

**CITY OF  
WOLVERHAMPTON  
C O U N C I L**

**ANNUAL ADOPTION AGENCY REPORT  
APRIL 2018 – March 2019**

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## **1. Introduction**

This report provides the Corporate Parenting Board with the Adoption Agency's Annual Report for April 2018 to March 2019. The statutory regulations require that elected members should be informed of the Adoption Agency's activity on a regular basis. This annual report covers adoption performance during this period and provides an update on the work of the team.

This report also includes information about the progress made towards Wolverhampton forming a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

The report was presented to the Children in Care Council on 26 June 2019.

Up until March 2019 when the service transferred to the RAA, the Adoption Service was located within the People Directorate of the City of Wolverhampton Council. The Adoption Service was responsible for:

- The recruitment of a sufficient pool of adopters from a range of backgrounds, and the assessment and training of prospective adopters to meet the assessed needs of children
- The identification of children for whom the possible plan is adoption and to work alongside the children's social workers to match children with their adoptive families and ensure permanence is achieved without drift and delay;
- The provision of an effective and efficient Adoption Panel conducted in accordance with the regulations;
- The provision of a comprehensive range of support services to children, birth families and adoptive parents;
- The provision in the disclosure of information and facilitating contact for adopted adults and birth families.

As of 1 April 2019, the responsibility for delivering the above services transferred to the RAA, Adoption@Heart.

## **2. Adoption Inspection**

All Adoption Services became regulated in 2003, under the Care Standards Act 2000 and were subject to inspections against National Minimum Standards. The inspecting Authority is OFSTED.

In January 2017 Wolverhampton's Children's Services were subject to inspection under the revised Ofsted Single Inspection Framework. The outcome of this inspection was that Children's Services were rated Good with a sub judgement of Good for Adoption.

In relation to adoption, Ofsted made the following recommendation:

Ensure that once children are placed with adoptive families there is no unnecessary delay in applying for an adoption order.

The Children and Young People's (CYP) Action plan included actions to address the recommendation as follows:

- Adoption applications to be made 10 weeks after a child is placed in the prospective adoptive household (unless it is recorded on the child's file that there is a reason why this should not happen)
- Annex A's to be completed by the child's social worker and lodged with the court at the same time as the adopters lodge their adoption order application
- CareFirst activity to be utilised to ensure timescales are met
- Three monthly audits take place to ensure adoption applications and Annex A's are being lodged at 10 weeks. With all children who are placed for adoption being tracked on a monthly basis

Where there are occasional circumstances where adoptive parents do not feel ready to lodge their adoption application at 10 weeks, liaison takes place with the child's social worker to explore how the placement can be supported to enable the adopters to feel confident to lodge at an appropriate time.

A process has been agreed with the Court in relation to lodging the application for the Adoption Order and the Annex A at the same time. It is currently taking approximately three months from lodging the application to Court hearings. However, more birth parents are contesting the making of an Adoption Order and this can contribute to delay children ceasing to be in the care of the Local Authority.

### **3. The National Agenda**

In 2012, the Government launched an Adoption Reform Programme. It focused on concern regarding the length of time taken for children to be placed for adoption. This resulted in a raft of reforms and measures being implemented to increase and speed up adoption these include:

- An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay, March 2012, which introduced the Adoption Scorecard
- Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes, January 2013 which introduced the National Adoption helpline; First4Adoption and a six months two stage process for assessing adopters
- The Adoption Leadership Board was launched in April 2014
- Children and Families Act 2014; includes the introduction of care proceedings limited to 26 weeks apart for exceptional cases, promotes Fostering for Adoption, repeal of due consideration to ethnicity in placing children in England, and adopter led matching with access to adoption registers.
- Regionalising Adoption, June 2015; outlined how the development of Regional Adoption Agencies will create a wider pool of adopters who could potentially meet the needs of child/ren for whom they were considering suitable for adoption and adoption support would be easily accessible,

additionally the Government aspired to develop a system with a spirit of innovation and excellence at its heart

- Adoption: A Vision for Change policy paper 2016 identifies how the Government wants to invest in the workforce with plans to equip the workforce with the professional skills and knowledge to navigate complex assessment, analysis and decision making and enable adoptive families to access the right support
- The strategy also details how, by 2020, the government will: end delay for vulnerable children in care by providing larger local pools of approved adopters by making sure every single council is part of a regional adoption agency by 2020, backed by £14 million
- Transform support on offer for adoptive families by becoming the first country in the world to provide vital therapeutic services to all adopted young people up to the age of 21 - as well as the family and friends who care for them - backed by a new commitment totalling over £49 million
- The Education and Adoption Act 2016; measures in the Act allow the Government to require local authorities to decide for their adoption functions to be carried out by another adoption agency, allowing for regional approaches.
- The Children and Social Work Act 2017 which came into effect in May 2017 includes the following;
  - Improving decision making, and support for looked after and previously looked after children in England and Wales, including adopted children;
  - The key changes in relation to services for adopted children is the Virtual School Head's charge to make advice and information available to adoptive parents. The act includes the provision for improving understanding among Designated Teachers in maintained schools and academies and any other person the authority considers appropriate, for promoting the educational achievement of relevant children.

#### **4. Regionalising Adoption Agencies**

The City of Wolverhampton along with Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council and Sandwell Children's Trust were accepted by the Department of Education as an early adopter project to work together to design and develop a Regional Adoption Agency.

A decision was taken in May 2018 to proceed with a hosted model for the Regional Adoption Agency, a due diligence process was undertaken which resulted in an agreement that the City of Wolverhampton Council would host the RAA. This proposal was agreed by Cabinets in all areas in December 2018.

Significant planning took place prior to 1 April 2019 to ensure appropriate preparation for the implementation and launch of the hosted model in Wolverhampton. Adoption@Heart was launched on 1 April 2019 as planned, with staff from Walsall Dudley local authorities and Sandwell Children's Trust transferring to the City of Wolverhampton Council under TUPE arrangements.

All adoption services from all three local authorities and the Sandwell Children's Trust are now delivered through Adoption@Heart. Adoption @Heart sits within the Children and Young People in Care Service. Adoption@Heart is overseen by a monthly management board with representation from Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall and Sandwell and in attendance is the Service Head for Adoption@Heart. This board reports to the Strategic Commissioning Board which is attended by the Director of Children's Services in all four areas.

Future Adoption Annual and Interim Reports to the Corporate Parenting Board will be prepared and presented by the Service Head for Adoption@Heart, Mark Tobin.

## **5. Delivering local adoption services**

### **Adoption in the Black Country Consortium**

Adoption in the Black Country (ABC) Consortium was made up of, Sandwell Children's Trust, and Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton local authorities (LA).

The original remit of Adoption in the Black Country (ABC) was to recruit adopters for the four LA's with specific marketing strategies to target the recruitment of adopters for older children, sibling groups and those of black and minority ethnic groups. The enquiries received at ABC were equally shared throughout the four local authorities.

Joint adoption preparation training for prospective adopters took place throughout the year delivered by staff across all four areas.

Joint family finding meetings took place monthly to explore potential links between approved adopters and children within the consortium.

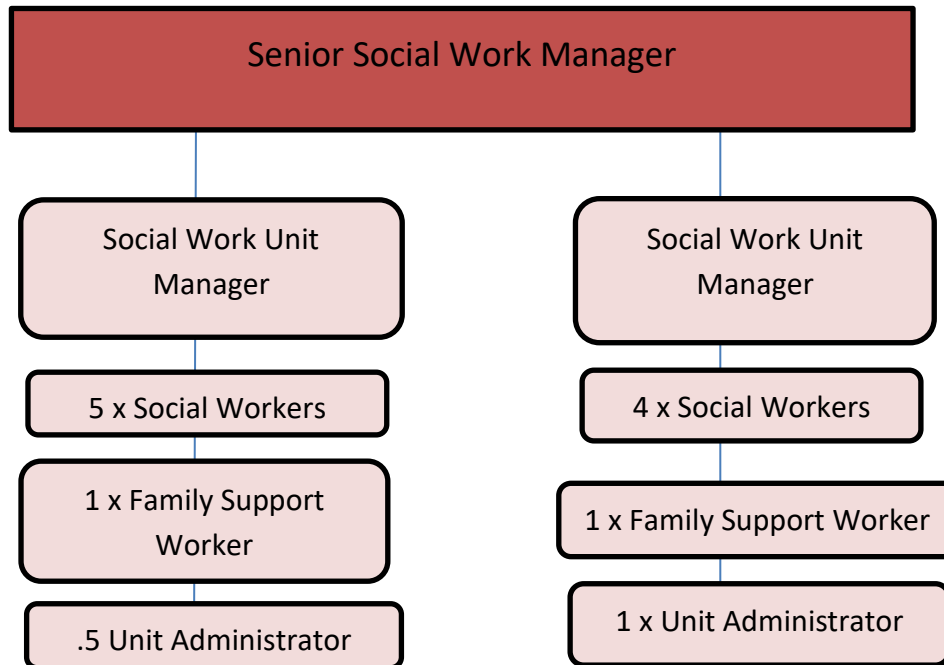
Post approval training in the consortium offered training to local adopters.

ABC Consortium members jointly purchased services from Voluntary Adoption Agencies to support the delivery of adoption services. Adoption UK as an adopter led support service, provided annual memberships for all approved adopters in ABC and offered access to support groups within the Black Country for adopters.

On behalf of ABC the Voluntary Adoption Agency, After Adoption, have delivered independent counselling for birth families affected by adoption and facilitated access to records for adopted adults.

## Adoption Team. City of Wolverhampton

Adoption Team structure (April 2018-March 2019)



The above diagram details the structure of the adoption team prior to transfer to Adoption@Heart.

All the adoption social workers are qualified, and experienced in adoption work, and all are registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC). They are qualified under the Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005, as all have all been qualified for at least three years and have the required experience in adoption work.

Staff receive regular supervision and the Social Work Unit Managers sat alongside the team thereby being available for consultation and advice in between planned supervision sessions. Additionally, the Senior Social Work Manager was situated close by and had an open-door policy offering consultation and guidance as necessary.

All staff have now been transferred into Adoption@Heart.

Staff have annual appraisals and their training needs are regularly reviewed and they are actively encouraged to undertake appropriate learning opportunities. Staff are expected to share learning outcomes to benefit the team and when relevant with social workers in the wider service.

Attendance at quarterly social work briefings and an annual joint children and adult social work conference plus mandatory training is part of the workforce development plan for social workers.

All the Adoption staff have expertise regarding the impact of attachment, loss and separation and trauma for adopted children. Training events over this period have included Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Therapeutic Life Story Work, Foetal Alcohol training and direct work training.

## **6. Recruitment and Assessment of adopters**

Prospective adopters are recruited to meet the needs of children with a care plan of adoption. Adoption in the Black Country Consortium's (branded as Adoption@Heart since September 2017) recruitment strategy endeavoured to recruit adopters for older children, who may have experienced neglect and or abuse and now need a permanent adoptive home; sibling groups and those of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups where children require adoptive parents who can reflect or promote their heritage. The enquiries received were equally shared throughout the three local authorities and the Children' in the consortium.

Recruitment activity by the ABC Consortium generated 40 referrals up until the end of February 2019 for the City of Wolverhampton Council for an initial assessment to be undertaken. This an increase from 36 from the previous 12 months.

In February 2018 the new branding of the RAA Adoption@Heart was launched along with all new marketing collateral, website, social media and digital/printed marketing. All marketing and recruitment this year has been under this branding in preparation for the launch of the RAA in April 2019.

At the heart of the Government's adoption reform programme is a shorter two-stage approval process for prospective adopters. The aim of this process is to allow potential adopters first to learn more about adoption, and then to move quickly through the approval process. Whilst remaining rigorous, the approval process is time-bound and ensures that prospective adopters have a greater role in the process. There is also a fast-track process for some previous adopters and approved foster carers.

After completion of the initial pre -stage, prospective applicants who are likely to meet the needs of children needing an adoptive placement are invited to submit a 'Registration of Interest' and they begin Stage One of the adoption process. This stage is adopter led and should be completed in two months, however. During this period, it is a time for prospective adopters to complete DBS and medicals while statutory checks and references are taken. If all checks are satisfactory, applicants are advised that they are, or are not, able to move to Stage Two.

Stage Two has required timescales of four months, applicants are engaged in the preparation training and assessment during this stage.

ABC jointly delivered adoption preparation training to prospective adopters. The programme included information on early life trauma, loss, attachment, abuse, adoptive parenting 'parenting plus', post adoption contact, post adoption support and guest speakers were in attendance. The adopter's feedback on this training is positive and they report feeling better prepared for the journey to adoption.

Wolverhampton utilised independent social work assessors to complete Stage Two Prospective Adopter Reports (PAR's). The adopters were also allocated a Wolverhampton Supervising Social Worker from the adoption team to support them during the assessment and keep them linked to the adoption service.

During April 2018- February 2019 40 referrals were received from ABC; Initial visits were then undertaken by a City of Wolverhampton Stage One social worker.

The target set for 2018-2019 was to approve and support 25 new adopter households. During April 2018-2019 26 adopter approvals were achieved, this is positive performance.

## **7. Former Foster Carers who adopt**

During April 2017-2018 the process for approving finance for former foster carers was amended. The central principle is that financial support can be payable in accordance with the regulations to help secure a suitable Adoption, Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order where such an arrangement cannot be readily made because of a financial obstacle.

Former foster carers who adopt are eligible for transitional support. The transitional arrangement is the payment of the core fostering allowance for two years plus the means tested child's allowance.

There were six foster carers during April 2018-2019 who were adopted the children that they were fostering. This enabled children in the fostering household to have their permanence secured by their current carers.

## **8. Early Permanence**

Early Permanency Placements were an initiative introduced under the Children and Families Act (2014).

Early permanence is an umbrella term which includes both Fostering for Adoption and Concurrent Planning placements. Both schemes enable a child in care to be placed with foster carers who are ready and willing to adopt them later, if the Court decides they cannot live with their birth family. It is intended to speed up a child's journey through care and minimise the disruption of repeated moves to different families. This aims to enable children to experience a loving and secure home in which they feel safe and settled as quickly as possible. Early permanence placements can limit delay and secure good outcomes for children whether they are rehabilitated home, or they are adopted.



Wolverhampton remains ambitious about utilising early permanence placements, as outlined above, they minimise the requirement for a further placement move and speeds up permanency for children. Wolverhampton has made seven early permanence placements via Foster for Adoption (FFA) or concurrency placements during April 2018-2019.

## **9. Permanency via Adoption**

When children are placed in the care of the local authority it is imperative that they are placed in safe, permanent homes as quickly as possible. In most circumstances, children can be reunited with their families, but in some cases, children find homes with relatives or adoptive families.

To pursue permanence in a timely manner, permanence planning is embedded in practice and provides oversight and scrutiny in care planning options for children. There are a range of activities that support this practice. The Senior Social Work Manager for Adoption attends a weekly admission to care panel, this enables cases to be tracked and allocated as early alerts. Family finders regularly attend permanency planning meetings that are coordinated where there is a potential care plan of adoption for a child. Monthly family finding meetings enable children's plans for adoption to be discussed and early inhouse matches proposed. These arrangements will be continued when the adoption services transfer to Adoption@Heart, to ensure early permanence placements continue to be considered and actioned where appropriate.

## **10. Family Finding**

A Family Support Worker (FSW) assists in progressing family finding actions by taking photographs, filming DVD's of children and completing a child's profile. Where there is not a match for the child with Wolverhampton or ABC prospective adopters the FSW refers the children to Adoption Link (Link Maker), a web-based family finding service that approved prospective adopters can view once a child is subject to a Placement Order granted by the Court.

Children can also be featured in Children Who Wait magazine published by Adoption UK specifically utilised for harder to place children. However, this medium is no longer as successful as it used to be due to the use of other web-based family finding services which are now more widely used by prospective adopters.

Wolverhampton Adoption Team attended eight exchange events, which included events in London, Manchester, Leeds and Walsall, profiling children who are regarded as harder to place; i.e. children over the age of three, sibling groups and children of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME). These events are opportunities to feature profiles of children who are waiting to be matched to suitable adopters and are attended by prospective adopters and their social workers. These events support adopter led matching as prospective adopters can express an interest in finding out more about the children profiled at the event.

During 2018-2019 Wolverhampton attended two activity days held across the region where eight children attended, including a sibling group of three for a pre – link which

progressed successfully. Activity Days are opportunities for children with a plan of adoption and prospective adopters to meet informally and spend some time together with a view to the initiation of potential matches taking place.

Wolverhampton continues to be creative in family finding activity; one such example is a collaboration with Ricochet production company who worked in partnership with Channel 4 filming a series of adoption activity events. Wolverhampton secured parental permission to feature two harder to place, older children. The children attended an activity day which was filmed for a documentary. This resulted in one successful match and viewers witnessed the emerging relationship between the child and the prospective adopters during the programme.

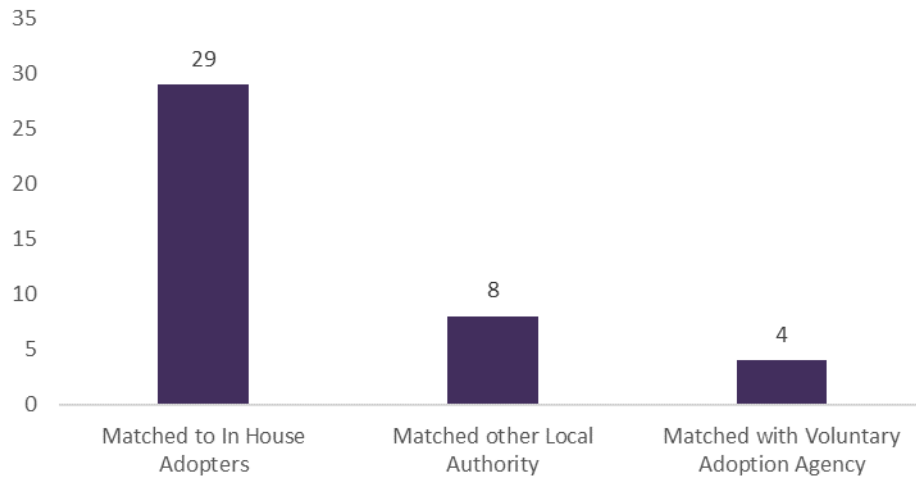
The link that was initiated at this event was presented to the Adoption panel in February 2018. On the 12- month anniversary of moving into his adoptive family the child, along with his parents met the Queen, as part of a celebration of adoption at Coram BAAF's new office. It was a lovely day enjoyed and celebrated by all. The child has since been adopted.

Prior to a prospective adoptive family being identified, Family Support Workers (FSW's) begin 'moving on work' with older children, the work is child centred and individualised and continues once a family is identified to support the smooth transition to their new family.

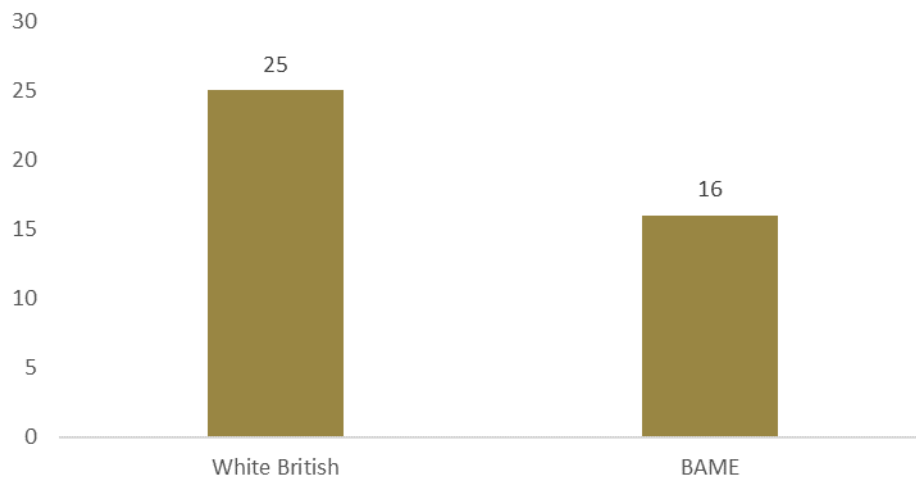
Wolverhampton linked 41 children for adoption during 2018-2019:

Linked with in house adopters	29
Linked with other Local Authority	8
Linked with Voluntary Adoption Agency	4
White British/ European	25
BAME	16
Single children	25
Sibling groups of two	16
Children with Disability	0
Aged over 5	7
0-2	27
Female	13
Male	28

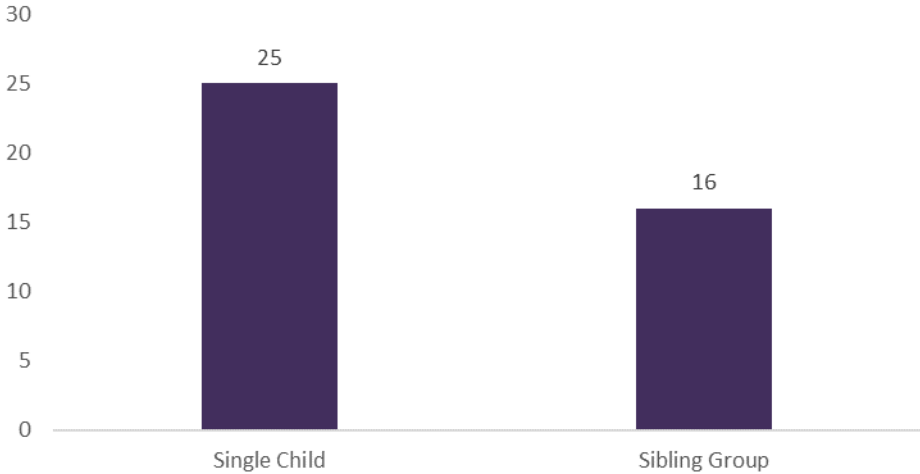
### Match Type



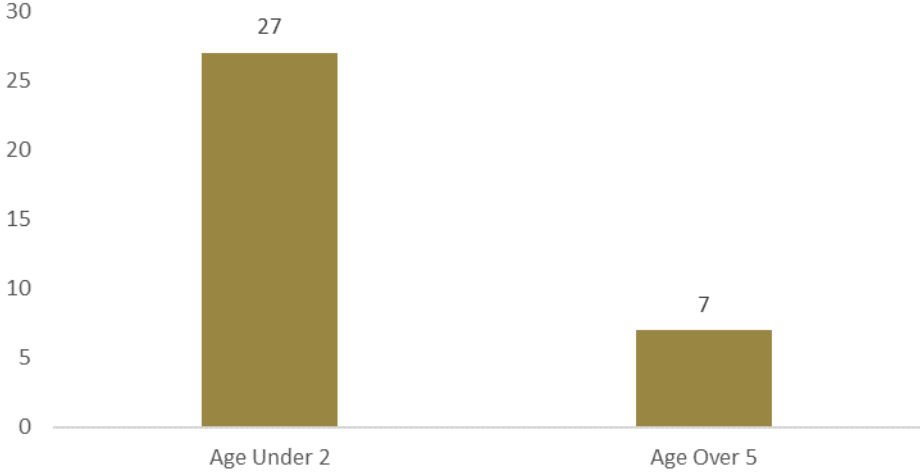
### Ethnicity of Matches



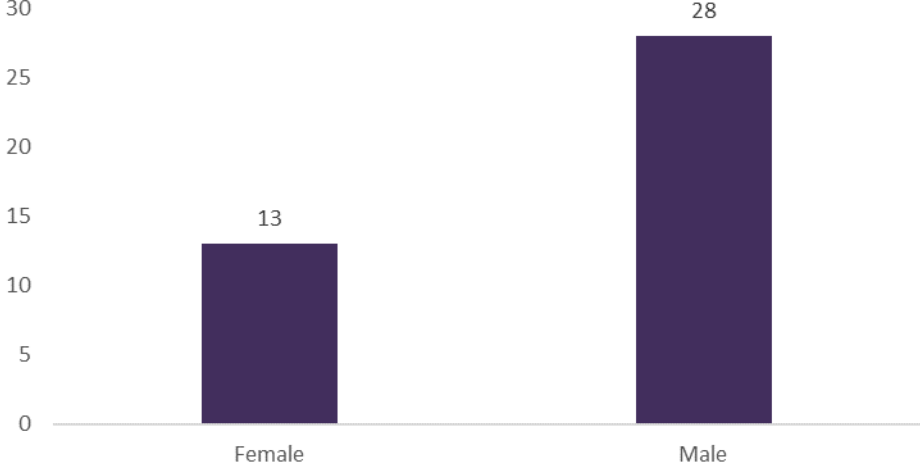
### Sibling Groups



### Age Groups



### Gender of Matches



## 11. Adoption Scorecard

In 2018 the rate of children and young people in care in England continued to increase. After small rises of 1% each year between 2014 and 2016, the rise in 2017 was 3% and another 3% in 2018. At 31 March 2018 there were 75,420 children and young people in England, an increase of 1,930 on 2017, and an increase of 7,350 on 2013.

Between 2015-18 there were 12,900 children who were adopted from care (14%)

Adoption Scorecards have been published by the Department for Education on an annual basis since 2012. They measure local authorities' performance against two key indicators.

The **A1** indicator measures the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family for children who have been adopted. A low number of days represents a good performance.

The **A2** indicator measures the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family. A low number of days represents a good performance.

In 2014 a new indicator was introduced; **A10**. This measures the average time between a child entering care and being placed with their prospective adopters adjusted for foster carer adoptions (where times for children who are adopted by their foster carers are stopped at the date children were placed with their foster carers).

Wolverhampton's A1 Indicator equates to 617 days (this is a further year on year decrease of 7 days from 2014-2017) against a target of 426 days, against an English year average of 486. Initial reporting for the single year 2018/19 increased to 799 days. This was due to the number of older children that were adopted by their foster carer.

Furthermore, when the A1 timeliness is adjusted where times for children who are adopted by their foster family are stopped at the date the child moved in with the foster family (A10) (2015-2018) it reduces to 521 days, compared to 412 English average. Initial reporting for the single year 2018/19 shows that the A10 indicator decreased to 367 days.

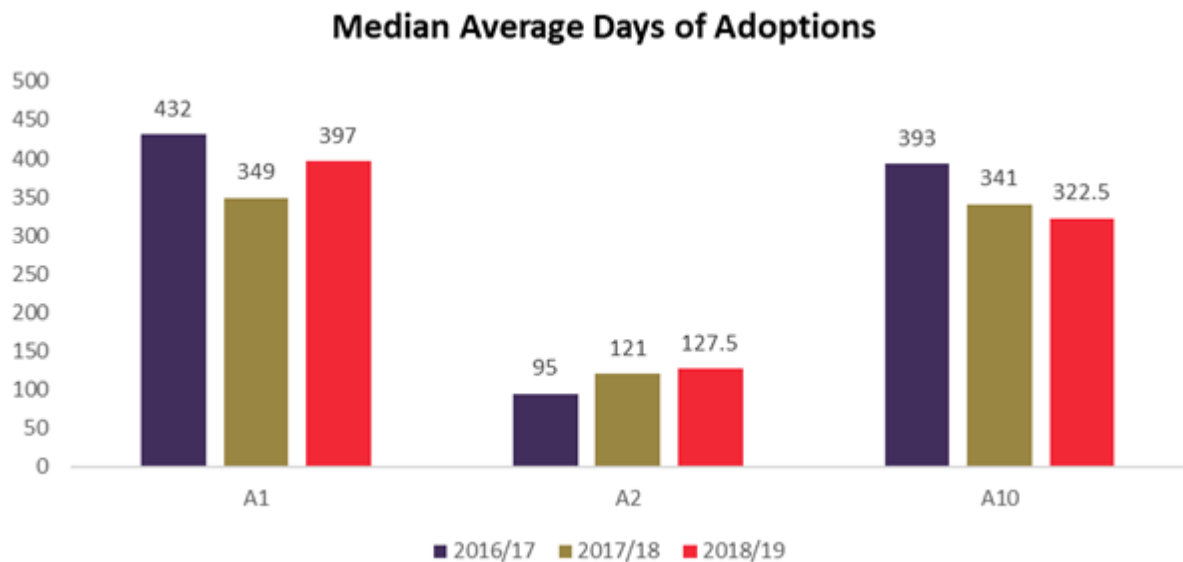
Wolverhampton's A2 indicator is 212 days (a further year on year decrease of 13 days from 2015-2018) against a target of 121 days and an English average of 201. Initial reporting for the single year 2018/19 saw performance decrease to 152 days.

Despite a significant improvement in performance year on year, Wolverhampton's adoption scorecard for 2015-2018 continues to be rated 'double red' for A1 and A2 indicators.

No local authority in England has met the over ambitious government 426-day target, therefore Wolverhampton is not an outlier in this area. The Adoption Leadership Board alongside Coram BAAF are canvassing Central Government and the Department for Education (DfE) regarding the 426-day target.

The average duration between entry into care and being adopted increased in the year 2018/19. Despite decreases by over six months between 2013 and 2018, in 2019 the average increased in line with A1 timeframes to two years and nine months due to the number of long-term children awaiting adoption who were adopted in the year.

Once a child has been matched with adopters, the time to adoption has decreased slightly from eight months in 2018 to seven months in 2019.



Despite an increase in the mean average number of days for A1, the median average decreased in 2018/19. The median average for A1 and 102 are lower than national targets with A2 within 6 days of the national target.

There are 9 adoptions that took over 1500 days, of these 9, 7 were adopted by foster parents.

The City of Wolverhampton Council Adoption Team has always been ambitious about adoption. The use of a three-year average for the scorecard indicator presents a challenge for the authority, and Wolverhampton constantly balances the need for swift placement with not giving up on finding families for older children, and children with complex needs. There are occasions where timescales have been sacrificed in the interest of placing older children, sibling groups and children with complex needs.

Black children and children of mixed ethnicity appear to be slightly over-represented in the children in care population. Children of Asian ethnicity are slightly under represented. In Wolverhampton 2015-2018, 35 children or 16% of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children leaving care were adopted compared to an England average of just 7%.

Wolverhampton continues to pursue adoption for children aged five years and older. In 2015-2018, 45 or 11% were adopted compared to an England average of 5%.

A yearly conversation with Ofsted explores the adoption scorecard and they recognise Wolverhampton's ambition and note the year on year improvement.

## 12. Interagency Placements

Four interagency placements of children from other local authorities were made with City of Wolverhampton adopters all of which were single placements.

## 13. Disruption of Adoptive Placements

There have been no adoption disruptions in 2018-2019, this is significant given the number of harder to place characteristics children placed during his year.

## 14. Adoption Order

There were 43 adoption orders granted in 2018-2019 an increase on 3 orders from the previous year.

The characteristics are set out below:

Single children	19
Sibling groups of two	12
Early permanence placements	4
Foster carers adopting	13
BAME	16
Aged over 5	15
0-2	22
Female	15
Male	28

Of the 43 adoption orders granted 22 passed the A1 indicator of 426 days and 26 passed the English average of 520 days.

In relation to the 43 children, 23 passed the A2 indicator of 121 and 33 passed the English average of 220.

## 15. Outliers

As outlined in the report there are a number of children who are deemed as hard to place due to their age, ethnicity, and health issues, for example. These children therefore do not always follow the pattern of those children that are deemed as easier to place and are successfully linked within A1 and A2 indicator timescales, they can be referred in statistical data as outliers. An outlier can be defined as a piece of data or observation that deviates drastically from the given norm or average of the data set. An outlier can cause serious problems in statistical analyses.

When considering the 2015-2018 adoption scorecard there are 33 children with 23 boys and 10 girls who we have identified as outliers for statistical purposes with A1

indicators over 900 days. They include two sibling groups of three, and nine sibling groups of two.

There are limited numbers of adopters willing and able to consider a sibling group of three, this can be exacerbated if they are an all-male sibling group of three as adopters invariably prefer a mixed gender group. A sibling group of three boys went on to be adopted by their foster carer after extensive family finding was unsuccessful. The A1 indicator was 1258 days and the A2 indicator was 952 days which was adjusted to zero when the foster carer adopted them.

A second sibling group of three had extensive family finding without success, the plan was to rescind the Placement Order however while completing paperwork a decision was made to remove the children from their foster placement due to safeguarding concerns and a subsequent sibling assessment recommended the youngest child was placed singularly. The sibling group of two and the remaining child were linked, and both sets of adopters applied for Adoption Orders and the Adoption Orders were granted the same day. The A1 indicator was 1355 days and the A2 indicator was 951 days. The adoptive placements are progressing well.

There are 16 children out of 23 aged five and over as part of a sibling group which equates to 69 percent. One sibling group A1 indicator is 1131 days and A2 indicator is 684 days; the adopters separated prior to the granting of the adoption order, a further assessment was undertaken prior to the children being adopted which impacted on the A1 indicator.

There are 10 single children with nine boys and one girl. The characteristics includes a child aged two; a child of mixed White British and African Caribbean ethnicity who had a query re diagnosis of foetal alcohol, a three-year-old Black Caribbean female and two four-year-old White boys. The remaining six children were all over five years old.

## **16. Children Awaiting Placement/Placement Orders at 31 March 2019**

There were 27 children with placement orders at 31 March 2019 with one child in an early permanence placement,

## **17. Additional Functions of the Adoption Team**

In addition to the functions outlined above, the Adoption Team continued to offer services;

- Support for birth family members - pre- adoption
- Notified adoption service, for e.g. step parents
- Inter-country adoption service
- Voluntary relinquishments

## **18. Adoption support services**

Adoptive families adopted adults or birth relatives can ask for an assessment of need at any time after the adoption.



The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was established by the Government in May 2015 as they became aware that access to therapeutic support following adoption was required. In January 2016, the government announced that the Adoption Support Fund could be used to provide therapeutic support for children from the point at which they are placed with their adoptive families and not just post order.

Children who require specialist assessments are now eligible for a separate amount up to £2,500. The level of demand for the ASF has been far higher than anticipated and so to address this the Department for Education introduced a fair access limit of £5,000 per child. Over 80 percent of applications to the fund fall within this limit. Since May 2015, the average spend per child has been around £3,500 for City of Wolverhampton ASF applications. Where a child has an exceptional need for therapeutic support over £5,000 and up to £30,000, funding is still possible on a 'match funding' arrangement with the relevant local authority to ensure families receive the support, in 2018-2019 Wolverhampton match funded £4799. Amounts over £500 are approved by City of Wolverhampton Resource Panel.

The City of Wolverhampton Adoption Support Service has undertaken post approvals Assessment of Need and review assessments which resulted in making 50 applications to the adoption support fund. The total approved funding was £156,734.00

Therapy services have included filial therapy, Circle of Security therapeutic parenting course; therapeutic life story work and psychotherapy. Reviews are undertaken to identify family satisfaction and clinical outcomes.

The Adoption Team continued to offer a therapeutic parenting programme based on the Circle of Security model which runs for eight weeks and was attended by five adoptive parents and was very successful in extending their understanding regarding impact of abuse while developing greater awareness about attachment and barriers to implementing therapeutic parenting. The feedback from adopters was impressive, and all scored it highly. They welcomed the opportunity to share difficulties with other adopters in similar situations and they commented on how it not only assists in understanding their child but challenges their parenting. The City of Wolverhampton Adoption service ran a monthly adoption support group where adopters can share highlights and challenges of parenting in a safe reflective environment.

## **19. Post adoption contact**

The post adoption contact (PAC) coordinator manages more than 400 post adoption contacts. Post adoption contact assists children in understanding their history and along with the life story book helps children to make sense of what happened in the past and to help them remember important people who were involved earlier in their lives.

## **20. Post Approval Training**

ABC provided post approval training to adopters; this year training has included Education Issues for Adopted Children; Talking about Adoption: Therapeutic Life Story Work and Child to Parent Violence; for adoptive families struggling with violence in the home.

## **21. Commissioned Adoption Support Services**

Additional adoption support services were commissioned from Adoption UK/PAC. Adoption UK ran local support groups on a bi-monthly basis, the meetings schedule speakers and presentations and also provide a time to socialise with other adopters. Adopters were also able to access Adoption UK training workshops and a lending library.

Wolverhampton had a Service Level Agreement with an Independent Adoption Agency (After Adoption) to provide an independent support service to birth relatives whose child is being placed for adoption or who has been adopted and to provide birth record counselling. This was managed via Adoption in the Black Country to ensure service delivery during the period.

## **22. Adoption and Permanency Panel**

City of Wolverhampton Council Adoption and Permanence Panel considered approvals of prospective adopters, Family and Friends carers and matching of adoptive and long-term fostering placements.

The Adoption and Permanence Panel complied with 2002 Children's Act, Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013; Fostering Regulations 2011; Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England)(Miscellaneous) Regulations 2013 and guidance relevant to both adoption and fostering. Panel members from the Central list with both adoption and fostering experience participated in the permanence panel.

## **23. Panel membership**

The Panel continued to function well supported by its committed members and support staff. There were 21 panel members on the Central list who could sit on both the Adoption and the Fostering panels. There were two panel Chairs and four Vice Chairs. As per the transfer arrangements to the RAA the panel function for approvals of adopters and matching has been transferred to Adoption@Heart as on 1 April 2019. All panel members were given the opportunity to move to Adoption@Heart Central list and become a panel member for Adoption@Heart.

## **24. Panel Business**

Panel met regularly during 2018-2019, with at least two opportunities a month for adoption matters to be heard. This meant matters could be dealt with in a timely manner avoiding any delay for children.

The Agency Decision Maker sat twice a month to consider whether children should be placed for adoption decisions but was also able to make emergency decisions as necessary and when required outside this timeframe.

## **25. Adopter approval**

There were 26 approvals of prospective adopters in this reporting period. This is good performance and exceeded the target set of 25 approvals.

## 26. Children's decisions

There has been a slight decrease in the number of children for whom Wolverhampton is pursuing a plan of adoption.

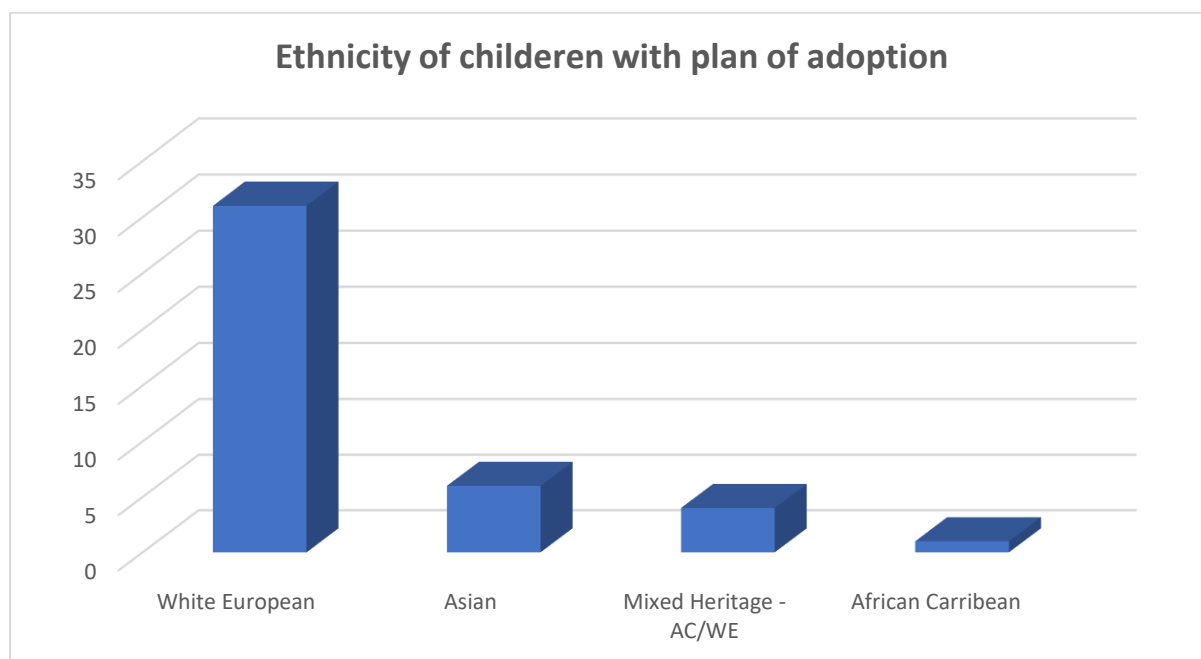
43 Children had Should Be Placed for Adoption decisions made. Of these

27 were in zero-two age range.

13 were in three – five age range

3 were six + age range

The table below gives a breakdown of the ethnicity of children with a plan of adoption for this reporting year.



## 27 Rescinds

There have been 11 plans of adoption for this period rescinded. All children were over 4 years old with 8 older than 7. Only one child had their adoption decision rescinded after being placed with a potential adopter.

## 28 Matches of children with prospective adopters

During this reporting period April 2018 to March 2019, 41 children were matched with prospective adopters.

There has been great effort to keep sibling groups together. The placement of sibling groups is not without its challenges. However, we have managed to place seven sibling groups of two, and one sibling group of three.

## **29 Complaints/compliments**

Wolverhampton Adoption Team received five complaints, plus three informal complaints that were dealt with at a service level.

Wolverhampton Adoption Team received 7 compliments during 2018-2019. Adopters complimented on the range of services provided.

## **30 Strategic issues and future service development**

- To actively support the development of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). Regionalising the service is consistent with the Government agenda and will widen the pool of adopters for Wolverhampton's children in care and will enable us to provide a regional adoption support service which will continue to be accessible and responsive to the needs of adopters.
- Increase the recruitment of adopters who can consider offering Early Permanence Placements to children either through concurrency or foster to adopt.
- Improve recruitment of adopters willing to adopt children deemed harder to place; including older children, children with disabilities and Black and minority ethnic children and boys.
- Fully utilise the adoption support fund to support families.
- Embed the culture of participation, ensuring feedback from service users is captured, analysed and used to inform service improvement