



Report title:	<b>Adoption Service Interim Report</b> <b>1 April to 30 September 2021</b>
Date of report:	14 February 2022
To:	City of Wolverhampton Council
Produced by:	Mark Tobin Head of Service
Service:	Adoption@Heart

## 1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report:

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

The report covers the six-month period 1 April to 30 September 2021.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 30 September 2021.

Adoption@Heart is a Regional Adoption Agency, providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. The service is hosted by City of Wolverhampton Council and became operational 1 April 2019.

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

As of 30 September 2021:

There were 18 children subject to placement orders but not yet placed for adoption. Two had already had a decision to cease family finding with a view to a formal change of plan (not yet ratified), a further eight children were linked but not yet formally matched and one child was formally matched but not yet placed with adoptive parents. The remaining seven were the subject of active family finding.

The timescales these children had been waiting since their placement order was granted are set out below.

Less than 3 months:	4
Between 3 and 6 months:	6
Between 6 and 12 months:	7
Between 12 and 24 months:	0
Children waiting over 2 years:	1

## 2.1 Children Made Subject to Placement Orders

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Total
5	4	0	2	3	0	14

## 2.2 Children Subject to Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions as of 30 September 2021 (without Placement Order)

### 2.3 Number of Children who had a SHOPBA during the period

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Total
1	1	0	1	0	0	3

## 2.4 The Numbers of Children with PO who had a Change of Plan (away from adoption) in the Period

0

## 2.5 Number of Children Placed for Adoption during the period.

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Total
3	2	5	3	3	0	16

Children Placed in Previous Years:

Financial Year:	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Children Placed:	45	42	25	38

### 3. Number of Children Adopted:

The number of children legally adopted by their adoptive parents in the six-month period to 30 September 2021 was 18.

In year average timescale for children adopted:

A1 690 days

A2 228 days

Both are outside the thresholds (as below).

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

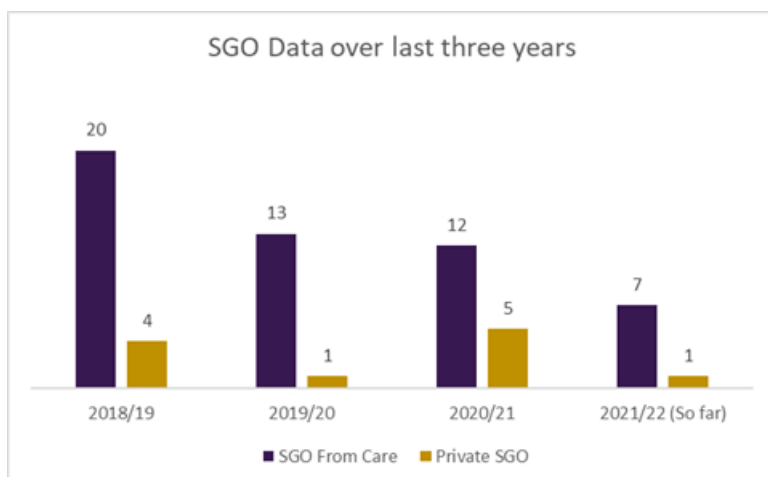
Financial Year:	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Children Adopted:	40	41	8	8

Court delays caused by Covid-19 and the impact on the courts, will be a contributory factor in delaying the adoption of children, however, the lower number of children placed in 2019/20 will also be a contributory factor. There is evidence of a significant increase in children adopted in the first half of the current year.

The numbers of children leaving care nationally via adoption has reduced continuously since 2017.

### Special Guardianship Orders Granted

(For comparative purposes)



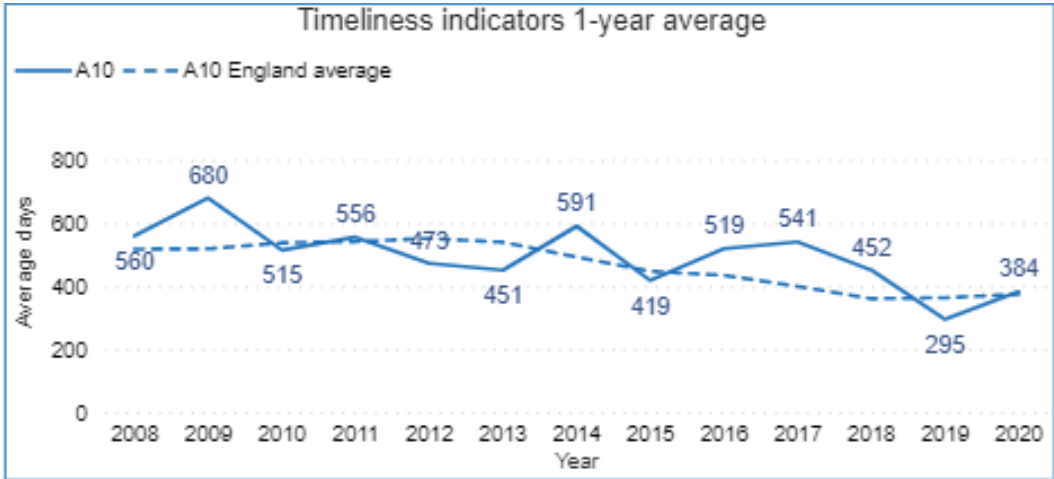
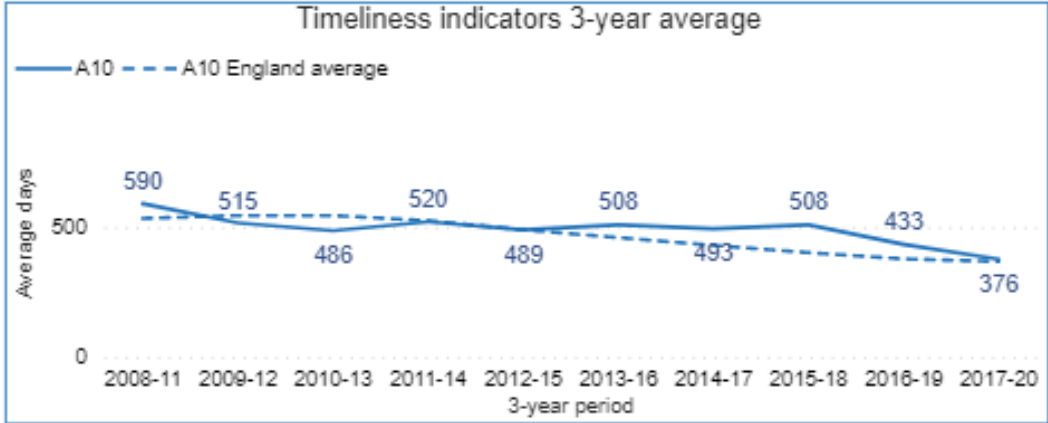
**Adoption Scorecard Performance**

In 2014, as part of its' Adoption Reform Agenda, the government introduced Adoption Scorecards to track local authority performance and to tackle delay in the adoption system. Scorecards are produced for a 3-year rolling average, with the latest data being published for April 2018 - March 2019 (Published April 2020). Given this is a 3-year average, performance is adversely affected by children placed outside of timescales and this could be a small cohort of children who awaited a significant length of time.

The current indicators are:

**A10** – number of days between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. The current threshold is 426 days.

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

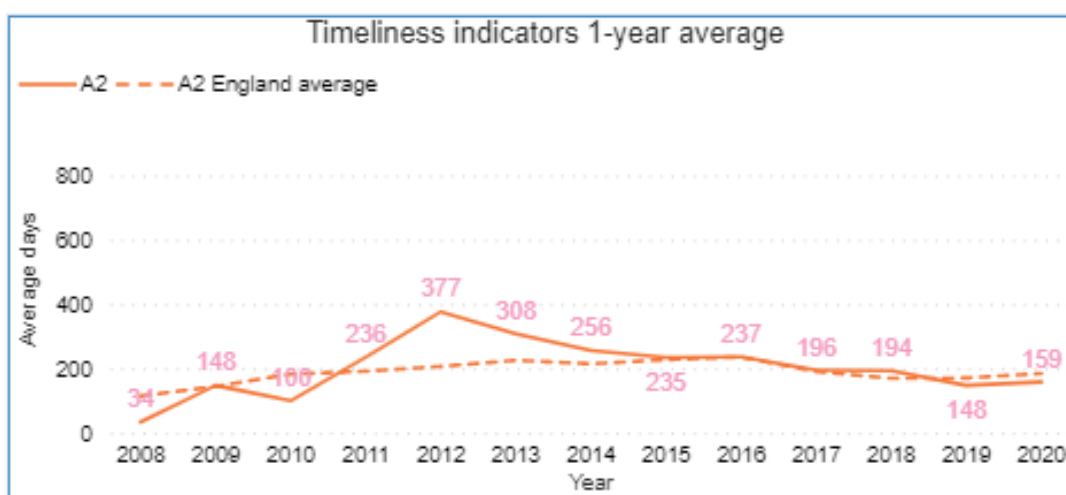
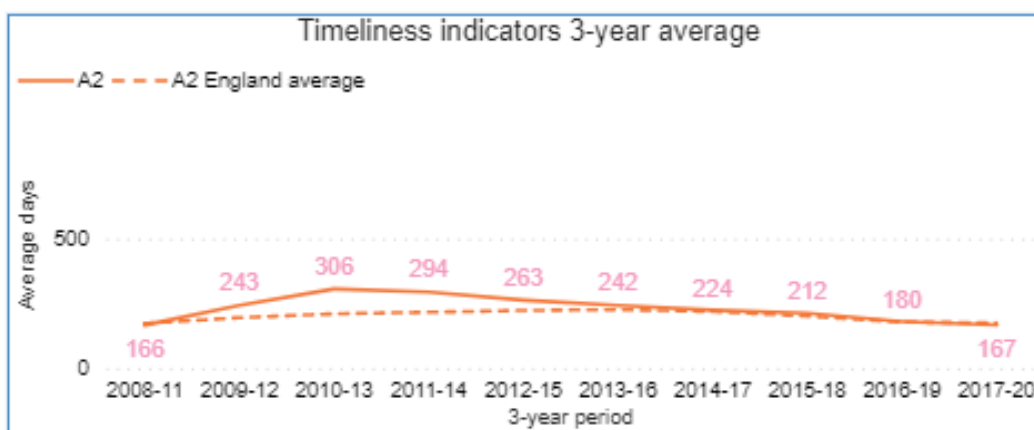


A10: Average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster care adoptions:				
2020 average days: 384	2020 England average: 375	Average time in 2020 was longer than in 2019	2017-20 average days: 376	2017-20 England average: 367

A10 performance for both single year and three-year average is below threshold but above England average.

The single year performance is 42 days below threshold and 9 days above England average.

The 3-year average is 50 days below threshold and 59 days below national average.



3.1

A2: Average time (in days) between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family:				
2020 average days:	2020 England average:	Average time in 2020 was longer than in 2019	2017-20 average days:	2017-20 England average:
159	185		167	175

Performance for A20 is above threshold for both 3-year average and single year. Both are below England average.

The 3-year average is 46 days above the threshold (121) and 54 days above national average

The single year performance is 38 days above threshold and 64 days above national average.

### Early Permanency

There were four Wolverhampton children placed in early permanence placements via Foster for Adopt.

## 4. Recruitment of Adopters:

### Adopter Recruitment Performance

Please refer to the separate Power Point which is taken from the dashboard reporting tool.

### Adopter Approvals at A@H Panels

First year 2019/20	Since 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021	Total projected approvals combined for 2 years	Approved April to September 2021
50	69	119	27

### Adopters in Progress on 30 September 2021

Stage 1	On a break	Stage 2	Total
49	3	35	87

## Registrations of Interest (Start of Stage one)

First year 2019/20 (Full year)	1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 (Full year)	April to September 2021
64	117	41

## Adopters approved and waiting

Not linked or provisionally linked	Provisional link / in progress	Matched at panel / ADM not placed	Total approved / Not placed
21	20	1	42

## Adopter Timescales

41 Adopters were approved, but not yet formally matched at panel with a child. Of these, 12 had waited a year or more and 19 under four months. 20 of these were provisionally linked with a child but not formally matched.

20 out of 27 approvals were completed within 16 weeks.

The average number of days adopters spent in stage two was 150 days (121 target). The average timescale from ROI to approval was 175 days (target 183).

31 out of 49 adopters who completed stage one, did so within eight weeks. Despite the majority completing stage one in timescales, the average number of days in stage one was 123 (target 56).

Of the 54 Stage one completions this year 31 (57%) have completed within eight weeks, with 83% within 16 weeks.

Of the 27 approvals this year, 20 (74%) have been approved within 16 weeks.

A report providing a regional and national comparison, relating to adopter approval timescales is to be presented to Management Board in November. Adoption agencies have experienced Covid-19 related impact on timescales.

## Adopter Approvals

This gradual improvement in adopter sufficiency is evident in the increased numbers of ROI's during the year 2020/21. Whilst registrations appear to have slowed down, the numbers of

prospective adopters in the process, currently 87, suggests the service should see an increase in approvals in the current year, albeit, staffing capacity issues in the recruitment team are likely to have an impact.

Out of the 42 adopters who are approved without a child placed, 20 have a connection with a child and are in the process of either being linked or matched. 21 therefore, do not yet have a connection with a child i.e., a provisional link. Some of the adopters waiting over 12 months have specific matching criteria, in relation to ethnicity and are being considered for placements outside of the region.

## **5. Requirements on the Preparation of Adoption Report Regulations:**

### **5.1 Complaints**

There was one formal complaint about the service during the six-month period and this related to adopter applicants who were not recommended for approval by the agency. This is delayed in stage one due to a pending IRM hearing.

### **5.2 Staffing**

The service employs 32 qualified Social Workers on a permanent basis, along with six agency Social Workers, who are providing additional capacity due to vacant posts, sickness, maternity leave and additional demand created by Covid-19. Two agency Social Workers have been funded by the partner agencies for twelve months, to provide additional family finding capacity.

There are three Team Managers, with one each covering the thematic service areas. One of these posts (Family Finding) was vacant until September 2020, but a seconded Manager in that role was permanently appointed in quarter three. The panel team have two Panel Advisors along with a Panel Co-ordinator and three Panel Administrators, one of which is currently vacant.

Management capacity has been increased with the addition of a Service Manager, funded within the existing budget. This role was in the process of recruitment at year end and subsequently, recruited to on an interim basis, pending a permanent appointment.

Vacancy rates have remained low since the service went live and despite Covid-19, sickness and absence rates have been minimal during the full year period of 2020/21.

### **5.3 Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)**

There has been one referral to the IRM in the period and this has not yet been heard by the IRM panel. It relates to a non-approval of an adopter application.



## 6. Family Finding Activity:

### 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 – Children placed in year

LA / Trust	In House	Interagency	Total placed
Sandwell	11	24	35
Wolverhampton	14	24	38
Walsall	20	17	37
Dudley	10	4	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>124</b>

### 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 – Children placed via Foster for Adoption in year

LA/ Trust	In House	Interagency	Total
Sandwell	3	3	6
Wolverhampton	4	5	9
Walsall	5	1	6
Dudley	3	2	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>26</b>

Inter-agency usage for children placed via Foster for Adopt regulations is 42 percent.

### 1 April to 30 September 2021 – Children placed in quarter 1 & 2

LA/ Trust	In House	Interagency	Total placed
Sandwell	6	8	14
Wolverhampton	13	9	22
Walsall	6	4	10
Dudley	5	7	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>58</b>

## 48 percent of children placed were placed inter-agency/52 percent in house

### Children Placed Foster for Adopt – 1 April to 30 September 2021

LA / Trust	FFA Inhouse	FFA Interagency	Total
Dudley	1	1	2
Sandwell	8	2	10
Walsall	2	1	3
Wolverhampton	4	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>19</b>

### For children placed Foster for Adopt 79 percent were placed in house/21 percent inter-agency

The number of children placed in the half year is 58. This is slightly above the performance for the previous year (124 full year).

28 out of 58 children were placed inter-agency Therefore, inter-agency placements were made for 48 percent of children placed. Inter-agency usage at end of quarter four of the previous year was 56 percent, so this indicates an improvement in performance.

The spread of children placed/matched across the four partners significantly indicates some degree of variance in comparison with the previous year, given Wolverhampton is considerably higher than the other partners. The pro rata number for Dudley indicates an increase in performance is likely in the year.

Inter-agency usage in Wolverhampton and Walsall is lower than for the other partners.

It is also very positive that 15 out of 19 children placed via Foster for Adopt are placed with in house adopters and this should impact positively on performance as it is highly likely these children will be matched and placed for adoption during the remainder of the year.

## 7. Adoption Panels:

Adoption Panels were held on 24 occasions during the six month period. There are at least four panels a month for adoption matters to be heard. There is also flexibility within the panel system, allowing for extra and special panels to be arranged in order to enable additional cases and emergency matters to be heard, as and when directed by the courts. The service aims to avoid delay for children and ensures matters are dealt with in a timely manner.

The service has three adoption panel chairs. A fourth chair is in the process of being recruited.

The Agency Decision Makers from Wolverhampton make all the decisions regarding the suitability for approval of all prospective adopters. The SHOBPA decisions remain in the three Local Authorities and the Trust. Agency Decision Makers are very flexible with regard to early

decisions with regard to matches, in order to enable transitions that work best for the child, for example using school holidays.

Panels have made positive recommendations on 27 adopter approvals and 55 matches in the period. All recommendations made by panel have been positive, with the exception of one adopter approval. All panel recommendations have been supported by the ADM.

Panel continues to be supported by a very committed group of staff. There are 1.5 Panel Advisors, one part time Panel Co-ordinator and two full time equivalent Panel Administrators.

Panel continues to offer individual feedback to Social Workers, regarding quality of the paperwork and to the Local Authorities and the Trust, regarding delay for children. Panel are also open to constructive observations regarding their performance.

Feedback is also sought from adopters attending panel, which this is largely positive and includes comments such as “panel were warm and welcoming” and “panel members put us at ease”.

Panels continue to run virtually due to Covid-19 restrictions. Consideration is currently being given to the benefits of the virtual panel system and to what extent the system might remain virtual once restrictions are lifted. There have been clear benefits regarding adopter attendance and reducing regional travel for professionals.

## **8. 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 Service.

The Strategic Commissioning Board has continued to meet quarterly, supported by the commissioning lead from Dudley. The Chairing of this board has been with the Director of Children’s Services in Dudley during the six-month period.

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

Report completed by:



**Mark Tobin**  
Head of Service