this year the campaign extended out into the Community Hubs and local libraries not just the City Centre.

In respect of the survey engagement rate, 44% was considered good although it was deliberated whether 60% was a more ambitious rate to aim for. Assurances were offered that concerted efforts had been made to encourage survey participation, including extending the deadline date. It had been considered that open questions were useful in gathering detail but often daunting to respondents, therefore a combination of closed and open questions was included.

In response to a query around how many fostering families there were in the City, it was confirmed there were 209 at the last count.

It was clarified that the four-week training courses consisted of one session per week. In respect of training in general, it was noted that the service endeavoured to deliver face-to-face training except where virtual training was more appropriate, such as to accommodate work and caring commitments or for families residing outside of the City.

The service was commended, particularly the Supervising Social Workers and Children's Social Workers who were considered invaluable in supporting foster parents as well as responding to queries in a timely manner.

It was suggested that consideration be given to supporting neurodiverse children and young people as there were often long wait times for a diagnosis of autism or ADHD for example, although support could still be offered without formal diagnosis. It was added that some of the training included recognising the early signs of illness in a child and this could be incorporated into the training.

Resolved:

That the Foster Parents' Engagement presentation be received.

## 9 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved:

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.

## 10 **Councillor Visits to Establishments - Schedule of Visits**

For the benefit of new Board members, Hannah Finch, Corporate Parenting Officer provided an overview of the only currently registered home within the City. It was agreed that a schedule of visiting slots that were convenient for residents would be circulated following the meeting and Board members were encouraged to contact the Corporate Parenting Officer to arrange a visit.

It was announced that Board members had been invited to a Total Respect training session which was developed and delivered by care experienced young people. Members who had already participated enthused about how engaging they had

found it and encouraged new members to attend. It was queried whether there were full-day courses offered and noted that a schedule was being produced by the Participation Team which would be circulated once available.

Resolved:

1. That the Councillor Visits to Establishments - Schedule of Visits update be received.
2. That the establishment visit timetable be shared with Corporate Parenting Board following the meeting.
3. That the full Total Respect training schedule be shared with Corporate Parenting Board once available.

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<b>CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Board</b> <b>13 July 2023</b>
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<b>Report title</b>	Schedule of Outstanding Matters	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Chris Burden Children, Young People and Education	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards	
<b>Accountable director</b>	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families	
<b>Originating service</b>	Governance	
<b>Accountable employee</b>	Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer
	Tel	01902 554070
	Email	shelley.humphries@wolverhampton.gov.uk

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**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.

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	<b>Current Position</b>
25 May 2023	That nominations and expressions of interest in the Corporate Parenting Board Vice Chair role be received for recommendation to the next meeting of Full Council.	Democratic Services	A request has been sent to all members and nominations received have been forwarded for consideration.
25 May 2023	That the establishment visit timetable be shared with Corporate Parenting Board following the meeting.	Hannah Finch, Corporate Parenting Officer	Action complete.
25 May 2023	That the full Total Respect training schedule be shared with Corporate Parenting Board once available.	Hannah Finch, Corporate Parenting Officer	Action complete.
23 March 2023	That Jazmine Walker, Head of Service for Children and Young People in Care and Rebecca Grainger, Designated Nurse for CYPiC explore another means to fund a designated care leavers' nurse if the Staying Close bid was unsuccessful.	Jazmine Walker, Head of Service for Children and Young People in Care and Rebecca Grainger, Black Country ICB	This action is in progress until the outcome of the Staying Close bid is announced.

### **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 Any other implications**

- 6.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

### **7.0 Schedule of background papers**

- 7.1 Minutes of previous meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board and associates.

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<b>CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Board</b> <b>13 July 2023</b>
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<b>Report title</b>	Adoption Service Annual Report	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Chris Burden Children, Young People and Education	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards	
<b>Accountable director</b>	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families	
<b>Originating service</b>	Adoption@Heart	
<b>Accountable employee</b>	Lisa Preston	Head of Service
	Tel	07890 640 453
	Email	Lisa.preston@adoptionatheart.org.uk
<b>Report has been considered by</b>	Children in Care Council (CiCC)	21 June 2023
	Cabinet Member Briefing: Children, Young People and Education	04 July 2023
	Corporate Parenting Board	13 July 2023

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**Recommendation for action:**

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

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

**Recommendations for noting:**

The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to note:

1. The progress made by the Regional Adoption Agency.

## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 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 attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.2 It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 31 March 2023.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 Adoption@Heart is a Regional Adoption Agency providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and City of Wolverhampton Councils. The service is hosted by City of Wolverhampton Council 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

- 3.1 The report (Appendix 1) provides the detail of performance and the progress the service has made from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

## 4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 The budget for 2022-2023 was £4,817,907 and the agreed contributions from each of the partners are shown below:

<b>Partner Authority</b>	<b>Total Contribution 2022 - 2023</b>
Dudley MBC	1,150,169
Sandwell MBC	1,316,347
Walsall MBC	1,154,617
City of Wolverhampton Council	1,196,773
<b>Total to be funded</b>	<b>4,817,907</b>

- 4.2 The outturn position for 2022-2023 was an underspend of £741,000. Any underspends over and above agreed reserves are returned to partners as per the financial funding protocol.  
[JB/20062023/A]

## **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.  
[SB/18062023/D]

## **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. Staff have the flexibility of working from home and from the A@H office.

## **10.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

10.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications in place at this stage.

## **11.0 Schedule of background papers**

11.1 Appendix 1: Adoption Service Report

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# Adoption Service Report

1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023

**Report for** City of Wolverhampton Council

**Date of report** 8 June 2023

**Produced by** Lisa Preston  
Head of Service

**Service** Adoption@Heart

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## Appendix 1a

### **1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report:**

This report fulfils the obligations in the 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 this report.

The report covers the full year 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, Appendix 1a will cover the overall work within Adoption@Heart and the progress with adopter recruitment and Appendix 1b will be service specific for each of the four partner agencies.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 31 March 2023.

Adoption@Heart is a Regional Adoption Agency, providing adoption services on behalf of City of Wolverhampton Council, Sandwell Children’s Trust, Dudley Council and Walsall Council. The service is hosted by City of Wolverhampton Council and became operational on 1 April 2019. The service is now four years old.

## **2. Aims and Objectives:**

The overarching aim of Adoption@Heart is to provide secure and loving homes to children in need of permanence via adoption and to support those children and their families through their lifelong adoption journey. Adoption@Heart offers child-led and adopter friendly services by an experienced and motivated professional team.

Adoption@Heart supports the ethos that children and young people are best able to develop close and enduring relationships within a family setting. Adoption@Heart aims to ensure that all children whom it places within adoptive families will experience stability, security, and quality of care throughout their childhood and into their adulthood.

The objectives of Adoption@Heart are to:

- Meet the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, associated standards, regulations, and guidance.
- Ensure the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process, as outlined in the Welfare Checklist (Adoption & Children Act 2002).
- Support the process of timely decision making for children in relation to permanence options, including the use of Early Permanence Placements.
- Recruit, assess and approve a range of adoptive families in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of our LA and Children's Trust partners children for whom adoption is the plan, including children who wait longer, sibling groups and those children who require an early permanence placement.
- Promote best practice in adoption through the provision of advice and support to our LA and Children's Trust partners with the care planning process.
- Ensure the assessment and preparation of adoptive families is comprehensive and robust, in order that adopters are aware of and prepared to meet the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan.
- Provide a child centred, needs led matching, transition, and placement process for children.
- Provide a comprehensive adoption support service for adopted children and young people and their parents, adopted adults and birth family members.
- Ensure all staff involved in the work of Adoption@Heart have the appropriate level of skill, knowledge, and experience to deliver an effective service.
- Regularly review and evaluate services provided to ensure services delivered are of the highest possible standard and continue to meet the needs of our LA and Children's Trust partners and the children and families in receipt of our services.

## **3. National Context:**

Whilst representing a small part of the total children's social work sector, adoption continues to have a high profile politically. The programme of regionalisation which commenced in 2016

is now almost complete, with 29 Regional Adoption Agencies covering virtually all Local Authorities in England. There continues to be some areas, such as Birmingham, where they have formed as a Voluntary Adoption Agency, due to the nature and size of their individual organisations and Children's Trust status.

The government launched their [Adoption Strategy: Achieving Excellence Everywhere](#) in July 2021, setting out its vision to further improve the adoption system across England, with the provision of sector-led support to create national models of best-practice.

The National RAA Leaders Group is working to deliver against key areas of the strategy in line with the 3 key priority areas identified in their plan for 2021-2023:

1. Adoption Recruitment
2. The Child's Journey
3. Adoption Support

The National RAA leaders group meets monthly and there are working groups in place to address these three priority areas. Adoption@Heart is not currently represented on the working groups due to a change in Head of Service role in November 2022. The group receives updates directly from the Department for Education, the Children's Minister, and Ofsted.

In February of this year, Ofsted announced its intention to roll out an inspection framework for Regional Adoption Agencies. It is likely this will mirror the VAA inspection framework. However, given the variation in RAA set-up, to clearly define the parameters for an inspection, Ofsted will be selecting 6 pilot inspection sites in the summer of this year, with a plan to roll out the learning from these pilot inspections in Winter 2023. The new inspection framework and evaluation criteria is likely to be published early 2024.

#### **4. Regional Context:**

Adoption@Heart continues to be an active member of the Midlands Together Collaboration (MTC). The shared aim of the MTC partnership is to work together to enhance placement choice at the earliest possible opportunity for children and to ensure effective arrangements and protocols are in place for providing longer term adoption support. There are 18 Local Authority members and two Voluntary Adoption Agency members. There are five Regional Adoption Agencies represented.

The key aims are to:

- Reduce the placement waiting times for children.
- Increase the number of children placed regionally.
- Enhance adopter involvement in placement identification.
- Improve the co-ordination and access to adoption support services and to take advantage of opportunities to develop best practice across the region, to improve opportunities and services for children to be adopted and adoptive families.

Whilst all RAA's are working to ensure sufficiency for approval of adopters to meet the needs of children with an adoption plan, Adoption@Heart still uses a relatively high number of inter-agency placements, securing regional links is preferable to placing children at a distance.

The placement figures for the MTC region for 2022-23 are as follows:

- There were 145 interagency placements made for 206 children.
- 12 placements were secured with RAA's in the region for 13 children (8.3%).
- 41 placements were made with our VAA partners for 60 children, representing 28.3% of all placements made.

The focus this year has been the launch of the MTC Early Permanence Good Practice Guide. This follows the launch of the National Early Permanence Standards. This is in recognition of the need to ensure we consider early permanence for all children with a likely plan of adoption. Since the launch of the Good Practice Guide in February and March 2023, referrals for Fostering to Adopt (FFA) placements have increased. The challenge for Adoption@Heart and other RAA's is recruiting enough adopters to meet the increase in demand.

## **5. Recruitment of Adopters:**

### 5.1 New Enquiries

For the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, the Adoption@Heart Recruitment Team received 541 new enquiries.

This is in comparison to 609 enquiries received last year.

### 5.2 Information Events

21 virtual information events took place with 169 households attending and six phone consultations (mix of single and joint applicants). Therefore, 32% of people who made an enquiry went on to receive information.

## **6. Marketing Overview:**

Marketing figures for this period are:

- 541 enquiries.
- Six phone consultations and 169 households attended information events.
- Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, we had a total of 18,611 website visits – made up of 13,491 unique visits.
- 482 Twitter followers.
- 2,180 Facebook likes.
- 340 Instagram Followers.

### 6.1 Marketing brief

In late spring, a national campaign was launched by 'You Can Adopt' which focused on the children that wait longer (i.e., older children, siblings, children with additional needs and children from ethnic minorities). Adoption@Heart supported the campaign with local PR (which resulted in two radio interviews), social media posts (both organic and paid for adverts) and Google Ads campaign.

In September and October, Adoption@Heart launched its own recruitment campaign, which ran alongside National Adoption Week. The campaign aimed to increase awareness of Adoption@Heart and encourage anyone thinking about adoption to contact their Regional Adoption Agency – Adoption@Heart. Artwork and messaging focused on the brand and the strength of the three Local Authority and Children's Trust brand. Imagery focused on a single parent and toddler, both of Black heritage. The advert recorded for the radio campaign

featured the voice of a Black female actor, with the message focused on the Adoption@Heart brand, myth busting and information about the children that wait longer.

The campaign included targeted Google Ads, PR to regional media, digital 'page takeover' on the Express & Star website, billboard advertising, a radio campaign with Free Radio, the launch of a 'mega rear' bus back advert which travels daily around the Black Country for 12 months, plus a schedule of co-ordinated social media posts (including paid for social media adverts) across Adoption@Heart and partner social media channels.

Adoption@Heart also shared the national 'You Can Adopt' campaign, which focused on the memories and keepsakes of adopted young people and adults throughout their journey. This campaign was supported via social media posts, emails to residents and the Adoption@Heart website.

In December, Adoption@Heart shared a story of two adopted brothers that wanted to donate their Christmas presents to children that go without during the festive period. The gifts were donated to Graiseley Strengthening Families Hub. Adoption@Heart helped coordinate the donation and shared the story with local press and via social media channels.

In January, Adoption@Heart launched a campaign focusing on people motivated by the new year and their new goals. Building on from the campaign that took place in October, adverts focused on the Adoption@Heart brand for anyone considering adoption, a reminder that Adoption@Heart is the Regional Adoption Agency for the Black Country. A radio ad focused on emphasising the brand and dispelling myths by using the voice of a single 'adopter' who talks about the different people that can adopt and which children are currently waiting the longest. Imagery of a single adopter from a Black ethnic minority background was used across all artworks and the voice of a female from a Black ethnic minority group was used for the radio advert. The Facebook advert used multiple images including a single female, single male, range of ethnic minority backgrounds, a same sex couple and a person with a disability.

The campaign included a Facebook/Instagram advert, radio advert (digital and Black Country transmitter), Google adverts, PR (which resulted in two local radio interviews), a sponsored article and social media post with Birmingham Live, plus promotion around the first face to face information event held since before the pandemic.

LGBTQ+ Adoption and Fostering week took place in March 2023, which saw the launch of the '1, 2, 3 or more' campaign, a recruitment campaign to encourage those from the LGBTQ+ community who are considering adoption or would like more information to come forward and to also consider whether they could adopt siblings. Adoption@Heart had support from LGBTQ+ adopters to share their stories across multiple platforms including video, social media, blog posts and at virtual information events. A month-long digital radio campaign also took place with an advert targeting LGBTQ+ adopters to come forward. Towards the end of the campaign a general adoption sponsored post was shared via Birmingham Live.

Adoption@Heart has continued to offer virtual information events for prospective adopters using Microsoft Teams but has now added face to face events back into the schedule. Virtual events have continued to work well and were attended by an average of nine people per event across the year. Events are hosted by Social Workers, the Marketing Executive, and an adopter, where possible. The format of video, a presentation, plus a Q&A session, continues to provide an interactive and engaging session.

The face-to-face events are held in different community venues within the Black Country, ensuring that locations rotate around the region. The event format is similar, but with the opportunity to speak to the team at the end of the event over refreshments. This also allows

attendees to complete an expression of interest (EOI) form on the spot which increases the conversion from attendance to EOI from levels achieved at a virtual event. It is planned to continue to offer a mixture of virtual and face to face events to meet differing preferences of enquirers.

Regular meetings continue to take place with the Communications Leads across the three Local Authorities and the Trust. The meetings are used to discuss both national and regional marketing campaigns and activities, the marketing and communications support given to Adoption@Heart by the other comms leads (utilising the knowledge of their areas and resources) and what future support is needed and how the partnership can work going forward. Ongoing plans include joint working between fostering and adoption at community events across the Black Country.

This year will see the launch of a further national 'You Can Adopt' campaign, aimed at increasing awareness of support available to adopters. The new campaign is due to launch in late June 2023. Adoption@Heart has been improving the website with the aim to switch over to a new look website in the next few months. The new website features improved navigation, user experience and additional content including videos and articles. The improved website will work hand in hand with refreshed Google Ad campaigns. Having relaunched Instagram, Adoption@Heart now aims to increase content creation and improve its social media channels to increase reach and impact.

## **7. Adopter recruitment statistics:**

Adoption@Heart approved 40 adopter households in 2022/23.

- 15 (37.5%) were approved within the six months statutory timescale.
- 25 (62.5%) were not approved with the six-month statutory timescale.
- This year we approved 17 less adopter households, compared to last year's figure of 57.
- There has been some decline in timeliness for completion of assessments. The average number of days across the 40 approvals in stage two is 141. The fewest number of days was 79 and the longest 465.
- 43 households completed stage one throughout 2022/23. The average number of days in stage one was 160. The fewest number of days was 26 and the longest 559 days.

Nationally, there has been an overall decline in the number of adopters being approved and a decline in the number of adopters starting the adoption process. Whilst there are no nationally defined reasons for the decline in adopter numbers, the RAA leaders' group has begun to gather intelligence on the impact of the current cost of living crisis. Prospective adopters are making different decisions regarding family size and delay in pursuing adoption. There is a clear North/South divide with adopter enquiry numbers holding steady in some Southern areas whereas the Midlands and the North of the country are being adversely affected with overall decline in enquiries and approvals.

In addition to this, In November 2022, Adoption UK published survey results of over 300 adopter households in different stages of the adoption process on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. They found:

- 7% delayed beginning their adoption approvals process.
- 5% paused the process after it had begun.
- 41% said they were considering adopting fewer children than previously

The survey also found adopters were concerned about the expense of setting up a home for a child, buying essential equipment, being able to afford to take off their full adoption leave entitlement and having enough finance to enable them as a family to enjoy family experiences, such as days out and activities. These pressures were more acute for self-employed applicants, single applicants, and low-income households.

Adoption@Heart is focused on ensuring recruitment activity is robust and visible and is clear in its messaging that finance is not a barrier to adoption. However, for those who were in assessment during 2022-23, it is clear finance was an issue for many families with some deciding to withdraw from the process and others having to take a break to address their debt.

In addition to finance issues, during the year, we have seen a high number of complex assessments with some adopters having to take a considerable amount of time to come to terms with their personal histories including, loss and grief, poor mental health, and adverse childhood experiences. This has also adversely impacted on the completion of adoption assessments within six months.

On a positive note, during Q4 Adoption@Heart were beginning to see an increase in adopter enquiries.

At the end of March 2023 there were 40 families in stage two:

- Including three cases on hold.
- 10 (25%) have been in stage two for over a year.  
5 (12.5%) have been in stage two for between 8 and 12 months
- 4 (10%) between 4 and 8 months
- 21 (52.5%) for under 4 months.

Whilst this does show there are still some complex families in assessment, the total number in stage two at the end of March 2023, is higher than the figure for the same time last year which was 27.

At the end of March 2023 there were 58 families in stage one:

- Including five families on hold.
- 19 (32.8%) have been in stage One for two months or less.
- 39 (67.2%) families have been in stage one for over two months.

The total number of families in stage one at the end of March 2023 is higher than last year's figure of 39.

At the end of March 2023, there were 21 families approved and waiting compared to 43 families approved and waiting at the end of March 2022. Of these:

- Five of these are early permanence placements waiting to be formally matched.
- Six are families of South Asian origin, who have been waiting for a considerable amount of time for a child who matches their cultural and religious heritage.
- Four have specific matching criteria and are considering children.
- The remainder are in the early stages of matching or are newly approved and now considering children.

The average days waiting for a placement was 322, (10 months). One family had been waiting 1401 (46 months). (a child has been linked in April 2023) The shortest amount of time was

less than a month for a family that had been approved in March 2023. At this point in time, adopter approvals are looking much more positive, since the beginning of April 2023 there have been 13 approvals:

- Two foster carer approvals.
- 11 mainstream adopter approvals comprising of four South Asian couples, two single White British Females, one Black Caribbean female, one mixed heritage couple and the remaining three White British couples.

The high number of adopters in stage one and stage two is positive and should overall increase the number of adopter approvals for 2023-24. However, we do anticipate to still see the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the final number of approved and available families.

To provide strategic oversight on the progress of adopter assessments, the Head of Service for Adoption@Heart is undertaking monthly tracking. This enables any delays to be closely monitored and issues such as delays in the completion of statutory checks to be escalated.

## **8. Complaints:**

There were four formal complaints about the service during the twelve-month period, one complaint was about Sandwell Children's Trust and incorporated a complaint about Adoption@Heart about not feeling supported during the transition period with communication. A further complaint was about their approval/assessment journey and Keep in Touch, formerly called letterbox contact. Additionally, there was a complaint about a worker's breach of confidentiality and finally a complaint about the communication style of an Adoption@Heart worker. Learning from complaints is a key feature of the service, management and team meetings are used to explore learning and the business plan and team plans are used to implement learning from complaints.

## **9. Staffing:**

The service employs 31 qualified Social Workers on a permanent basis, along with one agency Social Worker, who is providing additional capacity due to the number of cases in the Adoption Support Team. There is one Social Worker currently going through pre-employment checks, who is likely to start in June. There are also a number of unqualified posts such as family support workers and business support colleagues.

There is a Service Manager and three Team Managers, with one covering each of the thematic service areas. The Business Support Team have a Business Support Manager, Senior Business Support Officer and five Business Support Officers. The Panel Team have two Panel Advisors along with a Panel Co-ordinator and three Panel Administrators.

The recruitment vacancy rates continue to remain low since the service went live.

## **10. Panels:**

During the year 2022-2023 adoption panels continued to be virtual. Consideration has been given to panels using a hybrid approach by consulting with members and seeking feedback from adopters. Feedback continues to show that applicants feel more relaxed joining panels virtually via Microsoft Teams from their home. Social Workers report that working in this way allows them to work effectively and efficiently, whilst managing their workloads, it is also time and cost efficient.



In addition to the work undertaken in Adoption@Heart, the University of Worcester in partnership with Adoption Central England (ACE) RAA, conducted a piece of research which concluded that there are as many advantages to online panels as there are disadvantages. The disadvantages can be mitigated to some extent. There is a balance to be struck between the formality and quality assurance purpose of the panel meeting and the comfort of those participating.

The research made the following recommendations:

- To consider those circumstances where an in-person panel would support those attending.
- Social Workers being in the same room as their adopters when attending panel.
- Technical support to panel chairs, members and applicants when using Teams.
- Regular in-person events for panel members.

These recommendations are currently being considered by the Adoption Panel Team.

Panel activity approvals and matches per month 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
	Approvals	Approvals	Approvals	Matches	Matches	Matches
April	5	5	4	7	10	7
May	4	4	7	16	10	13
June	5	8	3	11	13	6
July	7	7	0	8	8	8
August	8	3	5	12	5	3
September	7	7	0	19	6	4
October	5	3	5	20	11	5
November	7	5	5	7	12	9
December	4	3	5	6	3	6
January	6	3	1	6	5	14
February	3	10	1	8	6	7
March	6	7	2	11	14	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>95</b>

### 10.1 Panel membership

The Panel continues to function with the support of the Panel Team including the Panel Advisors, Panel Co-ordinator, and Panel Administrators. There are currently 35 Panel Members on the central list. It is made up of Independent Panel Members and Social Work Panel Member representatives. There are four Independent Panel Chairs, six Medical Advisors for the three Local Authorities and the Children's Trust.

The central list offers a good representation of members who have either been adopted or have adopted and this is seen as very positive in terms of the different perspectives they bring. There has been a change in the membership and activity to recruit new members with the aim of increasing the diversity and representation at panel in terms of gender, race, disability and lived experiences. However, it is acknowledged that more needs to be done to recruit males, same sex couples and single adopters. Work in this area is therefore ongoing.

Figures provided for an Ofsted Inspection in December 2022 show the diversity of panel from the start of the RAA 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to December 2022.

(\*Data was not available for 2020/2021 but will be collected and monitored annually from 2023)

	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Panel Members</b>	37	*	*	47
<b>Gender</b>	7 Male members			6 Male members
	1 Medical Advisor 6 Independent members			1 Chair 1 Medical Advisor 2 Independent members 2 Social Workers members
<b>Ethnicity</b>	8 Asian members			11 Asian members
	5 Medical Advisors 1 Independent member 2 Social worker members			5 Medical Advisors 1 Independent member 5 Social Worker members
	1 Black Caribbean member			6 Black African or Caribbean members
	1 Social Worker member			5 Social Workers members 1 Independent Social Worker
	2 Mixed Ethnicity members			3 Mixed Ethnicity members
	1 Medical Advisor 1 Social Worker member			1 Medical Advisor 2 Social Workers members

## 10.2 Panel training

In the period 2022-2023 Panel Members have had the opportunity to attend the following training events:

Adoption@Heart Panel Development Day 29/03/2023, with the agenda items including Adoption@Heart Performance, Legal Updates, Diversity in Approvals and Matches presented at panel, Good Examples of Matching, Recruitment and Assessment, Mental Health, and the adoption process.

Thematic training has also been offered to Panel Members to develop their effectiveness on panel following themes and topic areas identified in their annual appraisals. These are as follows: Thematic Training on Questioning at Panel – Questioning Techniques 18/11/2022, Attachment in Adults & Attachment in Children 09/12/2022. In addition to this all four Panel Chairs attended Cultural Humility Training on various dates.

## 10.3 Panel business

Panel met on 45 occasions during 2022-2023, there are 50 panels a year for adoption matters to be heard. There is also flexibility within the panel system allowing for extra and special panels to be arranged to enable additional cases and emergency matters to be heard, as and when

directed by the courts. This means that children do not wait, and matters are dealt with in a timely manner.

The Agency Decision Makers (ADM) from City of Wolverhampton Council made all the decisions regarding the suitability for approval of all prospective adopters from April to December 2022. From January 2023 this responsibility changed, and the Adoption@Heart Head of Service now undertakes these decisions as ADM.

Should be placed for adoption (SHOBPA) decisions remain in the three Local Authorities and the Trust, except in the case of Consensual Adoptions, previously known as relinquishments, which remain with Adoption@Heart. Agency Decision Makers are very flexible regarding early decisions in relation to both approvals and matches, to enable transitions that work best for the child/ren.

#### 10.4 Approvals

Adoption@Heart is welcoming of adopters from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, those in same sex relationships, single applicants, those with disabilities and where English is not the first language. In some circumstances an interpreter has been used or made available to support the applicants.

40 adopters were approved in this reporting period. There was one deferral, which was subsequently approved. There were two Consensual Adoption cases presented for an adoption recommendation.

#### 10.5 Feedback from Adopters and Social Workers about their experience at panel:

Feedback from Applicants for approvals and Prospective Adopters for matches is sought after every panel.

Feedback has been largely positive and where this has not been the case, it has been addressed through several ways, for example learning reviews, changes in practice, change in policies or processes at varying levels.

Quotes from adopters include:

- *“Panel Members were all welcoming and friendly – calmed our nerves.”*  
*“We were treated well at panel and were kept informed of everything that was happening and would like to thank everyone involved.”*
- *“I was a lot more relaxed than I thought I would have been, and I think that was because of how warm and friendly the panel were.”*
- *“We found panel to be a positive experience. We were made to feel welcome and had time to express our feelings.”*  
*“Very well organised, friendly, and made to feel at ease when questions were asked.*
- *Notifications and calls before panel, e-mails when panel had commenced and links to join panel were all done professionally and efficiently.”*
- *“I was informed before the meeting ended how the decision would be made and the time frame. I understand everything and was happy with what was said to me.”*
- *“Very good conversation with all members in the panel,”*

Quotes from Social Workers include:

- *“The reason was clear for the recommendation. Panel listed the couples of strengths; they recognised it had not been an easy journey for them and heard the emotion of the applicants that they have a strong affiliation and commitment to this child. The evidence was before us as the young person attended with the prospective adopters. Their attendance was due to childcare (grandparents had covid). Nevertheless, the couple’s ability to engage in the panel process whilst continuing to be attentive to the child was evident.”*
- *“The panel showed careful consideration of the needs of the child and provided a very positive recommendation which was pleasing to hear.”*
- *“The chair clearly explained the recommendations to the adopters/professionals.”*
- *“I just wanted to thank panel for the positive praise which was acknowledged by all panel members in this case.”*
- *“Recommendations were clear and fair.”*
- *“I wish to thank the panel advisor for ahead of panel she was supportive in ensuring the quality of the PAR, noting there were spelling and grammar errors and ensuring these were amended. It had been QA’d, but certain sections needed re-working after. I know the wider discussions within the LA and waiting on outcomes from meetings regarding the siblings, at some level impacted the quality of the PAR.”*
- *“Panel asked relevant questions and showed a great deal of empathy to my adopters. I found today’s experience useful myself with clear recommendations and advice and also support to go forward with this case.”*
- *“Panel members were welcoming and asked clear and concise questions. It was nice to be invited back into panel to receive the recommendation”*

#### **11. Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM):**

There has been one referral to the IRM in the period. The Social Worker and the manager attended the IRM panel on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The recommendation was received by the agency on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2022; and the full set of minutes was sent to Adoption@Heart on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2022. The IRM upheld the decision of Adoption@Heart.

## **12. Disruptions:**

There was one adoption disruption during the period for a sibling group of two girls. These were not Wolverhampton children but from one of our partner Local Authorities.

The girls were placed in June 2022 and returned to a foster parent placement in September 2022. The disruption meeting identified that the girls had lived in five households before their move to adoption. Their level of and exposure to trauma may not have been fully explored during the decision-making stages of care planning, the foster carer was also not clear about her experience of providing care, as such the adopters were unprepared for the behaviours one of the girls was exhibiting. The adoptive parents were used to offering care to children who were receptive and trusting, this very quickly escalated into a 'blocked care' situation where the adopters were unable to move beyond the presenting behaviour. The female adoptive parent became fearful and anxious, and the adopters made the decision to end the placement.

The learning identified was as follows:

- CAMHS involvement had ended too quickly and should have supported the girls in their transition plan recognising their level of trauma.
- The focus became the relationship between the sisters and not how to support the adoptive parents to understand the basis for the behaviour.
- There was a lack of oversight from the IRO who had followed the girls' journey and would have had an invaluable insight.
- The adoptive parents were not prepared for the extent of the children's needs, they were unable to see beyond the behaviour to understand the girls were testing out the relationship.
- The Matching Panel made recommendations that greater thought needed to be given to the support plan, this advice was not reviewed and therefore not embedded. Consideration should be given to sharing advice from panel, not only with the children's Social Workers and their managers but also the IRO.

In addition to this adoption disruption, there was also a case where introductions for a child ended prior to placement. The child had four pre-meets and the adopter appeared unable to respond to the needs of the child, the house was unprepared, and the foster carer was privy to personal information about the adopter, which impacted on their development of a relationship. A learning review was undertaken on this case and the learning identified was as follows:

- Workers underestimated the readiness of the adopter to respond to the child's holistic needs.
- There were some signs in the assessment that the adopter was not prepared for the arrival of a child or had enough transferable skills.
- The pre-meets need to be conducted by one consistent person, so the feedback loop is consistent.
- PARs are not to be shared with foster parents, this information belongs to the adopter and the agency, the same way that a Form F is personal to a foster parent.

Learning from both has been fed back into the service and where needed, changes have been implemented.

### **13. Inspections:**

One Local Authority (Dudley) and the Children's Trust (Sandwell) in the Adoption@Heart partnership were inspected in the year, Dudley within the ILACS framework and Sandwell initially under the ILACS framework and later as a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) inspection.

Dudley received an overall Requires Improvement judgement, whilst Sandwell received an overall inspection outcome of Requires Improvement for their ILACS inspection and Good for their VAA inspection. Positive feedback was received in all inspections. However, the Sandwell VAA inspection presented several challenges from a VAA perspective, as most activity was based on Adoption@Heart activity but had to be looked at through a Sandwell Children's Trust lens. There were recommendations in both Ofsted reports for Adoption@Heart to follow through on, these are contained in the business plan.

### **14. Accountability:**

#### **Management board**

The service has continued to have in place two key layers of governance with a Management Board attended by Assistant Directors and a Strategic Commissioning Board attended by Directors of Children's Services.

The Strategic Commissioning Board has continued to meet quarterly, supported by the commissioning lead from Dudley. The chairing of this board has remained with Dudley during the year 2022-23.

An Operations Group was established in the previous year, with a view to increasing engagement, oversight, and operational involvement of Heads of Service and other Managers from each partner service. This group has continued to meet six-weekly, chaired by the Head of Service for Adoption@Heart. The Management Board meets quarterly.

The Management Board is chaired by the Deputy Director for Children's Social Care in Wolverhampton, as host Local Authority for Adoption@Heart.

With effect from Autumn 2023, it has been agreed that the governance arrangements will change with the establishment of a new board which will be titled the Strategic Partnership Board (SPB). This will replace both Management Board and Strategic Commissioning Board and representation will be from Assistant Directors, with a Director of Children's Services chairing. This decision to streamline the governance arrangements has been made considering the continued positive progress of the service in becoming an effective and high performing Regional Adoption Agency for the region. The legal agreement and related documents supporting the current governance arrangements are being reviewed to reflect this change.

## **15. Service Development**

Whilst there has been significant focus on Ofsted activity, the management team have also focused on the re-write of key policies and procedures and the formulation of an overarching business plan which identifies key service development priorities.

For the coming year, 2023-24, the business plan identifies the following as areas for ongoing development:

- Embed early permanence from both a child and adopter perspective
- Focus recruitment activity on recruiting adopters for children who wait the longest
- Improve on timeliness of adoption assessments and matching
- Improve on adopter and child voice
- Reinstating some activities that were suspended during Covid such as coffee mornings, adopter picnics and social gatherings for adoptive families which will extend our adoption support offer
- There is a need to embed a quality assurance framework within the service, which includes the need for regular themed audit activity across all aspects of the service and the collation of service user experience across all parts of the adoption journey

**Child level Information for City of Wolverhampton Council children:**

**16. Number, type and age of children waiting for adoption and length of time waiting:**

On 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2023:

There were 26 children subject to placement orders, but not yet placed for adoption. Two of these were linked but not yet formally matched, the remaining 24 had an active family finding plan.

The timescales for the 26 children waiting since the granting of their Placement Orders is as follows:

Less than 2 months:	4
Between 2 and 4 months:	11
Between 4 and 6 months:	4
Between 6 and 12 months:	2
Children waiting over 1 years:	5

The 26 children comprise of mainly single children, with some sibling groups of 2 children and one sibling group of 3. Most children who have been waiting for an adoptive family since the granting of their placement order is below six months. Those children waiting over a year are in the process of having their care plan reviewed, for some the decision has been made to revoke their placement order.

**17. Children Made Subject to Placement Orders:**

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2	2	7	14	25

This is the total number of children where the court has agreed with the Local Authority care plan of adoption and have granted a placement order. This enables the Local Authority to progress the adoption plan for the child.

**18. Children Subject to Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions as of 31 March 2023 (without Placement Order):**

There are seven children who have a SHOBPA decision in place but not a placement order, this is because the care proceedings for these children have not yet concluded, or they are a consensual adoption case.

**19. Number of Children who had a SHOPBA during the period:**

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
8	9	7	9	33

This is the total number of children across the year who had a decision made that they should be placed for adoption (SHOPBA)



**20. The Numbers of Children with PO who had a Change of Plan (away from adoption) in the Period:**

Four

This will be those children where the decision has been made that adoption is no longer viable and will have resulted in a change in care plan.

**21. Number of Children Placed for Adoption during the period:**

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2	0	3	4	9

For those children moving in with their adoptive family, 7 were two years or younger, 1 was aged four and 1 aged six plus.

There were 7 boys and 2 girls. 7 children were White British and 2 were White British/Asian.

There has been a reduction in the number of children moving in with their adoptive families compared to last year's figure of 34. This decrease is reflective of a national reduction in the overall numbers of children being placed for adoption. In addition to this, the City of Wolverhampton Council continues to work hard in reducing the number of children in care. As a result, the number of children in care has decreased from 522 to 501 between March 2022 and March 2023, this is an overall decrease of 4%.

It is also known that in 2021-2022, there were several large brother and sister groups living with adopters compared to 2022-2023. This inflated the overall number of children moving to an adoptive placement in 2021-22.

City of Wolverhampton colleagues form part of the governance arrangements for Adoption@Heart. Appropriate rigour and challenge are applied to the performance data presented to Operational Group meeting, Management Board and Strategic Commissioning Board. Whilst individual partner performance is closely monitored, the mandate from central government in the establishment of Regional Adoption Agencies was to apply 'one pool of adopters' and 'one pool of children'. The success of family finding is dependent on several factors including, age of child, whether part of a brother or sister group, complex family history, ethnic and cultural origin and overall health and development and the availability of adopters, locally, regionally, and nationally to meet the needs of children waiting. Whilst there are differences in the number of children placed this year amongst partners, overall performance for Adoption@Heart is in line with the national picture of adoption performance.

On a positive note, and to provide some reassurance of family finding activity for City of Wolverhampton children. As the time of writing this report, the 25 children who had a placement order granted during 2022-2023, 2 are adopted, 7 are now living with their adoptive family, 14 are linked or matched to an adoptive family and 2 are still waiting for a family to be identified.

## Children Placed in Previous Years

Financial Year:	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Children Placed	42	25	38	34

### 22. Number of Children Adopted:

The number of children legally adopted by their adoptive parents in the 12-month period to 31 March 2023 was 25.

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

Financial Year:	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Children Adopted	41	8	8	41

### 23. Adoption timeliness:

The national 3-year average scorecard indicators for timeliness of achieving adoption have not been published since 2020. These have been replaced by the ASGLB data that is published quarterly. End of year 2022-23 is not yet available. For comparison purposes, I will refer to 2021-22 timeliness and 2022-23 Q3 timeliness.

For the end of **2021-22**, ASGLB indicators were:

- A2 time from placement order to matching decision **199 days**
- A10 time from entry to care to placement for adoption **460 days**

For the end of **Q3 2022-23**, ASGLB indicators were:

- A2 time from placement order to matching decision **199 days**
- A10 time from entry to care to placement for adoption **478 days**

Wolverhampton's current timeliness for **2022-23** indicators are as follows:

- A2 time from placement order to matching decision **214 days**
- A10 time from entry to care to placement for adoption **608 days**

Whilst Wolverhampton's performance is below that of the national average for both indicators, A2 is relatively stable and close to the national average and continues to evidence the timely placement of children for adoption.

A10 is much higher than the national average, it must be noted that the number of adoptions was lower for 2022-23, therefore the average number of days will be adversely affected by even a small percentage of these children experiencing delays in their care proceedings. However, it is clear there is work to do on this from a whole system perspective. It is likely the roll out of the early permanence standards will improve on this indicator in the coming months.

It is also worth noting that the numbers of children leaving care nationally via adoption has reduced continuously since 2017.

## 24. Early Permanency:

There were three Wolverhampton children placed in early permanence placements via Foster for Adopt, all in Q4 and all with internal adopters.

## 25. Children's Family Finding Activity:

The tables below show the total number of children moving to their adoptive family by the service during the year 2022/23.

### Children placed 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

LA/Trust	Inhouse	Interagency	Total Placed
Dudley	15	1	16
Sandwell	18	7	25
Walsall	20	21	41
Wolverhampton	7	2	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>91</b>

Inter-agency usage for full year is 34%, thus 66% of children were placed in house.

Whilst this is positive, the lower number of adopter approvals has meant there were less adopters available for placements in Q4 and more inter-agency placements were made in Q4 than any other quarter. Inter-agency usage ensured children's adoption plans continued to be expedited with families approved by other RAA's and VAA's.

To try and reduce the use of inter-agency placements, we are exploring potential matches for children waiting with families in assessment. However, the current trajectory is for there to be an increase in the use of inter-agency placements for 2023-24 to ensure that we can continue to place children in a timely way with approved adopters.

The agreement to inter-agency placement searches is monitored and reviewed monthly by the management team, the meetings are chaired by the Head of Service. Should there be a need to expedite a search sooner than this, the Adoption@Heart Head of Service can agree. The increase in demand for FFA placements because of the launch of the MTC Early Permanence Best Practice Guide is meaning that we are not able to keep up with current demand and therefore seeking inter-agency FFA placements alongside other placements. The likely increased cost of this is also being monitored and reported to the Operations Group and Management Board.

### Children Placed Foster for Adopt

LA/Trust	FFA Inhouse	FFA Interagency	Total
Dudley	4	0	4
Sandwell	4	2	6
Walsall	9	2	11
Wolverhampton	3	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>24</b>

## **Analysis – Children Placed**

The number of children matched and moving to live with their adoptive families in the full year is 91. This is less than the number placed in the previous year (103).

34% of children placed by 31 March 2023 were placed inter-agency and this represents a slight improvement on the end of the previous year performance (38%).

The spread of children placed/matched across the four partners is significantly different this year, with Walsall placing the most children and Wolverhampton significantly less, this is the opposite to last year when Wolverhampton placed the most and Walsall the least. Dudley and Sandwell both saw a drop in numbers.

It is positive that 24 children have been placed via Foster for Adoption (32 in previous year) and that 80% of these were placed with in house adopters. Early Permanence practice is becoming more embedded, despite this year's drop in numbers.

Like the tracking of adoption assessments, the Head of Service also has strategic oversight of case tracking for family finding. This activity commenced only recently and sits alongside the tracking of inter-agency spend. Family finding audits are now also embedded so that key themes, from both a strengths-based perspective and an improvement perspective can be identified and fed back into the service and partner agencies.

### **26. Adoption Support:**

The team continues to provide all aspects of pre and post order adoption support on behalf of each of the three Local Authorities and Children's Trust and supports families pre and post order. The team commissions therapeutic services via applications to the Adoption Support Fund, Keep in Touch arrangements, access to records and birth parent support.

It is recognised that early life adversity impacts children developmentally, emotionally, cognitively, and socially and requires therapeutic support for children to thrive. Adoption@Heart operates a graduated approach, offering universal access to an adoption training programme and support groups delivered by staff; enhanced support includes an assessment of need and parenting support, individually or in groups, and targeted support includes commissioning of specialist therapeutic intervention. We utilise the service of an Adoption Support Therapist employed by Adoption@Heart, as well as commissioning private and independent therapeutic services.

The starting point for accessing the Adoption Support Service is an Assessment of Need. The team undertook the following number of these in the twelve-month period. This is an overall increase in the number of assessments of need, this is becoming a growing demand and continues to evidence the lifelong nature and complexity of adoption.

Dudley	79
Sandwell	45
Walsall	63
Wolverhampton	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>

The Adoption Support Fund was established in 2015 by the Government to help adoptive families access support and settle into their new lives following adoption. The Government committed ongoing funding for the 2022-23 financial year in advance of the spending review settlement. There has been a marginal increase in the number of ASF applications which again evidences the need for on-going support within the adoption arena.

### **ASF Applications completed in the year**

Sandwell	35
Walsall	54
Dudley	70
Wolverhampton	75
<b>Total</b>	<b>234</b>

### **Access to Records**

The provision of birth records counselling and access to information is of vital importance in enabling adopted adults to understand the circumstances of their adoption and enhance their sense of identity. The team supported the numbers of requests below within each area.

Dudley	19
Sandwell	12
Walsall	16
Wolverhampton	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>

### **Birth Parent Support**

The team also provides support to birth parents affected by adoption and the following numbers were supported by the service in the twelve-month period.

Dudley	2
Sandwell	9
Walsall	10
Wolverhampton	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>

### **Keep in Touch**

Adoption@Heart is responsible for Keep in Touch arrangements on behalf of City of Wolverhampton Council. There are three full-time Family Support Workers who are responsible for administering the service. They offer support to adoptive parents and birth relatives. There have been some considerable staff absences this year which has impacted on some aspects of service delivery. Due to staff absence within the team over the course of the past year, a breakdown of Keep in Touch exchanges by Local Authority/Children's Trust is not available. This will be rectified for the next annual report.

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<b>CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Board</b> <b>13 July 2023</b>
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<b>Report title</b>	Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-2023	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Chris Burden Children, Young People and Education	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards	
<b>Accountable director</b>	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families	
<b>Originating service</b>	Children and Young People in Care	
<b>Accountable employee</b>	Caterina Robinson	Service Manager
	Tel	01902 550844
	Email	<a href="mailto:caterina.robinson@wolverhampton.gov.uk">caterina.robinson@wolverhampton.gov.uk</a>
<b>Report has been considered by</b>	Children in Care Council	21 June 2023
	Children and Young People in Care	22 June 2023
	Children's Social Care Leadership Team Meeting	22 June 2023

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**Recommendation for action:**

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive the Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-2023.

## **1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the service delivery, service structure and performance for 2022-2023 whilst setting out key objectives for 2023-2024.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 The Fostering Service Annual Report is presented each year to the Corporate Parenting Board for information. It is an opportunity to highlight key achievements and provide an overview on performance as a service and how this supports positive outcomes for Children and Young People in Care.

## **3.0 Progress**

- 3.1 This report provides an annual review of the structure, duties, and performance of the City of Wolverhampton Fostering Service. The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) requires that all Fostering Services provide an annual report to their Executive or Trustees. In the case of Local Authorities, the 'executive' is the Elected Members of the City of Wolverhampton.
- 3.2 The Fostering Service is located within the Children and Young People in Care Service of the City of Wolverhampton Council. The Fostering Service recruits, assesses, supports, and develops foster parents to provide a good standard of care and stability to children and young people aged 0-18 years. In addition, the service works with the Supported Accommodation Team to promote Staying Put arrangements for young people to remain living with their foster parents post 18. Currently we have 36 young people in Staying Put arrangements.
- 3.3 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 imposes a duty on Local Authorities to find sufficient fostering provisions in its local area. The Fostering Service is committed to provide stability, care and security to children in care and ensure that foster parents can meet the individual needs of children. The importance of children remaining within their birth family network, education and within their community remains paramount in securing stability for the child and there is a heavy focus on encouraging fostering applicants to "foster for your local council" for this reason.
- 3.4 The Fostering Service was last inspected by Ofsted as part of a single inspection of Children's Services in March 2022 and was rated 'Good'. Overall feedback was positive, as Ofsted found children were living with foster parents who met their needs, and stability was a real strength.
- 3.5 The Fostering Service seeks to provide comprehensive and excellent quality foster care to all children in the care of the City of Wolverhampton. Foster parents provide children in care a positive experience of family life within an environment that promotes their physical, emotional and health needs. Working in partnership with health, education and other allied professionals enables foster parents to provide a warm, safe and caring family environment ensuring that the children's emotional health and development is promoted. Foster parents ensure children in care have access to available opportunities to promote children's



attendance and their academic achievements, thus maximising all opportunities for children to achieve their full potential.

### 3.6 Key Achievements 2022 - 2023

- An all-new accurate foster parent register was created.
- Inclusive language is promoted across the whole service.
- Embedded therapeutic parenting in supervision, fostering logs and assessments.
- Internal matching events and matching policy are in place.
- Home stability has been steadily maintained and the year ended with more children in internal foster than within external foster care with the gap continuing to widen.
- A permanent Marketing Executive in post with all new Marketing Strategy is in place.
- Assessment timeliness has improved.
- The new CRM system is in place to track and report on all leads and enquiries.
- A full training review was started with a training portal in process,
- A short break foster parent has been recruited specifically for a child with disabilities.
- A Preference Tool is in place to maximise sufficiency within current foster parents.
- Linking and Matching is now formally celebrated and recorded on the child's file.
- Dormancy Policy is in place with those dormant being reviewed and encouraged to return to fostering.
- An E-bulletin is sent out monthly with key news and foster parent shout-outs.

### 3.7 Key Objectives 2023-2024

- Key focus on recruiting and supporting foster parents for older age groups.
- Develop services for Special Guardianship Order / Kinship care.
- Achieve a net gain of five mainstream foster parents and continue to achieve the 183 days target.
- All those awaiting link and matching will be progressed.
- Review and finalise Foster Families United model.
- Relaunch Same Day Family Finding policy and ensure in use and promoted.
- Review Fostering Fees and Allowances in line with cost-of-living crisis
- Produce a whole new training offer to foster parents from September 2023 where they can book via the portal, receive reminders, surveys and certificates.
- Develop Short Breaks policy and recruit more short breaks foster parents

## 4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 There has been a year-on-year reduction in the cost for both agency fostering and slight decrease in internal fostering. The figures are detailed within Appendix 1 – Annual Fostering Report.  
[JG/03072023/W]

## 5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 The Fostering Service operates within the following legislation: Children Act 2004, Children & Young Persons Act 2008, Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services: National

Minimum Standards 2011, The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 2011, The Care Planning, Home, and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended 2021), Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

5.2 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.  
[TC/04072023]

## **6.0 Equalities implications**

6.1 The Fostering Service works with foster parents and social workers from a diverse background to meet the needs of children and young people in respect of all nine protected characteristics.

## **7.0 All other Implications**

7.1 No other implications.

## **8.0 Schedule of background papers**

8.1 No background papers noted.

## **9.0 Appendices**

9.1 Appendix 1: Fostering Service Annual Report



## ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT

April 2022 – March 2023

Author: Caterina Robinson – Fostering Service Manager  
Children and Young People in Care Service



CITY OF  
WOLVERHAMPTON  
COUNCIL



#FOSTERINGFORWOLVES

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## **Section 1: Introduction**

This report provides an annual review of the structure, duties, and performance of the City of Wolverhampton Fostering Service. The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) requires that all Fostering Services provide an annual report to their Executive or Trustees. In the case of Local Authorities, the 'executive' is the Elected Members of the City of Wolverhampton.

The Fostering Service is located within the Children and Young People in Care Service of the City of Wolverhampton Council. The Fostering Service recruits, assesses, supports, and develops foster parents to provide a good standard of care and stability to children and young people aged 0-18 years. In addition, the service works with the Supported Accommodation Team to promote Staying Put arrangements for young people to remain living with their foster parents post 18. Currently we have 36 young people in Staying Put arrangements.

The Fostering Service operates within the following legislation:

- Children Act 2004
- Children & Young Persons Act 2008
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 2011
- The Care Planning, Home, and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended 2021)
- Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 imposes a duty on Local Authorities to find sufficient fostering provisions in its local area. The Fostering Service is committed to provide stability, care, and security to children in care and ensure that foster parents can meet the individual needs of children. The importance of children remaining within their birth family network, education and within their community remains paramount in securing stability for the child and there is a heavy focus on encouraging fostering applicants to "*foster for your local council*" for this reason.

The Fostering Service was last inspected by Ofsted as part of a single inspection of Children's Services in March 2022 and was rated 'Good'. Overall feedback was positive, as Ofsted found children were living with foster parents who met their needs and stability was a real strength.

The Fostering Service seeks to provide a comprehensive and excellent quality foster care to all children in the care of the City of Wolverhampton. Foster parents provide children in care a positive experience of family life within an environment that promotes their physical, emotional and health needs. Working in partnership with health, education and other allied professionals enables foster parents to provide a warm, safe, and caring family environment ensuring that the children's emotional health and

development is promoted. Foster parents ensure children in care have access to available opportunities to promote children's attendance and their academic achievements, thus maximising all opportunities for children to achieve their full potential.

## **Section 2: The Fostering Service Structure**

The Fostering Service has a full complement of 23 full time equivalent qualified social work posts, one unqualified post, one specific business support posts (covering SGO finances) and one Fostering Panel Advisor. This year the service appointed to a new Service Manager in January 2023, followed by two new Team Managers (one had been seconded into the role previously and the other appointed from the Assessment Team) along with two permanent Senior Social Workers (from within the service either seconded or increasing their hours). Three long term members of the team have taken retirement (Service Manager, Senior Social Worker, and Social Worker).

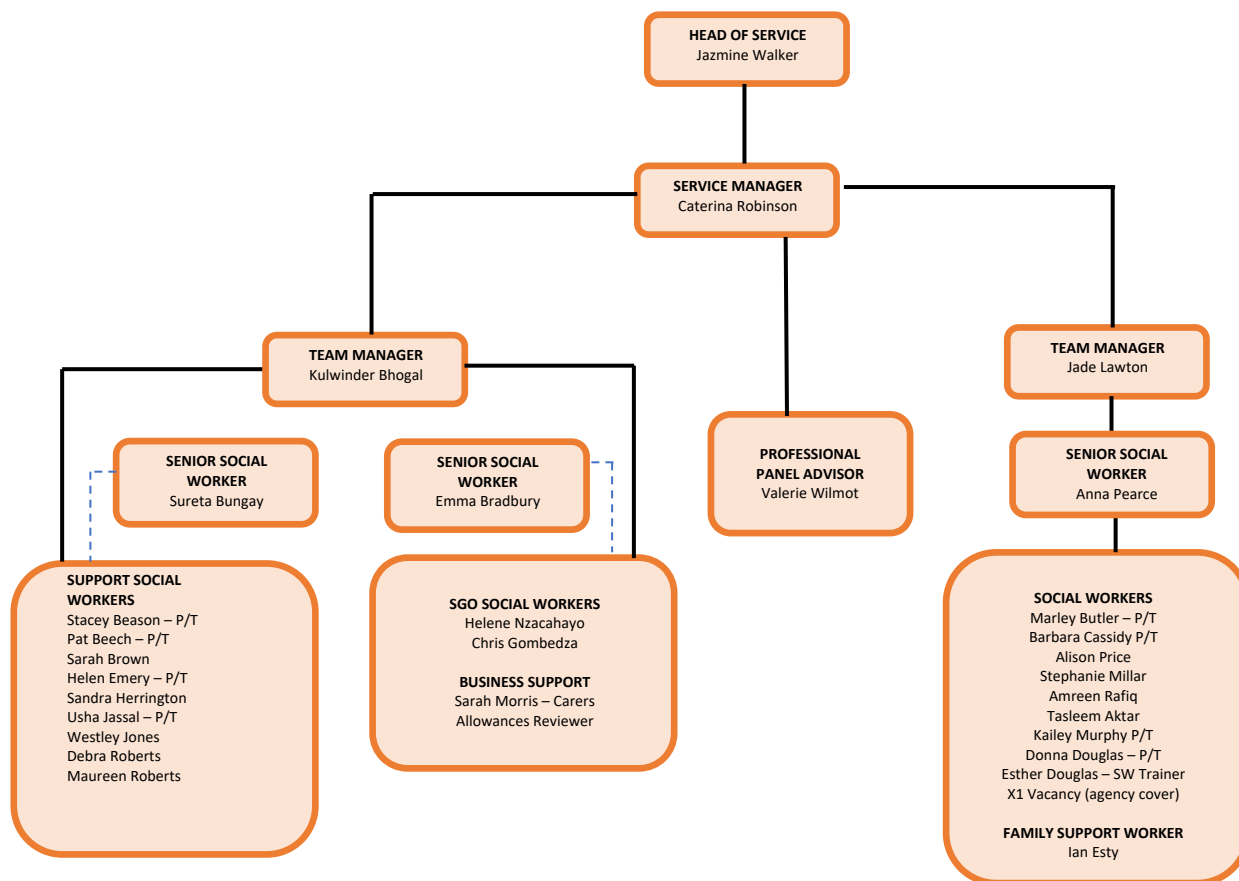
The Fostering Service is divided into two main teams:

**2.1 Recruitment and Assessment** – The team set out an extensive recruitment strategy each year with support from a fostering marketing executive. Staff attend recruitment events to offer expert advice to potential applicants. The team respond promptly to all fostering enquiries to ensure a smooth journey to fostering from the onset. The team have overall responsibility for completing all fostering assessments (i.e., initial assessments, viability assessments, Form Fs (mainstream fostering applicants), Form Cs (connected person assessments), private fostering and Stepparent adoption assessments and presenting these to panel and (where applicable) to Court. The team are also responsible for training, delivering *Skills to Foster* pre-approval and a comprehensive training programme for foster parents once approved. The team are responsible for supervising and support arrangements via regulation 24/25 where children are living with family members prior to approval at fostering panel.

**2.2 Fostering Support** – The team are responsible for the support and supervision of all foster parents post approval (mainstream, connected and private fostering). The team ensure all foster homes meet National Minimum Standards and are responsible for ensuring all compliance requirements are met as part of fostering regulations. The team work hard to support foster parents to meet the need of children in their care and support stability for positive outcomes for our young people. The Special Guardianship Order (SGO) function sits within the support team and all SGO reports for children and young people in care are completed, whilst all SGO support plans completed across all teams are reviewed before they are filed in court. The financial part of SGO support plans and all post SGO support is reviewed annually or when there is a significant change in a SGO parents' circumstances.

Each team is managed by a team manager and each team manager is supported by senior social workers who supervise up to four social workers and manage an area of work within the team. There is currently one full-time vacancy within the service and one agency social worker covering.

## 2.3 Structure Chart



## 2.4 Workforce Development

There is an extensive Workforce Development Plan in place which includes a wide relevant training and development opportunities for all staff throughout the year. All members of staff have completed three Therapeutic Parenting modules, and many are supported to achieve their Practice Education levels one and two. Additional Coram BAAF training was agreed as part of the workforce plan for all fostering social workers to attend to support assessment of adult relationships. Three members of staff have either attended or applied for Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) level one. In addition, managers and senior social workers are part of a pathways management programme and the service manager is currently completing Level 5 in Management and Leadership.

## Section 3 – Service Delivery

### 3.1 Language

The Fostering Service have pledged to remove the words “*placement*” and “*foster carer*” and have replaced with home / family and foster parent. All policies and documents have been amended as are all marketing materials to evidence the importance of foster families being a **home** and not a *placement* for children and young people in care. This is a shared pledge for the whole of Children’s Services service championed by the Fostering Service.

## 3.2 Foster Parent Recruitment

Within the team is a dedicated Marketing Executive for fostering who sits within the Council's Corporate Communications Team.

An annual marketing activity plan ensures that recruitment campaigns are planned and spread throughout the year. As with last year, fostering leads from prospective foster parents have mainly come via google search. The enquiries continue to be received and screened by our specialised customer service officer or the marketing executive. If the initial lead is recommending eligibility to foster, this becomes an enquiry. From this point, the Recruitment and Assessment Team will make contact within five working days to book an Initial Assessment. If the Initial Assessment proves positive, the Full Form 'F' Assessment is completed by an assessing social worker within four-six months. The service aim to complete all assessments in-house however the service also has the option to recruit an assessor via Yoo Recruit should the team capacity require this.

### Recruitment and Marketing highlights 2022/2023

The recruitment of mainstream foster parents over the past two years is facing an unprecedented challenge. This is a national issue and was recognised with a targeted marketing campaign at Christmas with an advert by John Lewis. This advert was used by all local authorities at Christmas to promote fostering in each local area.

A calendar of online information events via Microsoft Teams was promoted through a digital marketing campaign, advertising on google, social media and partner websites.

As part of our collaboration work through the West Midlands Regional Fostering Recruitment Forum, we joined together with a total of 34 local authorities to produce a high-quality film 'Childhood'. This was a real asset to our recruitment of new foster parents.



The Fostering for Wolverhampton online presence continues to be strong and the stand-alone website, which was introduced in 2018, has been invaluable during these difficult times with a high increase in activity in the last year. There were 12,698 visits to the websites in the financial year 2021-22 but between April 2022-March 2023 this increased massively to 37,804 which equates to an average of 104 people accessing the fostering website daily. Of these 37,804, the following were recorded -

- 26,180 came to the fostering site directly
- 4,953 came via a display advertisement / recruitment event
- 2,641 via a referral
- 2,540 via a paid search (Google ads)
- 760 via social media
- 625 via a standard Google search (not ads)
- 58 via an email
- 49 via any other method



This said, we had fewer web submissions this year than the previous year which indicates that although a much higher amount of people are directed to the website, this is not equating to the number of leads we receive. Work is being completed to make the website more accessible on mobile phones and content is continually reviewed with new videos, links to the recruitments events and testimonials uploaded frequently.

A new Customer Relations Management (CRM) system has been developed to track and manage all data from fostering leads so that we can monitor these closely and pull reports from source of leads and maintain a database to ensure all leads are responded to promptly.

A decision to refresh the fostering brand, language, imagery, and key messages was made towards the end of March 2022. A new look campaign was created for this year and developed in April when face to face recruitment resumed with the re-opening of the fostering pop-up shop in the Mander Centre. This has been used on three campaigns throughout the year.

Recruitment continues throughout the year but the three main periods of campaign activity throughout the year are during Foster Care Fortnight in May, an autumn campaign in September / October and a new year January campaign.

September's campaign focused on a Coffee and Conversation and the team were at various cafes located around the city (WV Active, Morrisons, Kteas Cakes) with the tag line, "*your fostering journey could start with a conversation*".

We all know that foster parents can portray a realistic and positive view of fostering, we use several foster parent champions who work with the Recruitment and Assessment Team to support the innovative marketing and recruitment campaigns. It is important that we have foster parents at events to offer their experience and advice to potential applicants.

Targeted Facebook advertising is ongoing throughout the year and is refreshed regularly for each campaign. The Fostering for Wolves Facebook page is also regularly updated with news, video case studies, related tv programmes and events and shares national news and information from the Fostering Network. Content is also shared on the council's corporate channels including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.



Despite significant recruitment and marketing activity, conversion to actual leads and subsequent approvals has decreased (see performance data 4.1). That said, we have increased our number of children placed with Wolverhampton foster parents, so where we have not been able to recruit, we have been able to maximise our current resource and support foster parents to either return to fostering from a period of dormancy or support additional children where they may have been approved for one child previously as part of our sufficiency plan.

Following the publication of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England in May 2022, The Fostering Network welcomes £25 million investment for the retention and recruitment of foster parents over the next two years. The Government has also decided to apply an above inflationary increase of 12.43% to child allowances for foster parents which Wolverhampton adopted. This has supported families who have been exacerbated with the cost-of-living crisis and it is hoped that this will help make a difference to children and young people in foster families. In addition, Wolverhampton provided all foster parent households a one-off payment of £650 to support with the cost of living over the Winter months.

### **3.3 Assessments**

Each Form F assessment is completed over an average timescale of six months inclusive of stage one and stage two which run concurrently. Stage one is the lateral checks and information gathering from referees. Stage two is the main assessment.

Assessments are part of the core work of the Recruitment and Assessment Team which enables the building of a comprehensive picture of the applicants. Evidence based, to now include therapeutic parenting tools and analytical assessments are completed on all prospective foster parents to help understand their motivation and ability to care for children who have experienced loss, separation, and trauma. Caring for such children requires foster parents with a degree of resilience and patience in understanding the needs and presenting behaviours of children who have experienced childhood trauma including neglect and abuse. In addition, to collating information the assessment explores the applicant's own experience of childhood, their parenting skills, understanding of safeguarding children and ability to create a warm and nurturing home for children.

A preparation training course at the point of assessment follows the "Skills to Foster" programme, devised by the Fostering Network. Wolverhampton continues to be part of the Black Country Consortium, along with Sandwell, Dudley, and Walsall. The authorities work in partnership offering two places to any of the other local authorities on every course they run. Each of the local authorities delivers the course a varying number of times, with Wolverhampton running the course twelve times yearly. This has doubled from previous years where we ran six as we now offer a connected and mainstream course alternate month.

To develop and enhance the training and development of foster parents there is a full-time training social worker within the Fostering Team. The role is to strengthen the importance of continual development and to ensure that foster parents' training is targeted to meet the needs of children placed. Completed training will be recorded on the foster carer's file and reviewed during supervision and their Personal Development

Plan (PDP). Foster parents are required to complete the evidenced based Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) workbook within the first year of approval (first eighteen months connected persons). This is monitored via a new foster parent register.

### **3.4 Fostering Support**

The Support Team has responsibility for providing supervision and support to foster parents and special guardians.

Following approval all foster parents have a supervising social worker who is responsible for supervising and supporting parents, ensuring that they have the necessary guidance, support, challenge, and direction to maintain a quality service, including safe care practices.

As of 31 March, there are 218 fostering households: 62 are connected persons and 156 are mainstream (this includes one short break foster parent), collectively they are providing a home to 274 children and young people in care. Of these, there are seven mainstream fostering households dormant (not currently able to care for a child) due to ill health or home improvements being undertaken. In accordance with the new Dormancy Policy a foster parent may remain dormant for a period of six months at which point their circumstances will be reviewed.

The service focus is home stability, reducing home moves and improving outcomes for children. During 2022-23 over 50 home stability meetings were attended by fostering staff where home moves were averted by providing additional support to parents to minimise further disruption. All our foster parents have direct access to local partners in Health and Education who also provide them with advice and support. Foster parents provide homes for children and young people who present challenges and have a range of complex needs. All foster parents are offered support to meet these challenges. In addition, the Fostering Service provides specific training to foster parents to help them understand and manage the child's presenting needs.

The support package offered to all Wolverhampton's foster parents includes:

- Fostering Handbook contains pertinent information useful to parents and is regularly updated to reflect any changes.
- Foster parent profiles have been completed and filed on both parents' records and on the foster parents' register which supports the Personalised Support Team (who are responsible for identifying homes for children).
- Foster parents' training needs are identified as part of their PDP and reviewed regularly during supervision. The PDP's assist in identifying gaps in foster parents skills and knowledge.
- Approximately 80 different courses are provided to Wolverhampton foster parents each year, these courses are provided by both internal and external providers and include on-line courses.
- Therapeutic Parenting Training courses are held two/three times yearly (one evening course) whilst the Nurturing Programme is held three times per year.

- A focus on Restorative Practice has been incorporated into all training events.
- Approved foster parents who live a distance from Wolverhampton are offered the opportunity to complete their training on-line, via a local training provider; AC Education.
- “Buddy Scheme” in place and all Level three parents provide buddy support to less experienced foster parents. 30 foster parents were trained as buddies with 65 to date paired up with newly approved or less experienced foster parents. All newly approved foster parents receive weekly visits for six weeks following approval at panel.
- Fostering Families United (an enhanced peer support model) is currently being revised to offer support across the entire fostering cohort.
- The Foster Parents Portal allows all parents access to pertinent information regarding training and events and is interactive, supporting the recording of fostering logs and regular updates.
- The Foster Parent Forum meets monthly, all foster parents are invited to attend with an added opportunity to celebrate diversity or key themes that month (*picture below of St Patricks Day*). Fostering service manager attends each forum. These are now managed by the support team supervising social workers and attendance increases month on month with guest speakers and an opportunity to engage and hear the voice of foster parents.



- Special events for foster parents and their families include an Easter Egg Hunt, Summer Picnic in the Park (*below*) and a Christmas party.



Sadly, the Christmas party was cancelled this year due to weather conditions, so the Easter party was a much bigger event (Easter Eggstravaganza).

- Foster Parents' Annual Conference - July 2022



This is always a well-attended event with keynote speaker Sarah Dhillon, Co-author of the A-Z of Therapeutic Parenting (*pictured far left*).

- New E-bulletin was launched in March 2023 and now a monthly feature to share news
- The “Love of Fostering Awards” an annual event where parents were recognised for their commitment to fostering throughout the year (*below, December 2022*).



- Foster Talk offer support to all of Wolverhampton's approved foster parents including legal and expenses advice, insurance cover, a 24-hour legal advice helpline, a 24-hour counselling support helpline, an education support line, a Social Work support helpline and access to discounts and exclusive offers.
- Festivals/Cultural events have been promoted on the parents' portal to ensure all faiths recognised, including Ramadan and Holi.
- A Foster Parents Levels Panel has been set up quarterly where foster parents present their application alongside their supervising social worker to be considered for escalation from Level two to Level three or Level three to Level four. There is appropriate challenge at panels to ensure parents have completed training and are willing to engage in recruitment events and act as buddy's to less experienced parents before a decision can be agreed.

### **3.5 Long-term Fostering and Matching**

The Wolverhampton Fostering Service seeks to achieve permanency for children and young people with a Care Plan of Long-Term Fostering. We encourage foster parents to make a commitment to care for a child or young person until they reach the age of independence. These parents often go on to provide 'Staying Put' arrangements for young people to remain in the household post 18 years.

This year the Fostering Service has secured five long-term homes for children via the Linking and Matching process. This is two more than last year. There is focus this year to progress all those awaiting long-term matching. This year we have further revised the linking and matching policy and one key improvement is that we will celebrate children who are linked and matched to their foster parents. In the new policy, Head of Service will send a formal congratulatory letter and card to celebrate the completion of the process for all those who have been linked and matched, confirming their status. This is to reflect that this is a commemorative event for the child and foster parents and to celebrate the commitment being made to the child by the foster parent/s.

The child's social worker together with the fostering supervising social worker are responsible for progressing permanency for the child within the first year of home where their plan is that of permanency outside the family. There is now a linking and matching tracker with service manager oversight to ensure all plans are progressed without drift or delay.

## **Matching Panel**

Last year, Wolverhampton launched an Internal Matching Panel which provides an opportunity to bring together foster parents who are vacant or returning from dormancy along with children's social workers who are looking for a match for a child.

The Internal Panel consists of a Chair, children's social workers who present the information about a child in a profile (often completed by the child with the social worker), supervising social worker, and foster parents. The child's *All About Me* profile and the foster parent's profile is shared in the meeting, foster parents will then ask any questions in order to make an informed decision.

## **Preference Tool**

To support our foster parents to consider caring for our most vulnerable young people the service created a Preference Tool (launched in July 2022) which explores the foster parents' skills, knowledge, experience and if there are any barriers to them caring for our most vulnerable children and young people.

The Preference Tool explores the following areas:

- What past/presenting behaviours foster parents have experienced with a child/young person
- What the child/young persons expressed need may be
- How worried the foster parent may be managing these needs – expressed using a scale 1-10
- How would the foster parent feel parenting a child with these presenting behaviours?
- Finally, to consider what the support needs are, such as training; Therapeutic training, CSE, county lines etc

The scale helps to identify what support our foster parent requires to meet the needs of our children and young people.

We are currently using this tool with:

- Newly approved within the last year without a child in their care
- Experienced foster parents who have been dormant for a period
- Those whose preference is for a younger child ie. 0-10 years
- Experienced foster parents who struggle to manage teenage complex behaviours
- Foster parents who may be considering resigning from fostering to explore other options of fostering

Between July 2022 and March 2023, we have applied this with 13 foster parents and the outcome has been positive. We have had five foster parents return to fostering, five foster parents were identified who required further training and development and three who are considering offering short breaks. This will further support stability and longer-term matching for our children and young people.

### **3.6 Connected Persons**

Local authorities have a responsibility to consider the child's birth family, or friends (Connected Persons) ability to care for a child throughout their care experience. They are assessed by the service as to their suitability to provide appropriate care in accordance with the Fostering Regulations 2011. All Connected Person's assessments are presented to the Fostering Panel who recommend their approval which is subsequently ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.

In 2022/2023 there were 14 connected persons approved. This amounted to a total of 21 children remaining living within their birth family. The recruitment and Assessment Team have undertaken 129 joint viability assessments this year in total, an increase in 35 from last year. We currently have 11 connected persons in assessment.

### **3.7 Special Guardianship**

The responsibility for the assessment and support of Special Guardianships is that of the Fostering Service. This encourages a more joined up approach between teams with the completion of SGO assessments being a joint activity between a social worker in the Fostering Service and a social worker for the child. If the Care Plan for the child recommends long-term fostering with either mainstream or connected persons as a permanency option, then a Special Guardianship Order should be encouraged where this is deemed to be in the child's best interests, essentially removing the child from the care system, and transferring parental responsibility to the care provider.

There are currently 293 children subject to SGO Orders supported Wolverhampton. Of the 293, 78 live outside of Wolverhampton and will be transferred after three years as per the SGO out of area protocol, where Wolverhampton remain financially responsible but the local area in which they live are responsible for the ongoing support. The SGO team also offer an annual review to the established SGO families and respond to any SGO related queries.



All finances relating to SGO plans are reviewed annually to ensure appropriate funding is in place. A designated business support worker supports the SGO financial review function.

The SGO supports social worker delivers an SGO training module specifically for family connected persons which runs directly after each preparation course. This has been planned to inform the prospective foster parents of their options at the earliest opportunity.

The Senior social worker in the SGO team offers bespoke face to face consultations with prospective SGO parents and birth parents, offering them the opportunity to ask any questions and provide clarity regarding post SGO support and services. This is alongside any offer of independent legal advice to ensure SGO is the right plan for the young person and their family. There is a step-by-step flow chart to assist social workers in completing SGO reports and plans and the opportunity to consult with the SGO team throughout.

The supervising social worker and the child's social worker jointly complete the SGO Report, in partnership with the foster family and young person to ensure a seamless transition from foster care to SGO with the young person's best interest at heart.

A tracking tool has been devised and there is monthly oversight of progress to ensure permanency is achieved in a timely manner.

A total of two SGOs were granted in 2022/23 from children in care. This is low in comparison to previous years, however there are currently 22 in process i.e. awaiting a court date with a further 25 being tracked to begin the SGO process. The target to increase positive permanency for our young people and their families year on year via SGO Orders is well on course and there is additional Head of Service oversight via a monthly permanency panel.

### **Post SGO support**

The SGO support plan is reviewed annually and post-SGO support remains high on the agenda. Special Guardians can access all training that is currently offered to our internal foster parents.

The SGO team promote virtual coffee mornings for all SGO parents and invite guest speakers to talk and discuss issues that are relevant to our SGO families. These are now face to face and attendance increases each month. This year for the first time, the team offered a special event for Kinship week which supported kinship / SGO carers to attend a scrapbooking event in the City Suite.

The SGO team have created an online portal which provides updates, information, guidance and advice and links to community-based resources and additional support for our SGO families. We are in the process of compiling a newsletter to share with our SGO families to include the information available on the portal for those who prefer email updates as opposed to online portal access.

The SGO team complete Needs assessments in partnership with our SGO families to make Adoption Support Fund applications for those eligible. We work alongside

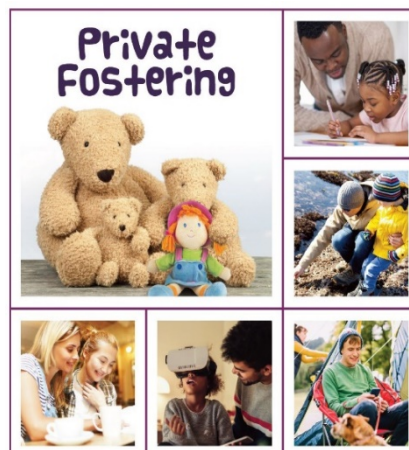
therapists and families to ensure support is reviewed and any ongoing recommendations are progressed.

The SGO team are part of a regional group where we meet with other Local Authorities and Trusts to share best practice ideas and work together to continually improve and promote our support and offers to our SGO families.

### 3.8 Private Fostering

This is regulated under the Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The service is responsible for raising awareness with the public, professionals, parents, and children. The assessments, training, and support of Private Foster Parents is the responsibility of the Fostering Service.

There are three Private Fostering Champions within the Fostering Service who regularly attend team meetings across Children's services, and Private Fostering Champions within the teams of our partner agencies and the voluntary sector, with workshops held to further increase, awareness and understanding. The Fostering Service supports Private Fostering Week in July each year and refreshes all material/leaflets whilst Private Fostering Champions within the service deliver workshops and attend meetings to increase awareness and understanding. Private Fostering Forums are held quarterly where information is shared, and updates noted with regards to referrals and enquiries. The Annual Private Fostering Report is completed each year and is presented to The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together). An action plan is updated quarterly to ensure this area of practice continues to be reviewed.



This year we have assessed 17 arrangements but only four were approved and progressed as private fostering arrangements. As of March 2023, we currently have four Private Fostering arrangements in assessment.

### 3.9 Short Breaks

This year we were successful in approving a short break foster parent providing shared care homes for disabled children. The short break parents are usually professionals who work full time but can offer short breaks at weekends. They offer regular breaks to parents and parents who have children who have disabilities so that they can have a break from their caring responsibilities. We continue attempts to enhance this area within the recruitment and communication strategy for 2022/23 and will incorporate expertise from within the Disabled Children and Young People's Service.



## Section 4. Quality Assurance and Improvement

### 4.1 Performance data

The below table highlights the number of leads (initial contacts from applicants) this year compared to previous years. The decrease in numbers is similar for neighbouring local authorities and in line with the national picture.

Year	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Number of Leads	412	232	117
Initial Assessments	55	39	15
Approved	14	7	7

As the number of leads is lower, we would expect the conversion rate to approval to be lower, but the number of approvals was the same as last year despite a lower number of leads, indicating that the applications were stronger than 2021/22 where seven were approved from the 39 IAs. Although seven were approved this year, ten went through to assessment which is even higher considering 15 IAs were completed. Of the ten who progressed to assessment in 2022/23, two withdrew in assessment stage (due to change in circumstances in their families) and one was no longer suitable hence the seven mainstream carers approved at the end of the year (see below). Often what is found is that the lower the number, the greater the applicant's readiness to become a foster parent and clear motivation as opposed to many leads that do not progress to assessment.

The 2022/23 target was to achieve a net gain of five mainstream and connected foster parents. Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, with 21 approvals (seven mainstream and 14 connected) and 21 de-registrations we achieved an overall of zero foster parents. The below table shows this in comparison to previous years and although not a net gain, this is an improvement on last year and going in the right direction.

Period	Approvals at panel	Number of de-registrations	Net gain
April 2018 -March 2019	23	0	23
April 2019- March 2020	25	3	22
April 2020-March 2021	31	8	23
April 2021-March 2022	22	31	-9
April 2022 – March 2023	21	21	0

The service completed a review of the de-registrations in March 2023 and were satisfied of the reasons for de-registration, mainly due to delayed retirement during COVID and dormancy foster parents.

The following table captures the timeliness of mainstream (Form F) assessments to determine if we are meeting our target of 183 days from initial assessment to approval stage. This is to ensure there is no drift and delay.

Year	Number of Mainstream Approvals	Average Days for Approval	% of Cases Approved in Timeframe
2015/16	21	278	56% (8-month target)
2016/17	22	217	72% (8-month target)
2017/18	20	227	50% (8-month target)
2018/19	24	170	67% (6-month target)
2019/20	25	147	84% (6-month target)
2020/21	14	147	86% (6-month target)
2021/22	7	236	57% (6-month target)
2022/23	7	190	57% (6-month target)

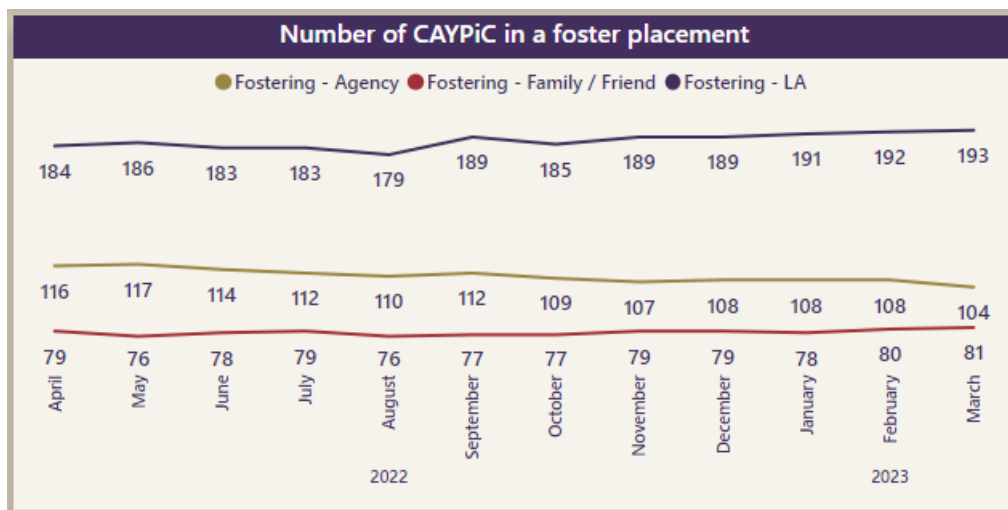
In the year there were seven mainstream foster parents approved at an average timescale of 190 days. This is improved performance on 2021/22 with four approved within timescale. The shortest time taken to be approved was 131 days (50 days shorter than target). The longest time taken was 268 days and this was linked to a medical issue where the delay was between medical agencies which was escalated to service manager.

The need to increase the proportion of foster homes with internal foster parents remains. The table below shows the number of children in each setting at end the end of March 2023. This indicates that although we are not approving as many foster parents, the numbers of children living with our foster parents has increased and decreased for agency foster care. There have been significant improvements over the last six years as set out in the table below and the gap continues to widen between internal and agency foster homes. The dip in connected care since 20/21 was due to 23 securing SGO in this year therefore a positive outcome evidenced by a decrease in numbers.

Type of Home	Number of Children / young people									This year
	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	
Connected / Family and Friends	45	50	62	71	78	95	84	102	81	81

<b>Internal Foster homes</b>	158	171	186	193	201	185	195	201	184	<b>193</b>
<b>Independent Fostering Agencies</b>	382	343	268	247	226	198	154	129	119	<b>104</b>

Below shows the figures month by month for 2022/23 so we can see the gradual increase in internal and decrease in external.



At the end of 2022/23, there were 274 children and young people placed internally, with either mainstream or connected parents. This is an increase of nine children from last year. The number of children in IFA homes has reduced by 15 to 104, further evidencing that the gap between internal and external agency homes continues to widen.

## Financial Implications

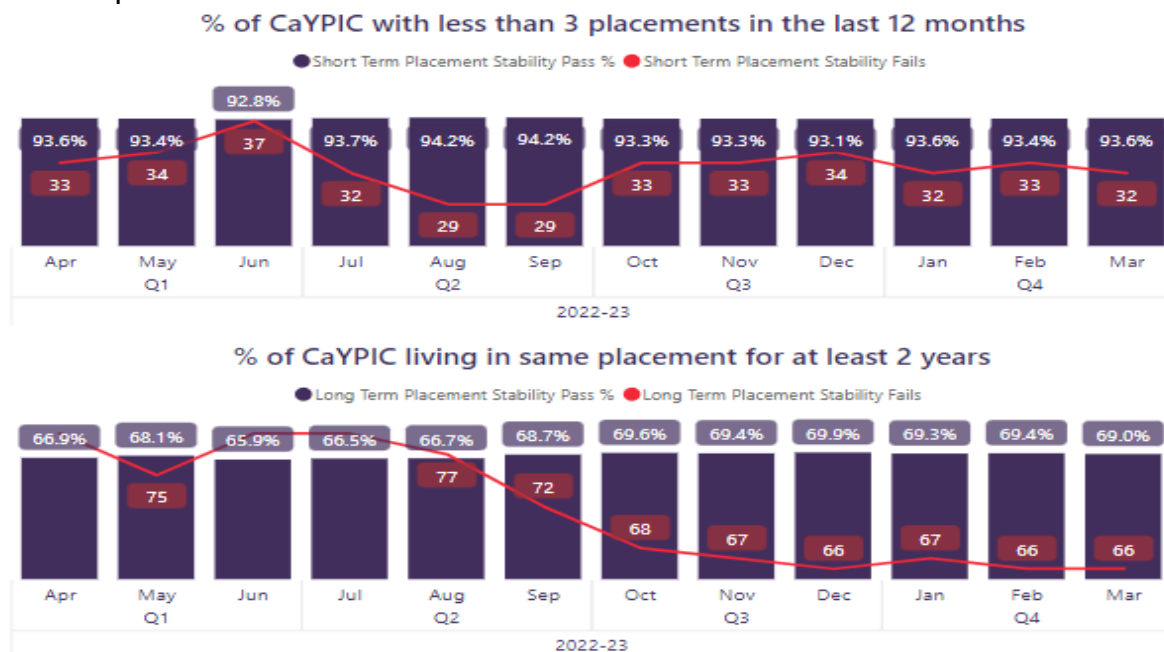
Taking a snapshot of homes at the 31<sup>st</sup>, March from each year, there has been a year-on-year reduction in the cost for both agency fostering and slight decrease in internal fostering. This could also be linked to the numbers of children in care reducing due to the ongoing work to ensure children secure permanency or return to their birth parents.

Year	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
<b>Independent Fostering Agencies</b>	£8.9m	£7.3m	£6.4m	£6.1m	£5.3m
<b>In-house fostering fees</b>	£4.8m	£4.9m	£5.2m	£4.7m	£4.7m

It should be noted that this saving is calculated purely on home costs and does not incorporate any additional unit cost attributed to placing children internally.

## Stability

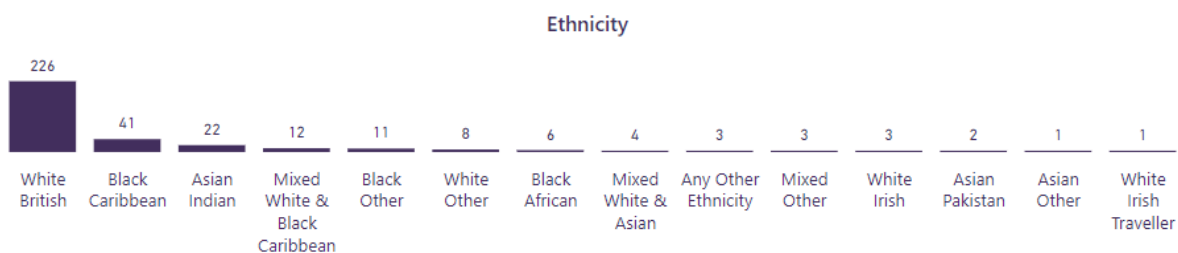
The below evidence that short term stability has remained consistent over the year, however long-term stability has increased by 2.1% compared to the start of the year which is positive.



Stability meetings are crucial to ensure children are not having to move unnecessarily and further support and regular care planning meetings are in place to reduce the number of moves for each young person. This has remained fairly consistent.

## Demographics

Below is a breakdown of ethnicity of foster parents as of March 2022. While we have an over representation of children in care from a Black Caribbean and Black Other ethnicity compared to general population of children in the city, most of our foster parents are White British. This is a consideration when supporting fostering parents with meeting the needs of children who are a different ethnicity and/or religion to themselves and there is training and support available in this regard



## 4.2 Foster Parent Engagement

Foster parents continue to support service delivery and have a voice in how this is achieved. Foster parents' engagement is a key strength as we have foster parents who attend workstream meetings such as developing the Portal, Foster Home Review process and the Family Values Steering Group. We have several foster parents who have expressed an interest in reviewing and developing policies and who wish to be a part of a Foster Parent Association to support with the delivery of events. Foster parents are encouraged to support with delivery of training, recruitment, and events. Foster parents offer peer to peer support.

Foster parents are engaged with service and attend face to face foster parent forms once a month. Engagement rate increased with the service annual survey this year and from this we have been able to develop the portal, the way in which we communicate with foster parents via our new monthly bulletin.

## 4.3 Wolverhampton Foster Panel

### Overview

Wolverhampton's foster panel has a key role to play in the provision and monitoring of foster care for the children and young people of Wolverhampton City.

In February 2023, the Government released a Consultation Document –Stable Families Built on Love. This guide contained proposals for Kinship carers, and wider family's network. These proposals will change the focus of fostering and encourage the assessment and approval of more connected persons. It is recognised that this will challenge the existing emphasis on mainstream applicants and require a shift in thinking and operation for foster panels nationally.

The emphasis will be on a flexible and inclusive approach to connected carer applications and Coram BAAF have gone as far as suggesting that foster panels review their membership and ensure that more proactive arrangements are put into place to challenge existing views and unconscious bias and to ensure that panels are more reflective of the diverse communities they serve and have a greater understanding of the changing needs of society.

In line with these national procedural developments and 'The Children, Young People and Families Plan' for Wolverhampton the City's Foster Panel is striving to develop so that it can meet the demands of a changing community. The priorities for the foster panel are:

- 1) To ensure that children and young people are listened to and involved in all decisions about their lives and that this is evidenced during assessments and panel business
- 2) Foster families receive the support, development, and respect they need to care for children and young people
- 3) That there are enough good quality foster families for children and young people at the time that they are needed
- 4) That foster families are commissioned according to the needs of children
- 5) That children and young people experience stability and homes that support them to achieve the same outcomes as every other child or young person.

Wolverhampton's Foster Panel strives to ensure that the right foster parents are recruited and can respond to the needs of the local community. Further that individuals wanting to foster have the right skills, resilience, and abilities to understand children and to drive forward their needs, views and wishes.

As a team the foster panel members are committed to ensuring that the voice of children and young people remain central to the decision-making process. Foster Panel members have continued to champion the views of children and in the past 12 months, panel membership has been supported by the recruitment of another care experienced young person.

The virtual panel meeting process hosted by Microsoft Teams is a fully embedded vehicle for meetings and the foster panel teams site hosts the business of panel as well as managing and tracking the Agency Decision Makers – ADM - long-term fostering and linking and matching arrangements. In addition, the site is a communication and development hub for panel members. The 'chat' facility ensures a regular line of communication and as every member is issued with their own equipment to ensure that GDPR is adhered to. Security of highly sensitive information is therefore not compromised. Panel business and functioning has continued to be driven by business support.

### **Panel Central List / Recruitment**

The Panel Central list has continued to evolve. The Independent Chair has continued to be supported by a Vice Chair, both of which support the Panel Advisor in the recruitment, development, and appraisals of the wider panel.

### **Panel Meetings**

Panel meetings have continued to be held on a fortnightly basis with the addition of several extra panels being convened over the last twelve months. Panel member commitment to attending meetings remains high and the central list continues to develop and is vibrant and cohesive as a group.

### **Panel Training and development**

Panel training and development is inclusive and panel members have accessed the same training development opportunities following their induction as their Council and Children's Services colleagues. Induction continues to be mandatory and all new panel members must complete Restorative Practice and Unconscious Bias training as well as standard 'new starter' training.

Training outstanding at the time of writing is update in respect of the consultation document 'Stable Homes Built on love'. Refresher – Restorative Practice and Panel updates from Coram BAAF and practice developments across the City's Fostering Service



## **Panel Achievements**

- Panel member retention with several expressions of interest in joining panel
- All annual appraisals – completed within the 12-month period
- Feedback from panel members incorporated into training development
- Development of Regional Black Country Foster Panel network
- Profile of Foster Panel developing across other Black Country Foster Panels
- Foster Panel Coffee and Chat
- Greater communication between senior managers, operational staff and Foster Panel
- Established Quality Assurance and feedback process
- Established practice development forum – bimonthly meeting between independent chair, vice chair, Service Manager and operational managers
- Opportunity to influence operational police and procedures
- Continued development of business processes and tracking arrangements
- Electronic feedback for individuals attending panels
- Greater opportunities to incorporate outcomes from quality assurance

## **Panel Improvements**

- Lack of awareness about the role and function of Foster Panel across the wider Children and Young People's teams.
- Inconsistencies in the quality of work presented to Foster Panel by individual social workers.
- Inconsistencies in the understanding of submission requirements to Panel
- On occasions foster families presented at short notice

All areas of practice deficits are being addressed through Fostering Standards of Practice meetings.

## **Moving forward Panel Priorities for 2023 - 2024**

- Review and increase the diversity of the foster panel membership and in line with this increase its reach to the Young People in Care Services. To actively promote and learn from feedback following Panel attendance and to incorporate the views of care experienced children and young people during panel meetings Further develop and build working together and partnership arrangements with the wider operational service. Further embed a restorative approach and to explore associated training for panel members, and provide opportunities to embrace diversity and the impact of difference
- Continue to work in accordance with 'The Children, Young People and Families Plan' for Wolverhampton.
- Continue to work in accordance with key legislative frameworks and expectations and regulatory requirements
- Maintain working relationships locally and across the Region
- Manage feedback and use outcomes to inform Panel and operational practice moving forward

### **3.7 Complaints / Compliments**

There were two formal complaints received about the Fostering Service during the year 2022-2023. This was slightly lower than the previous year. There was also one informal complaint received.

The complaints received were around decisions to proceed with an extension of the foster parent's home and a conduct of a foster parent. Both complaints have been addressed accordingly at stage two of the complaint procedure. The Fostering Service, upon investigating and reviewing complaints received, continue to ensure that learning is disseminated to staff and colleagues in order that adjustments and improvements can be achieved.

At the same time, there have also been several compliments in relation to the Fostering Service recognising social workers commitment in their job role to families and young people. We receive on average one compliment a month from foster parents and one a week from managers about the support they receive or social work practice. Comments are also collated during fostering panel feedback. These are shared in a monthly newsletter and with senior managers.

#### **Recent examples**

Social worker has received a great compliment regarding the support that he has provided to prospective connected foster parents through their assessment process. They commented following Fostering Panel:

*"I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders! Thank you for all your help & support too, you've been fab :) "*

A second example for support afforded to an approved foster parent

*"Thank you for the intense support you have offered A after she had been out of fostering for a long while, she had not had a child in her care for I believe over 5 years, she was anxious, apprehensive and wondering whether she should give up! together you have turned this around and it's excellent!!"*

#### **Independent Review Mechanism**

This is where a foster parent (including prospective) can appeal if they are unhappy with the outcome of panel. There was one IRM during 2022-23. The IRM concluded in agreement with the assessing social worker, fostering panel and ADM recommendation.

### **Section 5: Summary**

Like the National picture, 2022/23 continued to be characterised by an added pressure of the cost-of-living crisis. While we can evidence marketing and recruitment activity throughout the year, along with positive fostering engagement and events, we

continue to look to ways to improve both practice and service delivery where external challenges remain.

The Fostering Service continues to benefit from experienced managers and the compliment of social workers remains stable. Both teams have made significant progress during the year with many developments made across the service as described and outlined above and the service continues to improve year on year with a key focus on increasing sufficiency in 2023-2024.

## 5.1 Key Achievements

- An all-new accurate foster parent register was created
- Inclusive language promoted across the whole service
- Embedded therapeutic parenting in supervision, fostering logs and assessments
- Internal matching events and matching policy in place
- Home stability has been steadily maintained and the year ended with more children in internal foster than within external foster care with the gap continuing to widen.
- A permanent Marketing Executive in post with all new Marketing Strategy in place
- Assessment timeliness has improved
- New CRM system in place to track and report on all leads and enquiries
- Full training review was started with a training portal in process
- Short break foster parent recruited specifically for a child with disabilities
- Preference Tool in place to maximise sufficiency within current foster parents
- Linking and Matching is now formally celebrated and recorded on the child's file
- Dormancy Policy in place with those dormant being reviewed and encouraged to return to fostering
- An E-bulletin is sent out monthly with key news and foster parent shout outs

## 5.2 Progress on Key Objectives set for 2022/23

Objective	Outcome achieved / in progress / not achieved
Achieve a net gain of five foster parents in 2022-23.	This was not achieved due to the large number of de-registrations this year. We were over ambitions with this target as we were required to approve 26 foster parents in order to meet this target.
Parents for Disabled Children and Young People continue to be a focus or recruitment and a support offer is developed and agreed.	We have approved our first short breaks foster parent. This remains a targeted campaign for recruitment to support disabled children and young people
A return to in-person recruitment events blended with virtual opportunities to enable easier access for some.	This has been achieved with a number of face to face and online events throughout last year

<p>Relaunch Foster Families United – September 2022 and ensure the model is encompassed across the cohort of mainstream and connected parents</p>	<p>This is in process with a review of how the model is working since the launch in September 2022</p>
<p>To ensure that the Linking and Matching policy is fully understood, and that practice reflects an increase in arrangements. Celebrate the linking and matching of children and young people with foster parents</p>	<p>Linking and Matching is tracked monthly by the fostering service with the policy launched with all social workers. A celebration is now part of the process.</p>
<p>A fully functioning foster parents register is in place that reflects the approval status of all mainstream foster parents.</p>	<p>This has successfully been achieved and continues to develop in what can be added and reported upon as it evolves but we now have an accurate register with compliance easily accessed</p>
<p>The list of dormant parents reflects a realistic return to fostering or supports parents to make a decision to resign if there is ambivalence regards returning to fostering.</p>	<p>This has been a big area of work which has resulted in a reduction in those dormant for longer than 6 months.</p>
<p>The Ofsted Inspection March/April 2022 highlighted three areas of service improvement – Supervision of fostering staff, foster home reviews and quality of fostering assessments.</p>	<p>All three areas have since improved and have been reported with evidence of the progress and plans in place to sustain this to senior leadership team</p> <p>An assessment workstream and action plan ensured improve assessment quality, including additional Coram BAAF training, and a new standardised assessment to include therapeutic parenting.</p> <p>FHR policy has been updated, as has the FHR report and process. As of March 2023, timeliness of review is 96.7%.</p>

	Regular audits are completed (October 2022 and March 2023) giving assurance that all staff are receiving monthly supervision.
Ongoing support to foster parents to ensure that all consider a 0-18 age range of children and young people and that parents feel confident they can manage the needs of an 0-18 cohort.	Preference tool in place and working well.

### 5.3 Key Objectives 2023/24

- Key focus on recruiting and supporting foster parents for older age groups
- Develop services for SGO / Kinship care
- Achieve a net gain of five mainstream foster parents and continue to achieve the 183 days target
- All those awaiting link and matching will be progressed
- Review and finalise Foster Families United model
- Relaunch Same Day Family Finding policy and ensure in use and promoted
- Review Fostering Fees and Allowances in line with cost-of-living crisis
- Produce a whole new training offer to foster parents from September 2023 where they can book via the portal, receive reminders, surveys, and certificates
- Develop Short Breaks policy and recruit more short breaks foster parents



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# Corporate Parenting Board

Areas of Focus

13/07/2023

Period: To 31/05/2023

CITY OF  
WOLVERHAMPTON  
COUNCIL

Data &  
Analytics

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wolverhampton.gov.uk

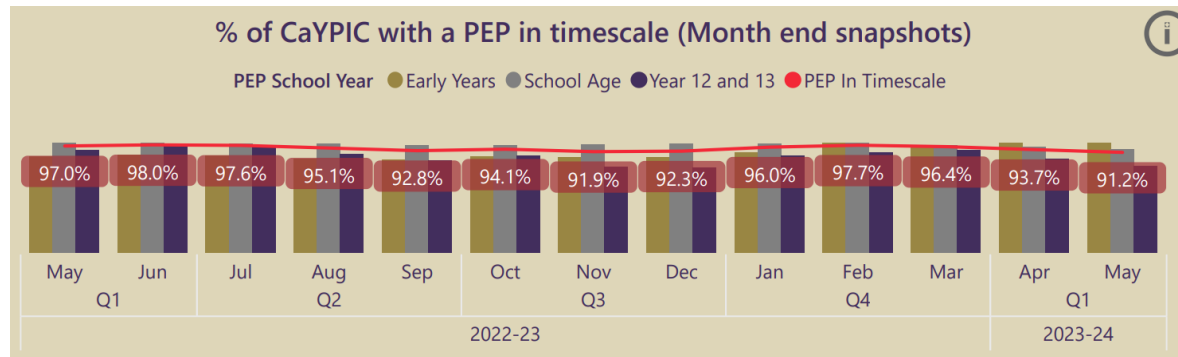
Agenda Item No 8



Areas of focus

**% of CaYPIC with a PEP in timescale** - The overall percentage of CaYPIC with a PEP in timescale for May has remained consistent at 91.2% (91.4% last month). At the end of May, 'Early-Years' had 100% PEP in timescale. The percentage for 'School Age' children has remained consistent at 93.8% (94% last month) and 'Years 12 & 13' has seen a decrease from 88.0% to 78.8%. There were 33 PEP fails at the end of May which is 3 less than the 36 reported at the end of April; 17 are school age children and 16 are in Years 12 and 13.

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**Service Comments** - Performance in this area is a strength and has remained consistently high for some time. The Virtual School will continue to monitor years 12 and 13 PEPs to ensure these improve in line with performance for other year groups.

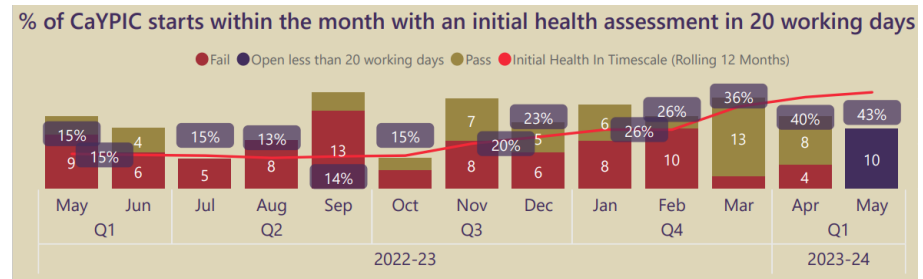


Areas of focus

**% of CaYPIC starts within the month with an initial health assessment in 20 working days -**

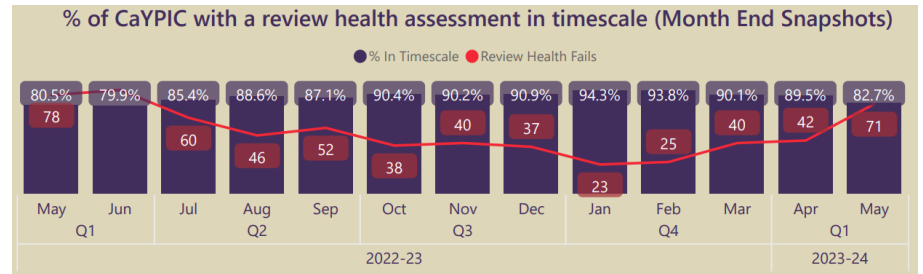
The percentage of CaYPIC with an Initial Health assessment within 20 working days of the young person entering care has continued to increase to 43% at the end of May, 28% higher than the comparative period in 2022.

**Service Comments** – Whilst it is positive that performance is increasing in this area it is important for us to continue to monitor and strengthen arrangements for IHAs to ensure performance further improves.



**% CaYPIC with a review health assessment in timescale -**

The overall percentage of CaYPIC with a review health assessment in timescale has decreased to 82.7% with 71 fails from 89.5% with 42 fails in April. The overall percentage remains below the latest published percentages for our statistical neighbours (90.2%), the West Midlands (86%) and England (89%).

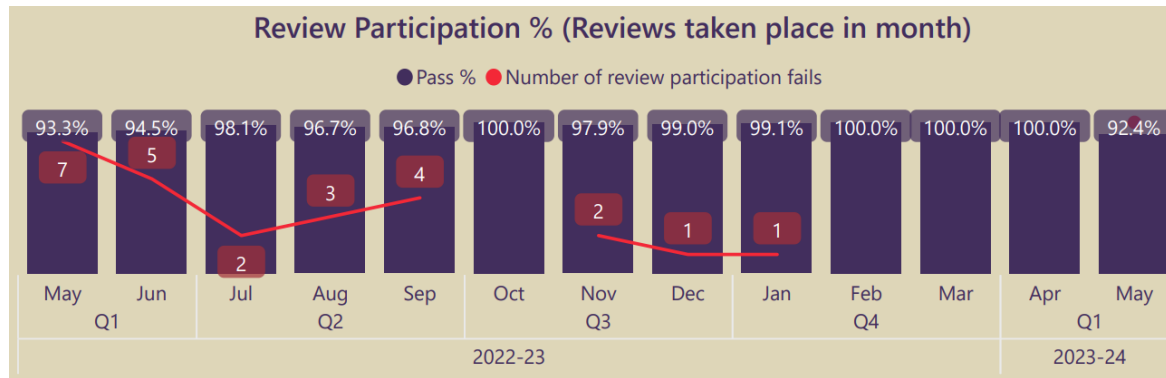


**Service Comments** – Monthly meetings with health colleagues continue to take place and will unpick where the process is failing to ensure that RHAs are taking place within timescales. Performance had improved to above 90% from Dec 2022 – March 2023 and we will work towards achieving this again. It is anticipated May’s performance will improve with retrospective recording

Areas of focus

**Review Participation % (Reviews taken place in month)** – 92.4% of reviews that took place in May had participation recorded. There were initially eight review participation fails for May when the performance reports were produced, however retrospective recording on Eclipse after the end of the month has reduced the number of fails to three, improving the percentage for May, showing 97.4% (as of 26/06/23).

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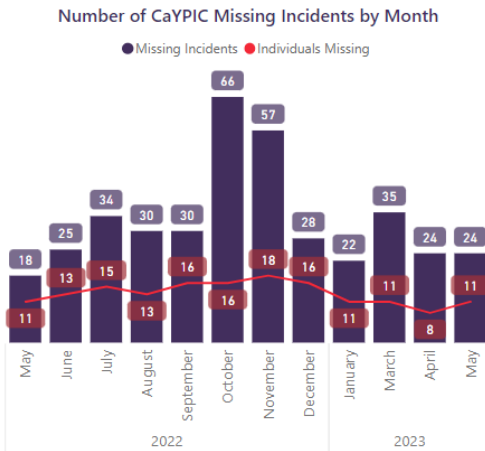


**Service Comments** - Performance in this area is a strength and has remained consistently high for some time. The Participation from February to April 2023 was 100%. It is anticipated May's performance will improve with retrospective recording

Areas of focus

**Number of CaYPIC Missing Incidents by Month** – Numbers of missing incidents for CaYPIC have remained stable over the past five months following the increase recorded in October and November 2022. There were 24 missing incidents for 11 CaYPIC in May with two thirds of these incidents due to child missing from their foster home. In May, there were no CaYPIC missing for more than 7 days, the third time this has occurred within the last 4 months. There were 4 missing incidents between 2-6 days, the lowest number recorded since July last year and the majority of missing incidents in the month (58%) where the young person was missing for one day.

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Year	2021		2022		2023													
Missing From	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May
Foster care	25	12	8	9	8	5	12	18	13	20	49	36	14	12	20	19	12	16
Other	2	1	2	1	1	3		2	1	1	4	2	2	2	1		2	1
Parental/family home						1	1	2	3		3	8	4	1	1			
Residential Home	31	15	11	17	21	7	5	12	13	7	7	9	7	6	6	15	10	7
School		4			1	2	7			2	3	2	1	1	1	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>

Year	2021		2022		2023													
Time Missing	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May
<24 Hours	11	10	6	10	9	6	8	17	4	11	27	17	6	7	12	7	5	6
1 Day	42	19	14	13	18	6	8	12	13	11	27	29	14	7	10	19	12	14
2-6 Days	5	3	1	3	4	4	5	4	9	7	10	10	6	7	7	7	7	4
7+ Days				1		2	4	1	4	1	2	1	2	1		2		
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>

**Service Comments** - It is positive the numbers of missing incidents for CaYPIC have remained stable over the past five months with a number of specific indicators improving evidencing overall missing has reduced. We continue to work together across services to support young people’s stability in their relationships, homes and education to further reduce missing episodes.

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