

Corporate Parenting Board

Meeting to be held on: **15th February, 2021 AT 6.00 PM**

Meeting to be held via: **Microsoft Teams**

Public access to meeting via: <https://youtu.be/F1Br8LR8fcl>

MEMBERSHIP:

Chair: Councillor Wilson
Vice Chair: Councillor Jukes
Councillor Ferguson
Councillor Jeavons
Councillor M. Nazir
Councillor Neville
Councillor Statham

ADVISOR

Alison Jones (NHS Walsall CCG)

Note: Walsall Council encourages the public to exercise their right to attend meetings of Council, Cabinet and Committees. Agendas and reports are available for inspection from the Council's Democratic Services Team at the Council House, Walsall (Telephone 01922 654369) or on our website www.walsall.gov.uk.

Democratic Services, Council House, Lichfield Street, Walsall, WS1 1TW
Contact: Mrs N Gough ☎ 01922 654767 E-mail nikki.gough@walsall.gov.uk

ITEMS FOR BUSINESS

1.	Introductions and Apologies	
2.	Substitutions (if any)	
3.	Minutes To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11 th January, 2021.	
4.	NEET This report provides an update in regards to our Children and Young People, of which we have corporate responsibility for that are not in Education, Employment or Training.	<u>Enclosed</u>
5.	Adoption Service An update from Adoption@Heart, a Regional Adoption Agency, providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Birmingham Councils.	<u>Enclosed</u>
6.	Fostering Service Annual Report 2019-2020 This report summarises the activity of the Fostering Service from 1 st April 2019 to 31 st March 2020.	<u>Enclosed</u>
7.	Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring To consider performance monitoring information for quarter 3.	<u>Enclosed</u>
8.	Work Programme To consider the work programme of the Corporate Parenting Board.	
9.	Date of Next Meeting To note that the date of the next meeting will be 22 nd March 2021.	

The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012

Specified pecuniary interests

The pecuniary interests which are specified for the purposes of Chapter 7 of Part 1 of the Localism Act 2011 are the interests specified in the second column of the following:

Subject	Prescribed description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	<p>Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by a member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of a member.</p> <p>This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Regulations (Consolidation) Act 1992.</p>
Contracts	<p>Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority:</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	<p>Any tenancy where (to a member's knowledge):</p> <p>(a) the landlord is the relevant authority;</p> <p>(b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.</p>
Securities	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where:</p> <p>(a) that body (to a member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and</p> <p>(b) either:</p> <p>(i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</p> <p>(ii) if the share capital of that body is more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth</p>

	of the total issued share capital of that class.
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Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)

Access to information: Exempt information

Part 1

Descriptions of exempt information: England

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6. Information which reveals that the authority proposes:
 - (a) to give any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
 - (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.
8. Information being disclosed during a meeting of a Scrutiny and Performance Panel when considering flood risk management functions which:
 - (a) Constitutes a trades secret;
 - (b) Its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the risk management authority);
 - (c) It was obtained by a risk management authority from any other person and its disclosure to the public by the risk management authority would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that other person.

Corporate Parenting Board

Monday 11th January 2021 at 6.00 p.m.

Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams

Held in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020; and conducted according to the Councils Standing Orders for Remote Meetings and those set out in the Council's Constitution.

Board Members Present:

Councillor T. Wilson (Chair)
Councillor. T. Jukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor. K. Ferguson
Councillor L. Jeavons
Councillor M. Statham

Officers Present

Michelle Cummings	Children and Young Persons Champion
David Hughes	Children and Young Persons Champion
Elise Hopkins	Interim Director of Customer Engagement
Alison Jones	Designated Nurse LAC (Clinical Commissioning Group)
Colleen Male	Director, Children's Social Work
Zoe Morgan	Group Manager (Corporate Parenting)
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service (Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services)
Donna Smith	Named LAC Nurse (Walsall Healthcare Trust)

Welcome

At this point in the meeting, the Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, and explaining the rules of procedure and legal context in which the meeting was being held. He also directed members of the public viewing the meeting to the papers, which could be found on the Council's Committee Management Information system (CMIS) webpage. Members confirmed that they could both see and hear the proceedings.

133/20

Introductions and Apologies

There were no apologies for the duration of the meeting.

134/20 **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

135/20 **Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meetings held on 2nd November 2020 were submitted.

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd November, 2020, copies having previously been circulated to each Member of the Board, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record.

136/20 **Young People Engagement**

A report was submitted (see annexed). The Children and Young Persons Champion presented the report and highlighted the salient points.

The Board were advised that young people met as part of an advisory panel and shared their experiences; this would contribute to the 'Participation Strategy Plan'. The 'mini influencers' and the 'influencer' groups were described, these groups were held weekly and enabled the young people to share their views and build connections.

The role of young people as health champions was discussed, and the Board were advised that monthly meetings would be held with young people.

A Member asked if there was a sustainable model for the 'children in care council', to ensure the continued engagement of young people. Officers confirmed that this was the case and the increased use of technology (due to the pandemic) had assisted this.

The Board were informed that Officers were supporting young people to deliver respect training online and ensuring that everyone felt comfortable in delivering training in this way.

Information provided to young people coming into care had been redesigned to be more child friendly and the Board would welcome a copy of this information.

Resolved (by assent)

1. Young people continue to be involved in the recruitment of staff, where possible.

2. The Children and Young People's Champion was thanked for her hard work, as she left the Authority for a new role.

3. That the Young People Engagement report be noted

137/20

Summary of Audit of Health Passports

The Designated Nurse LAC spoke to the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board were informed that the CCG had audited health passports over a period of six months. As part of the process young people had given feedback that they would prefer a digital passport rather than a paper copy and suggested that the format needed updating. Currently this document was not shared with Children's Services and was provided for young people's use only. It was suggested that greater involvement with Personal Advisors and Social Workers in relation to the health passports would be beneficial in the future.

Members were advised that it was hoped to introduce health passports at an earlier stage in a young person's life. Locally when promoted with young people it was called a 'Health History Document'. This was a basic health information tool and its purpose was to assist access to health services in the future. Limitations accessing health information were acknowledged by the Board.

A Member sought reassurance that communication channels were open between Social Workers / Personal Advisors and Health colleagues. The Health advisors stated that there were no barriers to this but improvements could be made and clarity should be achieved around roles and responsibilities.

Resolved (by assent)

The Summary of Audit of Health Passports report was noted and in the future performance data is included in the next report to the Board.

138/20

Local Offer to Care Leavers

The Board were informed that the 'Local Offer' published information in relation to services offered to care leavers and other services that may assist care leavers to transition into adulthood and independent living. This included information on financial support, housing, health, education and housing. Members were advised that discretionary support varied across Local Authorities. A significant amount of work had taken place in relation to the 'Local Offer'; an example of this was the council tax exemption scheme for care leavers up to the age of 25' living in and out of the borough. There were a number of young people at 25 years old, who stayed involved with children's services, and often supported younger care leavers. Consideration was being given to incentivise this. Work was also underway to identify how care leavers could be supported in the workplace to be successful in their chosen career.

The Board were assured that a significant amount of work was taking place to ensure that Walsall's final 'local offer' would be ready in April 2021.

Members acknowledged that this was a complex area, and sought reassurance that the correct signposting had been included to support young people. The Group Manager stated that it would be ensured that social workers were able to support care leavers through the document and an online platform. It was clarified that the 'setting up home grant' of £2,000 was a national figure, although as part of Walsall's Local Offer this figure would be reviewed. This was welcomed by the Board, as it had been raised by a young person at the Shadow Board.

In response to a Member query the Board were informed that caseloads were being closely monitored with the recruitment of an additional Personal Advisor.

The Mental Health support provided to Care Leavers was considered and the Board were informed that this was much needed and a firm offer from health was needed. Work was underway with the CCG to consider how the emotional wellbeing of young people could be supported. The Health Advisor suggested that the Children's Commissioner was invited to a future meeting to talk about this issue.

Resolved

That the Local Offer to Care Leavers report be noted.

Housing and accommodations needs for Care Leavers

The Head of Service presented the salient points of the report (annexed) which sets out the summary of findings of a joint audit undertaken by Money Home Job and Children's Services in respect of children leaving care as they transition into adulthood. The Board were advised that fifty young people who had left/were leaving care had been reviewed, and taken part in focus groups. This has resulted in the identification of three key areas for improvement for transition planning for care leavers:

- Staying Put planning and support.
- Preparation for living independently.
- Supporting care leavers to move into settled accommodation as they leave care or when they are in custody.

The legal responsibilities of the Authority were highlighted, and the key responsibilities of issues of consideration were also considered in order to prepare young people for adult life. Members were advised that there were several options for housing when young people left care, which were described, to the Board. Members were given further detail on actions that came out of the audit, and how the service would achieve these.

The Board were asked to consider a number of recommendations, which Members discussed.

Further to a query from a Member, Officers explained that once a Care Leaver was housed in appropriate accommodation, they were no longer eligible for priority housing status. It was noted that this may impact on their ability to move accommodation. The Interim Director of Customer Engagement stated that if their housing need was great or their current accommodation was no longer suitable they may receive gold banding again.

Resolved that:

- 1. The development of a training flat is costed and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration (February 2021).**
- 2. The decision to evict a care leaver from local authority housing accommodation will only be made by the Director of Customer Engagement (or a delegated substitute) following consultation with the Director of Children's Social Work. Whenever safe, and practical to do so, these Directors will jointly develop a plan, with the aim of preventing the eviction from occurring.**
- 3. The Board asks Walsall Council to develop a rent guarantor scheme with Registered Social Landlord/s in Walsall and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration (March 2021).**
- 4. The Local Authority meets the first month's rent for young people to reduce the risk of young people entering debt and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration (February 2021).**
- 5. The Board asks the Housing and Welfare Team to explore the costs associated with improving the offer to young people leaving care to help support them with the expense of setting up and managing their home. A business plan will be developed, and taken to Cabinet, to seek approval for any additional funds that may be required to support the development of this scheme (March 2021).**
- 6. The Corporate Parenting Board visit the range of accommodation options provided for children leaving care and care leavers, when it is safe to do so.**

140/20

Work Programme

The work programme was considered by the Board. Officers were asked to provide feedback to the Board on issues that were raised as part of the Shadow Board. It was agreed that feedback would be provided to the Chair. It was suggested that a report was scheduled on the number of young people in care that are NEET, to provide assurance to the Board.

Resolved

That the work programme be noted.

Termination of Meeting

The meeting terminated at 8.00 p.m.

The date of the next meeting would be 15th February 2021.

NEET

Executive Summary

This report provides an update in regards to our Children and Young People, of which we have corporate responsibility for that are not in Education, Employment or Training. It aims to give an update of the current data along with an overview of the current initiatives aimed to improve opportunities for care experienced young people.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board

To update the Board and provide an overview of Walsall's NEET figures.

Recommendations

- The Board is asked to note the Corporate Parenting responsibilities of the Council with regard to ensuring Children in Care and Care Leavers have access to education and training opportunities that will assist them in their future.
- To note and endorse the proposed recommendations as set out in the report.

Background papers: None

Resource and legal considerations

Local authority duties to young people and care leavers are set out in the following legislation:

Children Act 1989

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

Children and Social Work Act 2017

Education and Skills Act 2008 (sections 10, 12 and 68)

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 sets out various duties that local authorities have towards young people both in and leaving care, including those relating to providing support with Education and training. These duties are:

- Ensure all young people have an up to date Pathway Plan.
- Discuss options with young people and involve them in decisions
- Consider their education, training and employment needs
- Offer support and guidance in relation to their educational needs
- Provide financial assistance (if required) to attend education and training courses.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 sets out various duties in regards to improving decision making, and support for looked after and previously looked after

children in England and Wales. This includes the extended duty to young people having left care up to the age of 25.

Education and Skills Act 2008 (sections 10, 12 and 68)

The DfE provides the framework to increase participation and reduce the proportion of young people NEET. Local Authorities have existing duties to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training. These duties are to:

- Secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people who are over compulsory school age but under 19 and for those up to age 25 with a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA) or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan in their area. To fulfil this, local authorities must have a strategic overview of the provision available in their area and to identify and resolve gaps in provision.
- Make available to all young people aged 13-19 and to those up to age 25 with an LDA or EHCP, support that will encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training.
- Local authorities must promote the effective participation in education and training of young people aged 16, 17 years old in their area with a view to ensuring that those persons fulfil the duty to participate in education or training. A key element of this is identifying the young people in their area who are covered by the duty to participate and encouraging them to find a suitable education or training place.
- Local authorities must make arrangements to identify those aged 16, 17 years old and up to their 18th birthday who are not participating in education or training.

Performance management

Corporate Parenting Board ensures everyone works together to fulfil the corporate parenting role and to hold each other to account for making this happen.

- it acts as the visible organisational champion for looked after children and young people and care leavers, promoting their rights, entitlements and aspirations;
- the mobilisation and optimum use of resources available to get the best chance of success for children in care and to support care leavers to positively

transition to adulthood and independence.

Reducing inequalities

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017- 2020 sets out the response to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and families. By being effective Corporate Parents for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, we collectively seek to redress the disadvantage that looked after children and care leavers face.

Contact Officers

Zoe Morgan, Group Manager - Corporate Parenting



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	The current picture of NEET's in Walsall												
1.0	Introduction												
1.1	<p>Care leavers have significantly poorer educational and life outcomes than the general population on average, and are underrepresented in higher education. All universities and colleges must now consider care leavers in their access and participation plans in order to encourage and support them into higher education but we are far from getting this right. With only 6% of care leavers nationally going into higher education, the need to ensure that the most vulnerable young people in society have the best possible chance at success and as such a number of initiatives have emerged in order to try and bridge this vast divide.</p> <p>Likewise, in regards to training and employment opportunities, many of our care leavers have not been afforded the stability that allows them to gain the skills that would make them more employable within the job market. This often leads to poor outcomes in all areas of their lives including maintaining suitable accommodation, experiencing poverty, mental health issues and involvement in criminality.</p>												
1.2	<p>There are a range of factors that should be considered when assessing the young person's readiness to access Employment Education and Training which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the young person's wishes and feelings • their current circumstances i.e accommodation and support network • the aspirations of carers/corporate parents • the planning and support that is offered prior to them prior to reaching 16 i.e. settled placements as most of our young people that entre university are from stable foster placements. • the personal characteristics and ability of the young person • their understanding of the support on offer to them 												
1.3	<p>In Walsall, we currently have 290 Care Leavers of which 97 young people aged between 17-24 are not in Education, Training or Employment. This means that our EET figure (those that are in education, employment and training) currently sits at 66.3% and the NEET at 33.3%. (Please refer to appendix 1).</p> <p>The breakdown in ages is as follows:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Age</th><th>Number who are NEET</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>17</td><td>7</td></tr> <tr> <td>18</td><td>9</td></tr> <tr> <td>19</td><td>21</td></tr> <tr> <td>20</td><td>19</td></tr> <tr> <td>21</td><td>26</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Age	Number who are NEET	17	7	18	9	19	21	20	19	21	26
Age	Number who are NEET												
17	7												
18	9												
19	21												
20	19												
21	26												

	22	9	
	23	4	
	24	2	
1.4	<p>Within the cohort of young people that are classified as NEET:</p> <p>16 are not in education, employment or training due to pregnancy or parenting 21 are not in education, employment or training due to illness or disability</p> <p>This leaves a total of 60 young people that should be actively receiving support to improve their NEET status. However, other factors will impact on this as not all of the 60 will be 'job ready' or able to receive the right level of support owing to a number of factors. For example:</p> <p>6 young people are currently in custody. Education provisions within prisons are currently suspended owing to Covid restrictions and this will ultimately impact upon offender's job prospects once they return to the community. We continue to liaise with our colleagues in probation and the prison service as part of our pathway planning to assist our young people in returning to the community.</p> <p>6 young people are UASC and have no recourse to public funds. Whilst they are able to access educational support through ESOL, they are unable to gain employment owing to their immigration status.</p> <p>3 have a significant/serious offending history which limits their options for work and training opportunities.</p> <p>A further 12 young people are struggling with independence and are receiving significant support in order to ensure some stability. This sometimes means that their ability to enter the job market or focus on education and training is severely compromised. Other support such as stabilising their mental health or resolving accommodation issues is a priority and once resolved, a greater focus on education and training can begin.</p> <p>As you can see from the data above, the largest proportion of those classified as NEET are within the 19 – 21 age range at 68%. The over 21 ages also make up 15% of NEET out of the 97 total. This breakdown of the data allows us to look at how we can target the support and which age ranges appear to be the most affected.</p> <p>As with all Local Authorities, the pandemic has impacted our young people that were working in industries that have been most affected by the restrictions. We have had a number of young people that were furloughed as well as others that have lost their job entirely. In discussions regionally, we understand that all other areas have seen a change in their NEET figures with Warwickshire, Shropshire, Telford and Solihull all reporting a decrease of their young people in education, employment and training.</p> <p>In regards to our 16/17 year olds, 86 continue to be supported by the Virtual School and of these: 14 attend 6th form 40 attend college</p>		

	<p>1 is in the army 2 on council apprenticeships 1 is employed 8 are with a training provider 20 are NEET (of which this includes the 7 that are highlighted above within the Care Leavers data as there is an overlap in regards to the 17 year olds).</p>
1.5	<p>As a way of tracking our young people here in Walsall, we hold monthly meetings called NAG (Neet Action Group) that comprises of a number of key professionals and agencies. These meetings are chaired by Lorraine Thompson, Virtual School Head and include representatives from Transitions and Leaving Care Service and Black Country Impact. More recently we have extended this invitation to representatives from DWP and the wider Walsall Works programme of which the Black Country Impact is a part of. The difference between the two being that Walsall Works offers support to all Walsall residents over the age of 16 whilst Black Country Impact supports Care Leavers across the region.</p>
2.0	<p>Walsall Council in house programmes for NEET</p>
2.1	<p>Virtual School – their role in supporting 16/18 year olds into Education, Employment & Training (EET)</p> <p>The Virtual School is responsible for liaising and working in partnership with agencies to support the education of looked after/vulnerable children. Lorraine Thompson is the Virtual school Lead and leads on strategic planning and developments, policy, new initiatives and service delivery.</p> <p>The Virtual School have a dedicated Post 16 team comprising of a key worker and careers adviser and mentor who work with young people aged 14-18 to ensure they are in appropriate post 16 education and are given the right support advice and guidance to make informed career choices:</p> <p>Our post 16 Key Worker</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attends Personal Education Plan meetings for young people aged 16 & 17 • Attends SEN annual reviews for young people with an EHCP • Works closely with schools, colleges and training providers to ensure our young people are receiving the right support • Attends the monthly NAG meeting • Provides resources/equipment to help young people moving into EET <p>Our Careers advisor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides advice and guidance on KS4 options • Delivers careers drop in sessions to young people in year 10 & 11 • Holds group career sessions in secondary schools • Support young people with college and university applications • Identify appropriate post 16 provision for young people who are NEET • Provide advice and guidance on financial support moving into higher and further education <p>Our Mentor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports young people to remove barriers to participation • Advocates on behalf of the young person with schools and college

- Attends interviews/meetings with young people

Since the start of the pandemic, the virtual school have continued to have face to face and virtual meetings with our young people to provide careers advice. They have recently supported 10 young people with university applications for this forthcoming year.

They have also supported 3 young people onto a Council apprenticeship and are in the process of appointing a care leaver onto a full time Teaching Assistant apprenticeship within the Virtual School.

The Virtual School continues to provide support and guidance to our young people who are currently NEET by identifying appropriate provision and/or referring them onto other services such as IMPACT and Walsall Works.

Alongside the work of the virtual school, staff we also have other mechanisms in place to enable us to identify young people who may become NEET and need additional support at an early age. They have incorporated the Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) into the personal education plans. This is a scoring system that enables us to identify young people who may become NEET so support and resources can be put in place before the young person leaves school in year 11.

In addition, as part of our reviews into pathway plans, we are incorporating a revised assessment of need to be undertaken by the social worker once a young person reaches the age of 15 years and 9 months. This assessment will focus on independence planning and will inform the Pathway Plan that replaces the Care Plan at the age of 16. Whilst this assessment will focus on all areas of preparation for independence, a large focus will be on the education and training opportunities that should be afforded to our young people.

There are currently over 40 young people signed up to our 'Aspire to University' (A2U) Project which is run by Wolverhampton university, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Staffordshire Virtual Schools to encourage more young people to move onto further and higher education.

They continue to work alongside Walsall Works and Endless Possibilities to develop a pre apprenticeship scheme for care leavers which will provide longer term support for young people prior to moving onto an apprenticeship. This is an ongoing piece of work that will feed into our Local Offer for Care Leavers.

The Pupil premium funding received by the DfE to help support looked after children aged 5-16 is extended to help support care leavers up to the age of 19. The funding has been used to provide equipment and resources to enable young people to move from NEET to EET i.e. uniform and equipment, travel expenses, driving lessons, extra tuition and online training courses.

As part of our in house support to children and young people, we have access to a dedicated careers advisor based within our Virtual School. As part of her role, she is able to provide support with CV writing, applications to colleges and universities, finding suitable university accommodation and other practical support that may be required. In addition, our Personal Advisors have supported young people with

visiting university and college campuses to open days as well as signposting information in regards to relevant training and employment opportunities.

Case Study Examples:

OG was in year 12 in a large further education college. He was completing a Bricklaying course, whilst also studying for his GCSE English and Maths qualification. OG's attendance had previously dropped, but this was due to illness and a bereavement earlier in the year. OG was working hard to pass his Maths GCSE but had struggled and to re-sit the exam a number of times. He also struggled with homework activities and deadlines, and this issue was a concern raised by school staff. Unfortunately, prior to starting year 13, OG was informed that he had not passed his Math GCSE and therefore would be unable to move onto the next year of the Bricklaying course. This resulted in OG becoming NEET.

Our careers advisor worked closely with OG and the college to assess possible options in order to prevent OG from remaining NEET. We also arranged meetings with the college to understand what support had been in place for OG, and challenge the decision to exclude him from the course. Through the support of the Virtual School, OG was able to find an alternative course that he was happy to pursue and he is now doing well within his chosen field.

CP had achieved good grades across her GCSE's and intended to study at university as she had aspirations to become a nurse. Whilst in year 12, her grades and attendance dropped and this coincided with the sudden end of her long-term care placement. Concerns were raised about CP's academic achievement and motivation to engage in higher education. The Social Worker and PA were concerned that CP no longer intended on studying at university, and that she was feeling unsure of herself and her capabilities. In order to support CP to achieve her aspirations, our careers advisor worked with her, providing practical and emotional support focused on developing a careers pathway.

The goals if this intervention was to:

- Support the young person to improve self-esteem.*
- Provide advice and guidance about further education and careers options.*
- Support the young person to apply to university.*

We were keen to ensure that CP's wishes and aspirations were given priority, and therefore provided information about a variety of options open to CP. This impartial advice included guidance about further education such as university courses and qualifications, and apprenticeships. We also discussed alternative routes and opportunities including a gap year, or a year in industry. This conversation allowed CP to open up about her anxieties relating to university. Eventually we were able to secure a place for CP in a university to study for a Foundation degree in Paediatric Nursing. CP was able to enrol onto her university course, and was also supported her to access relevant bursaries.

CP was also introduced to the Care Leaver support team at the university ensuring that she would be supported whilst studying.

Transitions and Leaving Care Service

As part of our support to our young people, Personal Advisors work closely with partners in the VS, DWP, Impact and education and training providers.

Our links with local colleges are good and regular discussion with them in regards to education and training options for our young people takes place. This has often led to bespoke packages of support being offered to those that require it. For example, K is one of our young people attending Walsall College undertaking a painting and decorating course. As a parent herself, she has overcome enormous struggles and at one stage was fearful that she would lose the care of her child. Through a robust package of support by both her PA, family and the college, she has made great progress and is now looking to be involved in mentoring other young people in similar situations.

Across the service we currently have 14 young people at University with another 10 potentially applying for this forthcoming September (4 of which are social work Degrees). There is a slightly larger number making applications for this year as some young people chose to defer a year owing to the pandemic. We have been offering additional support to our young people currently at university as some have struggled with the online learning and have felt despondent by their experiences not being what they would have hoped.

As part of the initial support we offer to our university students, Personal Advisors work jointly with the Virtual School to identify places, secure university accommodation and link in with the student leads. Many universities across the country have a dedicated support for care leavers and so we have now developed a good portfolio of those that are particularly supportive and can advise our young people accordingly.

In order to ensure the best level of support, we also signpost our young people to other agencies such as the Care Leavers Association and Propel Project (part of the Become Charity), both of which offer support and guidance to care leavers seeking to enter into higher education and further training opportunities.

We also identify and signpost our young people with a range of training and development opportunities. For example, we have one young person that has recently been accepted on the civil service internship programme within the business, energy and industrial strategy department. As part of his preparation, his Personal Advisor, along with the VS assisted him with interview techniques in order to boost his confidence. He was delighted to be accepted and we have high hopes for his success.

We also have access to Walsall's 'Endless Possibilities' Apprenticeship Programme. This targeted Programme for Care Leavers was specifically established to provide those Care Leavers who are interested in pursuing a career within the local authority, the experience and qualifications needed to secure permanent employment in order to achieve adult independence and economic wellbeing.

The commitment was to ring-fence 17 Apprenticeships vacancies (around 10% of our overall apprenticeship target) for Care Leavers. It managed to exceed that initial target last year as 20 young people were initially recruited as service areas were able

	<p>to apply for a wage subsidy through Walsall Works to offset a proportion of the salary costs for the young person. The care leaver is paid the national minimum rates of pay for age and not the apprentice rate per hour in order to support the young person's costs of living independently. The young person receives all the usual Walsall Council terms and conditions of employment including paid holidays, staff benefits including access to the Council's wider learning and development offer. Walsall Works Programme makes a contribution to the salary costs for the Care Leaver for the first year and this is calculated based on the age of the young person, typically between 40% - 50% of the annual salary costs.</p> <p>Two of our young people have done exceptionally well with one having recently completed his level 3 as a Personal Trainer and another about to embark on her higher apprenticeship at Level 4 in Revenue.</p> <p>In terms of other apprenticeship schemes, we have had 2 young people accepted on the NHS Live and Work apprenticeship programme. This is a scheme set up regionally with local hospitals and offers a variety of apprenticeships within the NHS as well as on site living facilities. In addition to this, we have a number of our young people working within the NHS and Social Care that have played an active role throughout the pandemic. Their efforts have made us extremely proud.</p> <p>As a way of ensuring that our young people have access to as many opportunities as possible, we attend regional meetings with other Local Authorities across the region as well as attending sessions offered through the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum. We have also currently applying to be a part of a Local Authority Peer Learning Group around increasing employment opportunities for care experienced young people. A small number of LA's will be chosen to take part in a total of six sessions throughout this year by showcasing a project that they are currently working on of which we hope to use our pre-apprenticeship programme.</p>
3.0	Regional and National Initiatives
3.1	Walsall Works and Black Country Impact
3.2	<p>Since its inception in 2012, the Walsall Works programme has supported its residents, particularly young people aged 16-24 years, to improve their skills base through access to functional skills, upskilling in the workforce, apprenticeships and retraining.</p> <p>Despite restrictions in relation to Covid-19 and limited face to face engagement over the last few months, the programme has still been able to maintain delivery in some partner venues alongside a calendar of virtual roadshows, a virtual expo, events, sector specific sessions and continue to job match employer vacancies with local people in a number of sectors.</p> <p>The proportion of working age adults (16-64) with no qualifications has fallen gradually since 2004 demonstrating improvement in skills against all ages. However, Walsall does continue to underperform compared with the national averages. Walsall has a lower proportion of non-qualified adults than those in the West</p>

	<p>Midlands Combined region, and is significantly better than the Black Country average. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walsall: 21,000 (12.7%) of working age had no qualifications • Wolverhampton: 28,200 (17.3%) of working age had no qualifications • Dudley: 31,000 (16.4%) of working age had no qualifications • Sandwell: 41,600 (20.3%) of working age had no qualifications <p>Black Country Impact is made up of 5 delivery partners across the region in order to offer free training, help and advice to our care leavers in securing jobs and training opportunities. It is funded by the European Social Fund and Youth Improvement Initiative and can offer practical and financial assistance such as clothing for interviews, travel cards and childcare provision.</p> <p>Through collaboratively working together across teams they are maximising the chances of success for our most vulnerable young people i.e. those with SEND, care leavers, young offenders, teenage parents, and those at risk of long term unemployment. The pandemic has seen a greater rise in the volume of young benefit claimants nationwide and many of our care leavers have been impacted upon by working in industries that have been significantly affected by the pandemic.</p> <p>In Walsall, we currently have two Impact workers that work in partnership with the Personal Advisers based in our Transitions and Leaving Care Service. All of our eligible young people are referred to this service and are routinely discussed as part of the monthly NAG meetings. Updates are provided as to the work that has been undertaken and whether the young people are engaging with the support on offer. As a way of tracking the success, a log of contacts is kept by the Impact workers and shared with TLC Managers in order to ensure that all opportunities are explored and actions followed.</p> <p>Case Study Examples:</p> <p><i>C is 23 and has struggled to maintain suitable employment for a number of years. He was referred to Impact and has been supported by them as well as his Personal Advisor to complete a pre apprenticeship programme. After exploring his options and looking at roles that would fit in with his own interests, he is now training to become an electrician.</i></p> <p><i>R has been difficult to engage and had not responded well to offers of support in the past as the thought of being in an education setting or working environment was a struggle for him. He was provided with a laptop and dongle and through accessing LearnPlay, has been able to complete a number of online courses. He is currently completing his English and Maths with a view to going on to complete a Website Design Course. For him, access to learning and development at home has meant that he has been able to develop his skills and expand his options for when he is ready to explore employment opportunities.</i></p>
4.0	Kickstart Programme
4.1	The Kickstart Scheme is a national DWP programme and was announced by the Chancellor in July 2020, as a way to reduce the huge influx of young benefit claimants who will be displaced due to lack of employment opportunity within

	<p>businesses facing economic challenges. Kickstart provides funding to employers to create 6 month placements for 16 to 24 year olds who are in receipt of benefits. Walsall Council will act as a 'gateway' organisation and will administer the programme which aims to make available 150 local work placements. Each placement is a minimum of 25 hours per week and is paid at minimum wage. The Kickstart programme will have skills and training embedded through the work placement to ensure that young people are equipped to take up employment once the 6 month placement has ended.</p> <p>As a way of embedding this in our support to our Care Leavers, representatives from the Department for Work and Pensions presented the programme to Personal Advisors so that this could be incorporated into our Pathway Planning. Walsall Works has now launched its Kickstart offer that went live this month, Jan 2021 and so we hope to ensure that this opportunity is offered to our care leavers. (See Appendix 2).</p>
5.0	Care Leavers Covenant
5.1	<p>In July 2016, the Government published a major policy document 'Keep on Caring' to support young people from care to independence. A key policy commitment in the paper is a strategic pledge to introduce a Care Leaver Covenant. The Covenant is a promise made by the private, public and voluntary sectors to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them to live independently. Whilst all young people who leave care at 16, 17 or 18 are afforded statutory support from the local authority in the region in which they live, wider society also needs to play a part. In order to provide a greater level of support at this crucial stage during the transition of care leavers to adulthood, the covenant aims to provide care leavers with opportunities to enter the world of work, such as offering work experience placements, work shadowing placements, internships, traineeships and apprenticeships.</p> <p>A number of our young people have been referred to the covenant and some have received good levels of support which has opened up opportunities that may not have been available to them. One of our young people has also recently been filmed offering some feedback on his experiences with the covenant as part of their promotional material.</p> <p>As part of our work with the Care Leavers Covenant, we have been consulting with Local Universities and Colleges to offer additional support to care leavers attending higher education provisions. The Covenant aims to employ regional Covenant Progression Coordinators based within education provisions so that care leavers receive access to support both during and post study. This initiative is currently only in the early consultation stages but interest has been high and meetings with Local Authorities across the region have now taken place to move this forward.</p>
6.0	Summary and Recommendations:
6.1	<p>Overall our NEET data is comparable with what we are seeing regionally and as we progress with some of the initiatives outlined above, the landscape is likely to continue to improve. We are particularly hopeful that the kickstart programme will allow local businesses to offer our young people opportunities in sectors that may not have previously been available to them and open up jobs that will inevitably assist our</p>

local economy.

We are currently looking at ways in which we can widen our scope as a service and increase our engagement with local providers and education provisions so that the opportunities and initiatives are shared more frequently. Rather than open up the invitation to our in house NAG meetings, the view is that a separate steering group could be formed in order for local employers and education providers to share opportunities at a regional forum. As such, I am currently consulting with the Care Leavers Covenant as to whether this is something that they could assist us with. Although on just launched, this may also be something that is offered as part of the Kickstart programme.

As a number of our young people have expressed an interest in joining the police or armed forces, we are looking at ways in which we can engage these agencies in how we can support care leavers through the application process. We understand that West Midlands Police offer an apprenticeship scheme and so we are looking at whether there is any scope for these to be ring fenced for care leavers.

Whilst we currently have a good level of careers advice/support for our 16/17 year olds through the virtual school, there is a gap in regards to the support offered to them post 18. This is because Impact only work with those that are NEET and so the lower level of advice and support (what was once offered through connexions), no longer exists. In order to overcome this, some areas have employed specific PA's within their leaving care services to plug this gap but for us here in Walsall there is currently no such resource and may be something that should be considered.

As part of our Local Offer to Care Leavers, we are in the process of designing a pre apprenticeship programme that aims to ensure that all of our young people that wish to join the workforce, are fully equipped to do so. This will include tailoring specific roles around our care leavers so that they can have a 'taste' of what options may be available to them and incentivise them to move into certain fields at a pace that will ensure their success. This is a joint project with the Virtual School and our Apprenticeship Programme Lead and will be devised by the end of March 2021.

We are also planning to build on our support to those young people leaving custody as the current issues relating to lack of education and support currently in prisons is going to leave some of our young people more vulnerable once they return to the community. There is not currently any focused work taking place but our aim is to complete an audit and dip sample some of our recent young people to see what gaps/key themes that we can identify that we can pick up with partner agencies. This piece of work will be completed by the end of April 2021.

As the impact of the pandemic continues, it may be that the number of our young people actively seeking employment continues to remain at the current level. The Office for National Statistics is due to release its next report on NEET figures nationally in March and so we will then get a greater scope of the landscape nationally. We will continue to link in with regional groups and local agencies to ensure that any opportunities that may arise are identified and if possible, adopted here in Walsall.

Zoe Morgan

Group Manager – Corporate Parenting

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KICKSTART SCHEME

Walsall Works is supporting local businesses to access funding from the Government's Kickstart scheme to create jobs for unemployed young people.

By creating a **Kickstart** job placement, businesses will be helping young people who are at risk of being unemployed in the long term.



Walsall Works

Established in 2012, Walsall Works is a Council funded programme designed to support local people with finding jobs, apprenticeships and training.

The programme provides in-work and out-of-work support to our residents as well as supporting local businesses.

Our expert team of Employment Advisors offer a wealth of experience in supporting and engaging young people. Our Employer Engagement Officers provide specialist support to our local businesses.

Walsall Works can provide a mentoring service to both your business and your **Kickstart** placement through a wraparound employability package.

Kickstart

Businesses can use the **Kickstart** scheme to create new 6-month job placements for young people who are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment.

Funding is available for 100% of the relevant National Minimum Wage for 25 hours a week, plus associated employer National Insurance contributions and employer minimum automatic enrolment contributions.

Walsall businesses can register their interest in offering a placement by emailing walsallworks@walsall.gov.uk

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Who can apply for funding?

Any organisation, regardless of size, can apply for funding. The job placements created with **Kickstart** funding must be new jobs. They must not:

- Replace existing or planned vacancies
- Cause existing employees or contractors to lose or reduce their employment

The **Kickstart** job placements must be:

- 6 months in duration
- A minimum of 25 hours per week
- Pay the national minimum wage
- Should not require the young person to undertake extensive training before they begin the job placement



For further information about this scheme contact:

walsallworks@walsall.gov.uk

or visit walsallwork.com

or call **01922 654353** or **07464 495183**



Walsall Council



Walsall Works will act as a Gateway organisation to support businesses who have less than 30 job placements with the application process. Walsall Works will act on the employers behalf and apply for the **Kickstart** scheme.

All job placements need to help the participants to develop their skills and experience. Walsall Works can offer wraparound support to businesses for:

Pre-Kickstart

- Identify the business needs and scope out the new job roles
- Agree the job description and promote the vacancy
- Pre-screen candidates for employers
- Identify and recruit the best candidate for the job placement
- Conduct workplace risk assessments
- Pre-employment preparation for the young person with key skills
- Identify any support needs for the placement eg travel, clothing
- Embed young person into the role
- Trouble-shoot any employer or young person concerns or queries
- Enrol onto in-work employability or vocational training
- Confirm wraparound support package

On-Kickstart

- Finalise induction process for the placement
- Agree the young persons individual learning plan with the employer
- Mentoring / coaching support to employers
- Pastoral support for the young person to retain participation in the placement
- Tailored work portfolio to be completed throughout job placement
- Access to support services to address any personal barriers ie housing, debt, health
- Monthly keeping in touch and review meetings with the job placement
- Support with long term careers advice and goal setting for the young person
- Real time labour market intelligence on vacancies and electronic jobs bulletins
- Help with preparing a CV, completing job applications and interview techniques
- Priority invitations to local job fairs hosted by Walsall Works and its partners
- Access to additional government training for the business ie skills support for workforce
- Delivery of informal learning and access to programmes to optimise retention in work
- Production of promotional material including case studies for media campaigns
- Promotion on our website and social media channels including, Twitter and Facebook
- Access to enhanced business growth advice, support and grants from the Council and specialist business services

Post-Kickstart

- An offer of employment or apprenticeship with the host employer
- Agree in-work training and support for the young person
- Comprehensive post placement review
- Support with compiling employer reference for young person
- Support to apply for new progression opportunities with local employers
- Progression to new employment, apprenticeship or full time education
- Help with signing back to Universal Credit



To summarise Walsall Works will:

- Gather information from you about the job placements you would like to offer
- Use this information to submit an online application on your behalf
- Help to recruit the right placement
- Pass on the relevant payments made by DWP to you
- Provide wraparound support to your business and the job placement





Report title: **Adoption Service Report**

 • **30 September 2019 to 31 March 2020 &**
 • **01 April 2020 to 30 September 2020**

Date of report: 22 January 2021

To: Walsall 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 jointly covers the full year 2019/20 and the interim period of six months 1 April to 30 September 2020.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 30 September 2020.

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

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

As at 31 March 2020 there were 22 children subject to placement orders, but not yet placed with an adoptive family. Out of these 4 had been subject to a change of plan so 18 had an active plan of adoption. Of these 18, 6 were matched and waiting to be placed as at 31 March and a further 4 were linked to adoptive families but not yet placed. Therefore, 8 children were in active family finding

Timescales for the 18 children waiting at 31 March 2020

Less than 3 months:	0
Between 3 and 6 months:	0
Between 6 and 12 months:	8
Between 12 and 24 months:	9
Children waiting over 2 years:	1

As at 30 September there were 17 children on placement orders and not yet placed with an adoptive family. 3 children had been subject to a change of plan and was awaiting revocation of their placement order.

Of the remaining 14 children, 8 were provisionally linked with adoptive parents but not yet formally matched. A further 2 were matched and due to be placed. 5 children children were in active family finding not linked to adopters.

The breakdown of timescales since Placement Orders were granted for the 14 children on placement orders (not placed for adoption) at 30 September 2020 is below:

Less than 3 months:	10
Between 3 and 6 months:	2
Between 6 and 12 months:	0
Between 12 and 24 months:	2
Children waiting over 2 years:	0

2.1 Children Made Subject to Placement Orders

In year 2019/20

April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Total
1	2	4	2	1	3	13

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
2	0	1	2	3	2	10

23 Placement Orders granted in year

As at 30 September 2020:

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Total
1	2	4	3	1	2	13

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

Financial Year:	16/17	17/18	18/19
	30	28	18

The number of Placement Orders Granted has reduced over a 4 year period, albeit, 2019/20 performance is above that of the previous year.

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

As at 31 March 2020 there were 16 children with the decision to be placed for adoption (SHOBPA), but not yet subject to a placement order.

As at 30 September this number was 21

2.3 Number of Children who had a SHOBPA during the period

April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Total
0	4	1	4	3	5	17

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
7	4	3	5	3	1	23

40 children had SHOBPA decisions in the year.

As at 30 September 2020:

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Total
2	6	1	5	5	0	19

Financial Year:	16/17	17/18	18/19
	34	37	25

The number of SHOBPA decisions in the 18-month period is above the number given over the three previous years.

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

There were 11 children subject to a change of plan away from adoption during the full year to 31 March 2020. In the 6 months to 30 September 2020 just 2 children had a change of plan in the previous 12 period.

2.5 Number of Children Placed for Adoption during the period

For 12 months to 31 March 2020:

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

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total in year
2	3	2	0	1	3	13

Total number of children placed in the full year - 15

For the six months to 30 September 2020:

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Total
0	4	7	2	2	3	18

Children Placed in Previous Years:

Financial Year:	16/17	17/18	18/19
Children Placed:	43	29	26

Analysis:

The number of children placed in the 18-month period to 30 September 2020 is lower in comparison to previous years, but consistent with the reduction in SHOBPA decisions and Placement Orders. The first 6 months of 2019/20 saw a reduction in performance linked to

service transition but over the following 12 months there has been a steady increase in numbers of children placed.

3. Number of Children Adopted

The number of children legally adopted by their adoptive parents in the full year 2019/20 was 16

The number adopted in the first six months of 2020/21 was 3

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

Financial Year:	16/17	17/18	18/19
Children Adopted:	36	46	32

The number of children adopted in the 12-month period 2019/20, is significantly lower than the previous 3 years performance. Due to the time delay in a child being placed and adopted, many of these children will have been placed prior to Adoption@Heart being operational and the lower number placed in 2018/19 will in part explain this reduction. However the numbers adopted in the 6-month period to 30 September 2020 is also very low and reflective of the low numbers of children placed in the previous year.

It is expected that the full year number of children adopted will also be low, due to court delays created by Covid-19. The numbers of children leaving care nationally, via adoption, has reduced continuously since 2017.

Adoption Scorecard Performance

In 2014, as part of its' Adoption Reform Agenda, the government introduced Adoption Scorecards to track local authority performance and to tackle delay in the adoption system. Scorecards are produced for a 3-year rolling average, with the latest data being published for April 2018 - March 2019 (Published April 2020).

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.

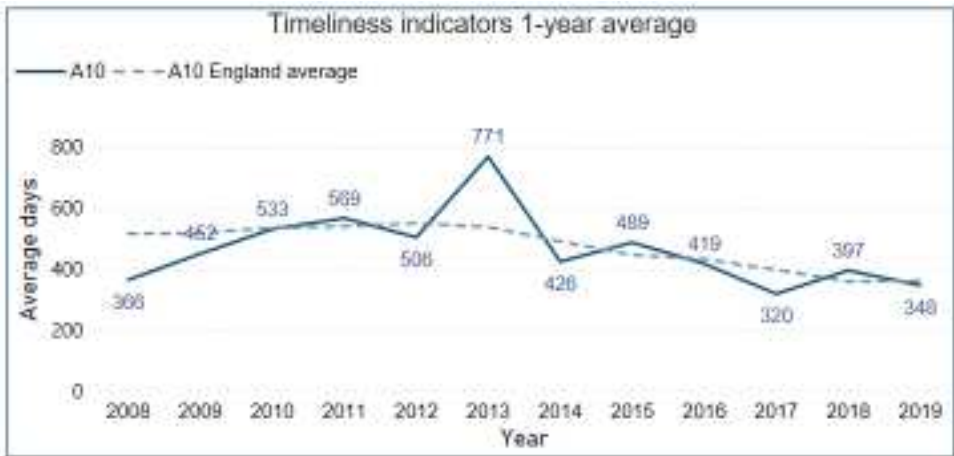
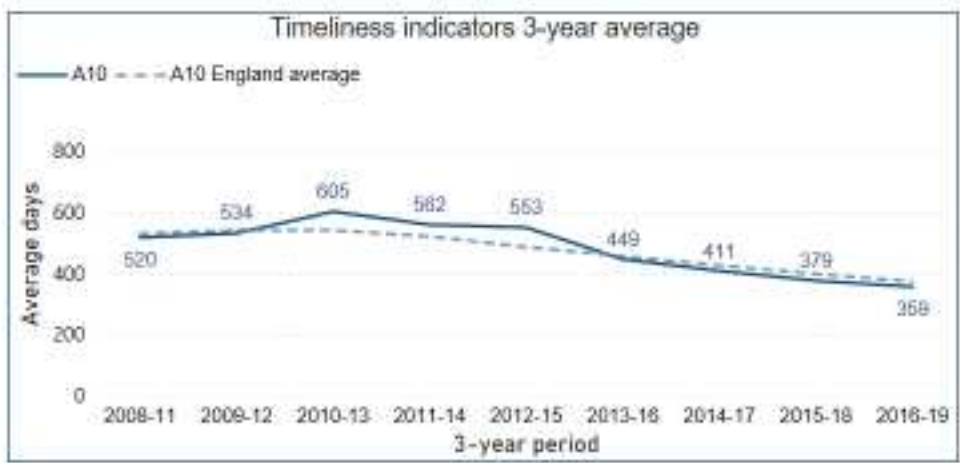
A2 – the number of days between receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and the Agency decision about a match to an adoptive family. The current threshold is 121 days.

The in year average timescale for 16 children adopted in the year 2019/20 was

A10 - 516 Days

A2 - 238 days

A10: Average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster care adoptions

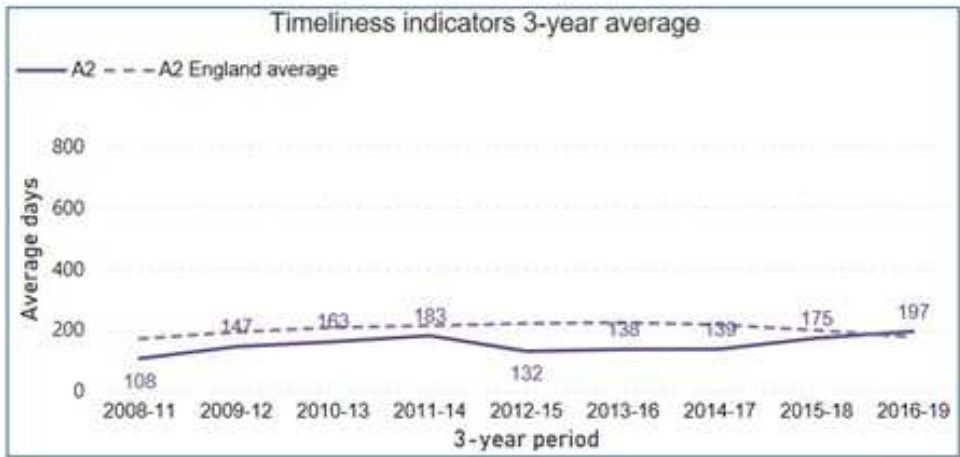


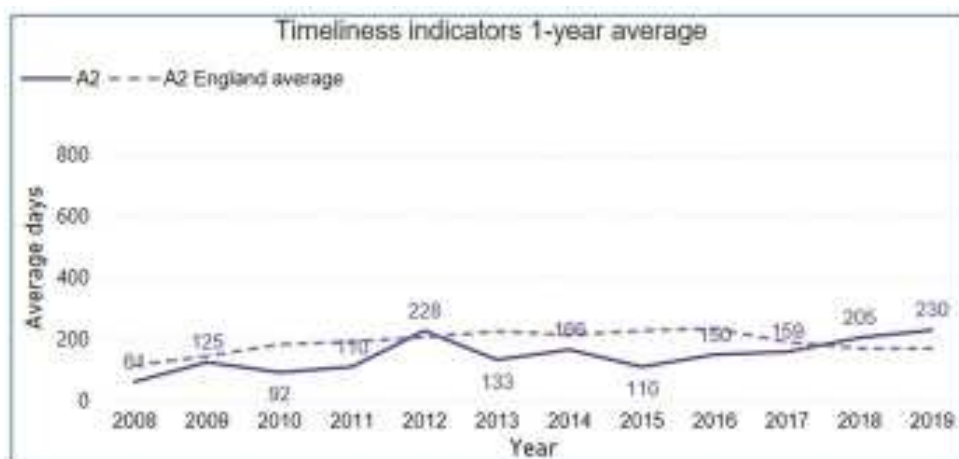
A10: Average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster care adoptions.				
2019 average days:	2019 England average:	Average time in 2019 was shorter than in 2016	2016-19 average days:	2016-19 England average:
348	363		359	376

The A10 performance is under threshold (426 days) and slightly below national average for the children adopted in the single year 2019/20. The 3-year average performance is below both the threshold and 3-year average. There is therefore evidence of improved timeliness for children adopted over the last 3 years in comparison to previous years.

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

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:				
2019 average days:	2019 England average:	Average time in 2019 was longer than in 2018	2016-19 average days:	2016-19 England average:
230	170		197	178





Performance for both single year and 3-year average is significantly above threshold (121 days) and national average evidencing delay from the point of obtaining a legal order to matching children with adopters. This applies to both the one-year performance and the 3-year average. The average time that children have waited for adoptive placements has increased gradually since 2015.

3.1 Early Permanency

There were six children placed in early permanence placements via Foster for Adopt in the 6-month period up to 30 September 2020. No children were placed via this regulation in the previous year.

4. Recruitment of Adopters

4.1 New Enquiries

For the period from 1st April 2020 to 30th September 2020, 283 new enquiries were received by the Adoption@Heart Recruitment Team.

This is in comparison to 139 enquiries received last year in the same period. 349 enquiries for the entire year.

During the year 2020/21 adoption enquiries have increased during the Covid-19 crisis and this reflects a national increase also experienced by other agencies.

4.2 Information Events

115 Adopter households attended virtual information events in the year 2019/20.

57 adopter households attended virtual information events took that place in the six months to September 2020, compared with 61 (mix of single and couples) households in the previous six months.

Due to Covid-19 Information Events were run virtually and the service offered a combination of phone consultations and virtual information events from June 2020. 106 adopters (units not individuals have received information in 6 months via this combined approach.

4.3 Initial visits

The number of initial assessment visits carried out to potential adoptive parents is as below:

Full year 2019/20:	128
Six months April to September 2020:	68

4.4 Registrations of Interest

The number of Registrations of Interest to adopt received were as below:

Full year 2019/20	64
Six months April to September 2020	42

Analysis:

The service has improved on year one performance in the first six months of year two, with a 31 percent increase in the number of Registrations of Interest.

Of the figures above six ROI's (three in each period) were received from foster carers adopting children in their care.

4.5 Current position

At the end of the period (30 September 2020), there were 19 families in Stage One, three in between Stage One and Stage Two, and 18 in Stage Two.

4.6 Timescales in Stage One

Stage One has a timescale threshold of 8 weeks or 56 days. 26 stage one's have ended in this period and the average duration (including fast track applications but excluding families who withdrew during stage one) is 48 days. 15 out of the 26 were completed outside of timescales which evidences the need for further work in reducing stage 1 delay. Covid-19 as led to additional adopter led delay in the current year.

4.7 Timescales in Stage Two

Stage Two has a timescale of 16 weeks or 112 days from commencement of the process to the Agency Decision regarding the match. 31 have ended in this period with an average duration of 113 days. 11 out of the 31 stage were completed outside of timescales. This is acceptable performance although every effort is made to avoid stage 2 delay.

4.8 Adopters Approved

There have been 34 adopters approved in this period compared with 34 in the previous six months (51 for full year 2019/20).

Analysis:

There is evidence of improved adopter recruitment performance in the first six months of the year 2020/21. The total number of approvals in the first year of operation was 51, therefore 34 approvals in the six-month period evidences an increase of 33 percent. This together with the numbers in stage one and two at 30 September, suggest that the projected overall number of approvals for the full year should increase to between 60 and 70. There has been some delay in receiving checks and medicals due to Covid-19, which could impact on performance.

4.9 Adopters Required

The service expects to place between 120 and 130 children in the current year and the targeted performance is to place 60 percent in house with this reducing incrementally to 30 percent over the next 3 years. In order to achieve this target performance will need to improve to 80 to 100 approvals over the next 3 years.

4.10 Partner adoptions

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

LA / Trust	2019/20 Full Year	2020/21 6 Months
Walsall	3	1
Sandwell	4	1
Dudley	4	0
Wolverhampton	1	1

5. Marketing Report

Marketing figures for this period are:

- 283 enquiries
- 49 phone consultations and 57 virtual information events attended
- Between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020, we had a total of 10,752 website visits – made up of 8,415 unique visits.

Marketing Activity

Despite the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, marketing activity has remained a priority in line with the national message that recruiting adopters and placing children with adopters remains a priority.

A summer campaign took place across July and August, which featured a digital advert impression campaign with a range of print and radio coverage across four weeks and a series of blog posts from Adoption@Heart Social Workers, detailing their working week from home. A myth busting social media campaign also took place across Facebook.

The national 'You Can Adopt' campaign launched on the 16 September 2020, which seeks to bust myths around who is eligible to adopt and explore what the adoption process involves.

The adoption process can seem confusing and complicated for those who are interested, so the campaign encourages agencies to work together to make sure prospective adopters receive the same message regardless. Adopters need to have the same message, process and experience, when it comes to their adoption journey.

Additionally, the campaign aims to target potential parents from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, as these children traditionally wait longer to be matched. We have to work effectively together to address the reasons why this is the case and we need to be better at reaching into the community to find those people who might be interested but aren't coming forward.

It also highlights that especially during the coronavirus pandemic, there are still children out there who are looking for their new family. A pilot campaign also launched in October across Birmingham and London, which urges potential black adopters to come forward. Two enquiries have been received so far from Home for Good, as part of this drive.

Communication Leads across Wolverhampton, Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall are working together in marketing the service across the region, utilising their knowledge, resources and opportunities to promote the service across the region.

The remainder of the year will see increased marketing activity with the National Campaign combined with localised activities over the Autumn.

6. Requirements on the Preparation of Adoption Report Regulations

6.1 Complaints

There have been three formal complaints about the service since 1 April 2019.

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

The second stage one complaint was from an adoptive parent who had received unauthorised contact from a birth parent, who had obtained their contact details. The child was placed by Wolverhampton prior to April 2019. Following an investigation by the Head of Service, it was concluded that the information had not been disclosed from within the council as had been suggested by the complainant. It is not known how the birth came to have the adopters contact information. The complaint also highlighted issues in communication during the service transition process with the adopter regarding post adoption contact. This part of the complaint was upheld and learning discussed with the relevant Team Manager.

A third formal complaint has been received from an individual who made an enquiry to adopt but was not invited to proceed to registration of interest due to significant vulnerabilities identified at initial visit. A meeting took place between this individual and the Head of Service in Autumn 2019, however the complaint has escalated to stage two and is currently with the Ombudsman.

6.2 Staffing

Total number of staff, numbers in each team, vacancies, capacity issues, use of agency staff:

The service employs 32 qualified Social Workers on a permanent basis along with seven 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 are funded 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 has now been permanently appointed. The panel team have two Panel Advisors (one of these is vacant and currently covered by an agency Social Worker), along with a Panel Co-ordinator and three Panel Administrators, one of which is currently vacant.

The Business Support Team have a Manager, a recently created Senior Business Support Officer post along five Business Support Officers. There are currently two BSO vacancies in the team.

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

Ongoing consideration is being given to staffing capacity in relation to demand on the service, in particular for Family Finding and Adoption Support.

6.3 Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

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

7. Development of Adoption@Heart

7.1 Practice

Since February 2020, a programme of Practice Development Work has addressed the developmental needs of the service. From this work additional practice guidance has been implemented with a view to raising standards of practice and increasing performance and innovation, as the service becomes more established. Key areas of focus to date have been:

Adoption Support

To develop a measurable, outcomes-based vision for Adoption Support Services, ensuring that services are focused on achieving outcomes.

Ensure that we have the right systems and processes to deliver the right level of the service to the right families, based on levels of need.

Provide adopters with easier access to and better support from other agencies.

To deliver a more responsive birth parent support service and promote birth family relationships.

Improve services for adopted adults.

Early Permanence in placing children

Raising awareness and knowledge about early permanence and embedding the early permanence policy, practice and delivery in house and across partner organisations, through opportunities for training and development to ensure that knowledge is up to date and is widely shared.

Adopter Recruitment

Streamline processes and shorten timescales for all parts of the adopter assessment journey from Enquiry to ADM approval. With the aim that 90% of all assessments are completed in the required 6-month timescale. Development of Stage One and Stage Two processes to address delay and facilitate Adopter Self-Learning in Stage One and Stage Two.

Increasing adopter engagement and consultation

To influence service delivery through the development of an Adoption Advisory Board. Adopter Voice is commissioned to support A@H with this work. Increased communication with adopters through their journey by the development adopter database and a plan of regular communication.

7.2 Family Finding Activity

The tables below contain the total numbers of children placed by the service during the year 2019/20, as well as the six months to 30 September 2020/21.

Full Year 2019/20 – Children Placed:

LA / Trust	In House	Inter-agency	Total Placed
Sandwell	20	21	41
Wolverhampton	10	13	23
Walsall	11	8	19
Dudley	9	8	17
(Total)	50	50	100

1 April to 30 September 2020 – Children Placed:

LA/ Trust	In House	Interagency	Total placed
Sandwell	4	17	21
Wolverhampton	6	9	15
Walsall	7	11	18
Dudley	5	3	8
Total	22	40	62

For comparative purposes, the performance of each LA / Trust in placing children is in the table.

2018/19 – Children Placed by LA / Trust (year prior to Adoption@Heart going live):

LA/ Trust	In House	Interagency	Total placed
Sandwell	8	28	36
Wolverhampton	29	13	42
Walsall	16	12	28
Dudley	16	16	32
Total	69	69	138

Early Permanence

In the full year 2019/20, five children were placed via Foster for Adoption.

20 children have been placed via Foster for Adoption in the first six months of 2020/21, five of these were Walsall children.

Analysis

The overall number of children placed in the year 2020/21 has increased pro rata by over twenty percent, compared with the previous year performance, despite the impact of Covid-19 on children's transitions. The service is likely to place around the same number of children in total as the combined total of the four partners in the year prior before the RAA was formed.

In the first year of operation, forty one percent of children placed were from Sandwell and consequently numbers placed for the other three partners were considerably lower. This was due to the fact that more Sandwell children were waiting on Placement Orders at the point the service became operational. In the first six months of the current year, this has levelled out with thirty three percent of children placed being from Sandwell.

The numbers of children placed for both Walsall and Wolverhampton have significantly increased in the current year to date. The number of children placed by Dudley remains lower than in the previous year and this should be seen in the context of the numbers of children waiting to be placed for adoption, which are also lower for Dudley. These are provided in the table below.

Inter-agency usage has remained high during both periods, with sixty four percent of children placed externally in the current year to date. The increased numbers of adopters entering the

process in the same period would indicate that the number placed in house should increase, as these adopters become approved during quarters three and four of the current year.

Foster for Adopt usage has significantly increased during the first six months of 2020/21. This increase is the result of development work done within the service and across the partnership.

7.3 Adoption Panels

Adoption panels have operated since early April 2019 across the four Local Authority / Trust locations on a weekly basis. Panels have approved 51 Adopters and matched 107 children in the year 2019/20 (100 children placed in year). In the first six months of 2020/21 panels have matched 67 children with adoptive parents (62 placed with adopters) and approved 34 adopters.

Panels have been robust in raising issues about practice where appropriate.

The service now has four panel Chairs, having recruited a further Chair in addition to the three who transferred in April 2019. The two Panel Advisors and the Panel Coordinator have driven the development of robust quality assurance processes and the Head of Service has held quarterly meetings with the Chairs. A joint staff / panel member development day took place in January 2020 and another is scheduled for December 2020.

In April 2020 Covid-19 restrictions led to the need for panels to be run virtually, rather than face to face. Despite initial challenges in moving to this new way of working, the panel team and Chairs worked effectively together in ensuring panels were able to run smoothly via Microsoft Teams. 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.

ADM processes are now embedded and there have been less delays in progressing decisions due to resource challenges.

Following challenges in ensuring panels are quorate during the first-year, additional panel members have been recruited from within the local authorities. This has reduced dependence on independent panel members, improve quoracy and enable effective involvement by partner agencies in panel delivery. There are some ongoing challenges regarding the quality of documentation and adherence to timescales, which are being addressed.

7.4 Partnership Working

Considerable progress has been made during the 18 months since the service went live in strengthening engagement and communication across the partnership. This has improved

the interface between the service and partners and improved the understanding of it being a shared service, rather than a separate entity.

Practice workshops were held in all partner services during the quarter four of 2019/20. Further workshops are planned for Autumn 2020.

Adoption@Heart managers are attending key meetings relating to children's care planning and tracking.

Virtual working has improved engagement, due to reduction in travel and impact on time.

Establishment of an Operations Group has improved operational communication at Head of Service and Service Manager level.

A partnership event for all staff is planned for November 2020 (delayed from May due to Covid-19).

8. Adoption Support

During April 2019 to March 2020, the service made 226 ASF applications. In the six months to September 2020, 145 applications have been made to the fund. The split of these according to which area the adopter lived, in is outlined in the table below:

Local Authority	ASF Applications 2019/20	ASF Applications 2020/21 – year to date April to September
Dudley	82	38
Sandwell	40	26
Walsall	58	40
Wolverhampton	46	41

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

Post Adoption Contact 2019/20 – Full Year

Council	Number of Adoptee	Number of Contacts for Adoptee
Dudley	343	966

Sandwell	544	1083
Walsall	683	1786
Wolverhampton	351	1022

Post Adoption Contact 2020/21 Year to Date:

Council	Number of Adoptee	Number of Contacts for Adoptee
Dudley	357	941
Sandwell	535	1068
Walsall	772	1860
Wolverhampton	400	860

Referrals / Enquiries for Adoption Support

There have been 94 referrals for assessment of need between April 2019 - March 2020 and a further 43 during the period April to September 2020. All of them have resulted in delivering specialist intervention, commissioning therapeutic services either inhouse or with external providers. Additionally, there have been a significant number of reviews of therapeutic intervention and we have made 288 applications to the ASF for new and continued therapeutic services.

In House Therapeutic Provision

The service has an in-house Adoption Support Therapist who delivers therapeutic intervention which includes; Therapeutic Life Story work, DDP informed practice, delivery of parenting programmes including Nurturing Attachment Parenting Programme, plus training sessions. The total ASF claims from work undertaken amounts to £38,314.33.

9. 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 Chair of this board transferred to Sandwell in October 2020, due to a change of DCS in Dudley who previously chaired.

In May 2020 an Operations Group was established on a trial basis, with a view to increasing engagement, oversight and operational involvement of Heads of Service and other managers from each partners service. This group has met monthly chaired by the Head of Service for Adoption@Heart. Consequently, the Management Board has met bi-monthly given part of its function is now delegated to this group.

Further discussion will take place with the Strategic Commissioning Board in January 2021 about the governance arrangements moving forward.

Report completed by:



Mark Tobin
Head of Service

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 This report summarises the activity of the Fostering Service from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020.
- 1.2 Walsall Council is committed to ensuring that wherever possible, children are supported to live with their birth parents. Where this has not been possible and children become looked after, it is preferable that they live within a family setting. It is the aim of the council that wherever possible, this will be with a fostering household approved by Walsall Council rather than through the commissioning an external placement. Through guidance on delegated authority, there is a recognition that foster carers should be empowered to take on the day to day tasks of parenting in the same way as any good parent would.
- 1.3 Foster care is subject to legislative and regulatory guidance through, The Children Act 1989, The Fostering Regulations 2011 and the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011. It is further regulated through the Care Planning, Placement and Case Regulations 2010. The regulatory framework for fostering sets out the minimum standards expected to ensure that the care provided by foster carers is adequate to ensure that those children placed within fostering placements are well cared for and achieve good outcomes.
- 1.4 Fostering placements are referred to as either mainstream or connected persons. Connected persons fostering refers to those households who offer to provide care to a child known to them, usually a relative. Mainstream foster care refers to a range of households who apply to become foster carers for children not known to them. Mainstream foster carers include those offering both long-and short-term care and those who provide respite care. Mainstream carers can be approved to care for between one and three children at a time and can care for children throughout the age range.

2. The Structure Of The Fostering Service

- 2.1 In March 2019 as part of the improvement agenda for Children's Social Care a review of the Fostering Service was undertaken in March 2019 which made a number of key recommendations to drive improvements in recruiting, assessing, supervising and supporting mainstream and connected foster carers.
- 2.2 A key recommendation was in respect to the span of management grip and oversight. The review lead to the creation of 4 teams and strengthened management structure to drive improvements in the meeting regulatory requirements, supervision of staff and quality of practice required to undertake assessments, supervision and support to Mainstream and Connected Foster Carers. The proposal endorsed by Directorate Management Team involved

deleting two existing Assistant Team Manager posts and the Panel Advisor post, creating 2 additional Team Managers and creating three Senior Practitioners. Full implementation of the redesigned structure became operational in April 2020

- 2.3 Critically a fourth team was created to increase the capacity for connected persons assessment and to enable those who support and supervise connected persons foster carers and Special Guardians to specialise in this work. There has been a significant rise in the proportion of children cared for in such foster homes and combining the supervision of these households has enabled greater focus in the mainstream support team on growing in house mainstream capacity.
- 2.4 The Fostering Service located to Fallings Heath in January 2020 and is managed by the Group Manager for Provider Services who reports to Head of Service for Corporate Parenting. It is comprised of 4 teams and has responsibility for the recruitment, assessment and support of foster carers and the assessment and support of Special Guardians.

3. Service Development

- 3.1 Recruitment and establishing key people into role has been a priority for the service.
- Group Manager joined the service in late November 2019
 - Team Manager for the Mockingbird Team joined in November 2019
 - Team Manager for Connected Persons Team joined in March 2020
 - 3 Senior Practitioners took up their posts in April 2020
 - The Recruitment and Promotion Officer joined in May 2020.
- 3.2 Over this period the service increased the recruitment of permanent staff reducing the number of agency social workers significantly.
- 3.3 A Team Manager now manages each team and all except the Recruitment and Assessment Team have a Senior Practitioner. Each team has 5 fulltime social worker posts. The new structure comprises of the following teams:

▪ Recruitment & Assessment

This team is responsible for the assessments of mainstream foster carers. The team provides supervision and support to carers until their first annual review. A full time customer services officer responds to all enquiries from adults expressing interest in becoming foster carers. This team also operates a duty service. The team is also responsible for all marketing, recruitment, training and assessment activities. There is also a Recruitment and Promotions officer post that is instrumental in the production of new marketing materials and the coordination of new marketing events. This post was vacant from October 2019 to May 2020 and was advertised at least three times before an appointment was made.

- **Support & Development**

This team is responsible for providing supervision and support to temporary and permanent carers, including family and friends (known as Connected Carers). They also provide a duty service that ensures there is always someone available to deal with concerns or questions from foster carers. The team also completes Special Guardianship assessments on approved Foster Carers and are responsible for the submission of reports to the Annual Foster Carer Reviews.

- **Support & Development (Mockingbird)**

Leads on the development and support for delivering the Mockingbird Fostering model for the Local Authority and the duties set out above. There are three Mockingbird constellations providing foster homes for 93 children. Walsall continues to work with Fostering Network in developing and delivering within the efficacy of the model.

- **Connected Persons**

The team provides assessment of friends and family members to become a Connected Carers under the Fostering Regulations or to apply for a Special Guardianship Order. When required, to meet demand, they will also act as Supervising Social Workers to approved Foster Carers. This team is also responsible for post order support to Special Guardians.

- **Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer** - The IFRO now undertakes all first reviews of foster carers, reviews of carers following concerns and allegations and every third subsequent annual reviews. All reviews chaired by Fostering Reviewing Officer are submitted to Panel for a recommendation.

- 3.4 Between April 2019 and March 2020, there were two new Mainstream Foster Carers approved at Fostering Panel. This is a low number of approvals and is a key factor in informing the redesign of the service. Over this period resources were diverted to meeting the demand of assessments for connected carers for children in care proceedings. In 2019/20, 24 Connected Person Households were recommend for approval at Fostering Panel.
- 3.5 At the end of March 2020, there were 671 Looked after Children. Of the 671 children, 520 children (77%) were living with foster carers of which 294 were living with Walsall foster carers compared with 302 at the end of March 2019. This equates to 43.8% of those children in foster care in 2020 compared with 49.1% in 2019.
- 3.6 On the 31/3/20, of the total number of looked after children 50.7% were living with Walsall foster carers. The number of children living with internal

mainstream foster carers reduced from 190 on 31/3/19 to 162 on 31/3/20. On 31/3/20, there were 227 children living with independent fostering agencies and this is an increase compared with the 158 on 31/3/19.

4. Marketing, Recruitment and Mainstream Approvals

- 4.1 The Fostering Recruitment and Promotion Worker post was vacant for several months in 2019/20. The service took part in a 3rd regional recruitment film project across the West Midlands in May 2019. Up until November 2019, the Recruitment and Promotions Worker organised Foster Care Fortnight and programme of social media posts on Facebook and Twitter and quarterly newspaper campaigns. The recruitment activity reduced over the period that the post was vacant and recommenced rigorously since May 2020
- 4.2 In 2018/19, a full review of the marketing strategy was undertaken in light of the developments within social media. The review found that although the service was a leader in the region with the website design and use of Facebook as well as starting to make good use of Twitter, the gains could not be fully realised without a Customer Relations Management (CRM) tool. The service invested in software and had taken time to be embedded. Whilst there is now an improved focus on making better use of this resource, further work is underway to fully integrate it in promotional and recruitment activity within the service.
- 4.3 Walsall has a strong social media presence established with interactions from media and existing carers. Recruitment activity has included extensive use of social media such Facebook and Twitter. Our online content on the website is regularly updated. In light of Covid 19, the team has quickly adjusted in to host recruitment events online with live, interactive sessions with members of the recruitment team. These are advertised on all our online platforms and Walsall once again has a strong social media presence. Recruitment activity has included extensive use of social media such Facebook, Twitter and more recently, Instagram.
- 4.4 **Foster Carer Recruitment – National Picture:**
- 4.5 The Fostering Network annually calculates recruitment targets, estimating the number of foster families that fostering services need to recruit during the next calendar year across the UK. The figures take into account a number of factors including the percentage of the foster carer workforce leaving each year and the rise in the numbers of children in care. Within the West Midlands the Fostering Network calculate that a further 850 fostering households would be required in order to meet the rising demand for local family based placements.
- 4.6 During 2019/2020, 20 public events were held in and around Walsall (including those during Foster Care Fortnight). Some of these were events we arranged (e.g. Drop ins), others were where we had a stall at a larger event (e.g. Walsall Pride). Attendance at information sessions has increased and over 40 people approached us to discuss becoming a foster carer at these events.

4.7 Enquiry levels:

Fostering	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Enquiries	116	135	95	57
Initial visits	75	57	39	44
Approvals	21	13	12	2
Conversion rate	17%	10%	13%	4%

- 4.8 The low numbers of enquiries during this period would be partly due to there being no Recruitment & Promotions Worker for significant periods over the last 2 years. In the same period, though, there has also been a drop in the conversion rate from enquiry to approval.
- 4.9 The Recruitment & Assessment Team over this period, were allocated increasing numbers of connected persons carers to supervise and support, which diverted focus and resources from the recruitment and assessment of Mainstream foster carers. One of the reasons for the recent re-structure of the service, was to re-create a team primarily focused on the recruitment and assessment of Mainstream foster carers.
- 4.10 In 2019/20, there were only two new mainstream fostering approvals. As there were 16 deregistrations or resignations, this represents an overall loss of 14 Foster Carers. As the number of deregistrations or resignations have not changed significantly, the overall loss is attributed to the significantly low numbers of new Foster Carers assessed and approved in 2019/20 and this the lowest number of new Foster Carers approved.
- 4.11 In terms of the 16 resignations/de-registrations, the reasons were Transferred to IFA 3; Initiated by fostering service 6; Initiated by foster carer 6; Transferred to Local Authority 1.

5. Occupancy of Mainstream Foster Carers

- 5.1 Walsall's mainstream foster carers now provide an average of 1.6 approved placements per household. The total number of approved placements on 31/3/20 was 101. Over the past 12 months, this percentage has remained static at 1.6. The role of Placements Liaison Officer was also created in April 2019 to support the efficient matching of in house foster carers to children requiring a foster placement. This role has supported the service to increase occupancy rates of in-house household and the close working between the Fostering Service and the Placements Team is considered to be a contributory fact in maintaining this percentage.

6. Connected Persons Fostering & Special Guardianship Orders

- 6.1 Connected Persons arrangements are often complex situations with families supporting children who have become looked after. Connected Person carers receive the same level of supervision as mainstream carers. The Skills to

Foster training tailored specifically for Connected Persons carers and continues to be offered to Connected Person carers.

6.2 In 2019/20, 24 Connected Person Households were recommend for approval at Fostering Panel.

6.3 The table below outlines the number of children living with Connected Carers. The number of children cared for in a connected persons fostering arrangement approved by Walsall Council increased by 16.5% in 2019/20. The service is actively promoting legal permanence through Special Guardianship for children for whom this is the preferred outcome.

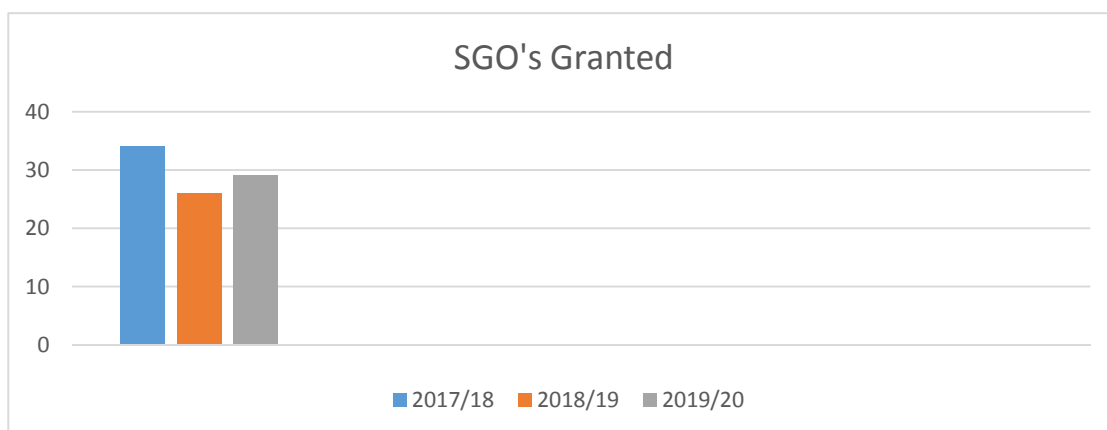
Year End	2017	2018	2019	2020
Connected Care (Fostering)	130	127	115	134
% of total LAC	20.1	19.9	18.7	20.0
SGOs from care	25	27	26	28
% discharges from care	14.9	12.3	14.7	14.8

6.4 The post of Permanency Co-ordinator was reviewed and refocused in 2019. All children with a care plan of long term fostering, adoption and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) are tracked in respect to timeliness and to prevent delays for our looked after children. The full time post for Special Guardianship Support has supported families in progressing SGO applications as a means to achieve permanency with the confidence that this support will be offered after the order is granted.

6.5 Walsall has a commitment to ensure that a child's need for a permanent home is addressed and that a permanence plan is made at the earliest opportunity. The aim is to ensure that each child has an agreed permanence plan in place by the second Looked after Review.

6.6 The expectation is that all children under the age of 16 will have a permanency plan; this can range from an eventual return home, a long-term placement with a foster carer, a Special Guardianship Order, a Child Arrangement Order, or Adoption. For those 16 plus, the expectation is that their permanency plan will be addressed through their Pathway Plan.

6.7 The table below outlines the number of children for who an SGO was granted.



7. Supervision, Support, Training & Development

7.1 The service review considered the need to focus on the consistency of support given to foster carers through ensuring consistency of the supervisory relationship, regular visiting patterns and that annual reviews of the foster carer's work take place.

- Supervision - The Fostering Service delivers effective regular supervision to all Foster Carers in line with their need for support, supervision and personal development, as detailed in the policy for foster carer supervision.
- Visits - According to the Fostering Service Regulations, at least one unannounced visit is undertaken to each fostering household each year. The frequency of unannounced visits is recorded on Mosaic and monitored via the foster carer annual review process. In 2018/19, compliance at the end of financial year was 90%. The performance at the end of 2019/20 improved slightly to 94%.

7.2 Foster Carer Training is provided through the Children's Workforce Development Team. This includes both mandatory courses ensuring that foster carers have the training necessary to undertake their role and more in-depth training for those carers who want to develop particular specialisms or a deeper knowledge of a subject area.

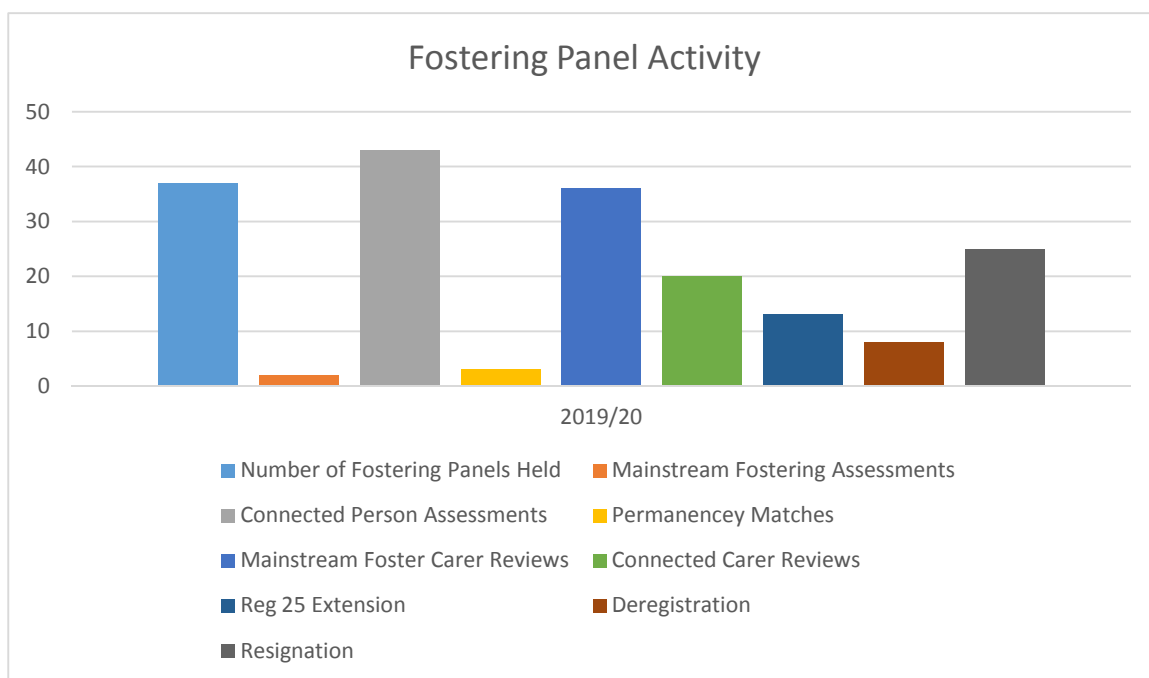
7.3 Preparation and training groups (Skills to Foster) have been held for all prospective mainstream foster carers. The training is delivered by the fostering service and in response to Covid 19, from summer 2020, it now takes place virtually. Connected persons foster carers are also invited to attend this training.

7.4 The service continues to support newly approved foster carers in completing the mandatory Training Support and Development Standards (TSD). There is an adapted version of these standards for connected persons foster carers and there is an expectation that any connected person carer completes this within 18 months of approval.

- 7.5 All foster carers approved by Walsall Council are provided with membership of the Fostering Network.
- 7.6 Foster carers can access support and advice out of hours via the Council's Emergency Duty Team (EDT). All foster carers have the contact details for EDT and reports from carers who have used the service are positive. Carers use the service to report significant events and to seek guidance. On occasions, social workers have visited carers' homes out of hours, most usually in response to children exhibiting disruptive behaviour.
- 7.7 Psychological support - the Fostering Service continues to make use of the regular consultation surgeries provided by Flash Service – the Tier 2/3 CAMHS service. The Hub Carers with the Mockingbird Service use this service to consult on the support they provide to the households in their hubs. Supervising Social Workers support foster carers to make use of the advice and support attendance by children requiring intervention.
- 7.8 During 2019/20 and up until August 2020, Walsall Foster Care Association (WFCA) provided support to carers through a variety of activities:
- Produced a quarterly Foster Carer Newsletter providing up to date and relevant information.
 - Offered a buddy scheme to carers
 - Assisted in recruitment activity
 - Supported carer training
 - Provided an Out of hours telephone support for foster carers
 - Ran coffee mornings and support groups
 - Participated with the service in developing and reviewing policies and procedures
 - Organised annual social activities

8. Fostering Panel

- 8.1 Chris Dennison and Lisa Cawthorn remained Chairs of the Fostering and Permanence Panel supported by Jan Toplis and Catherine Mitchley are Vice Chairs.
- 8.2 Fostering Panel business continues to be busy with the Panel meeting on 37 occasions. Panel was quorate on each occasion. The table below outlines the range of work discussed at Fostering Panel.



8.3 Up until December 2019, a dedicated, full time Panel Advisor took the lead on co-ordinating the recruitment, induction and annual appraisal of panel members. During 2019-20, they also arranged training days for panel members alongside facilitating their private study through sharing information from guidance and research with panel members. As part of the service redesign, the Panel Advisor post was deleted and aspects of the role has been built into the work of the 4 Team Managers within the Fostering Service.

8.4 The Panel provides the service with detailed feedback on the quality of the work discussed and has noted continued improvements in the quality of the work presented by members of the service. The Panel has, however, raised issues around the quality of connected persons assessment reports that have been externally commissioned. Feedback to the Panel from those attending continues to demonstrate that they experience a positive and welcoming meeting in which information is considered fairly.

9. Staying Put

9.1 The provision for 'Staying Put' has ensured that many young people are able to remain with their carers for a much longer period of time after their 18th Birthday. For the period 2019/20, 12 out of the 18 Staying Put arrangements were for internal foster carers, compared with 18 out of 20 for the previous year. This year has seen 20 young people and their carers accessing this opportunity. Though this reduces foster carers available for children and young people, it is important to ensure the offer of staying put is made to every young person in foster care.

10. Complaints, Allegations and Children Missing from Care

10.1 Complaints - during 2019/20, the fostering service received 5 complaints from a Prospective foster carer (1), Foster carers (3) and Grandparent (1). Of these

complaints, one was about lack of professionalism during the assessment process; two were about a lack of support and guidance to the foster carer; two related to communication issues, and clarity and sharing of information. All were resolved at Stage1.

- 10.2 There were seven allegations against Local Authority Foster Carers which is monitored under Regulation 36 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. Of these, three resulted in Section 47 enquiries being made. Following the allegations being submitted, six resulted in no further action being taken. The remaining continued fostering with additional monitoring. There have been no incidents of physical restraint were reported in 2019/20 and this is similar to 2018/19.
- 10.6 Notifiable events (Regulation 36, Schedule 7, Fostering Service Regulations 2011). There were a further 10 Notifiable Events. The majority (6) related illness or accidents within the foster home. Regulation 35, Schedule 6 requires us to monitor other activity such as minor accidents and injuries and the administration of medication.

11. The Impact of Covid 19

- 11.1 At the end of the period covered by this annual report, central government instituted the national lockdown measures as a result of the global Covid 19 pandemic. The long term impacts of this on the Fostering Service are yet to be determined.
- 11.2 However, to date there have been a number of areas in which the lockdown has affected the service and our foster carers. These include:
- Additional pressure on foster carers as children are spending more time at home and supporting children with online learning.
 - Adjustment to undertaking many activities through virtual platforms, such as visits, reviews, meetings and Fostering Panel
 - Foster carers have adjusted to changes to family time arrangements to enable children to see their families.
 - Fostering sufficiency reduced as foster carers are unable to health vulnerabilities.

12. Service Priorities and Improvement – 2020/21

- 12.1 In view of the challenges above, there are a number of areas for service improvement that have taken place in 2020/21. They are:
- Implemented Fostering Service Redesign
 - Change to office accommodation that brought about opportunity for all Teams in the Fostering Service to work from one building
 - Reduced number and reliance on agency workers in the Fostering Service
 - Improved consistency around Financial Assessment Meetings
 - Improved communication with Foster Carers
 - Undertook Foster Carer Survey (outturn due in March 2021)
 - Resolved WFCAs arrangements

- Responded to Covid 19 (RAA & additional payments to Carers)
- Mockingbird Hubs remain compliant with the Fostering Networks Fidelity model
- Partnership working with Grandparents Plus
- Improving trend on number of Foster Carers being recruited (12/14)
- Secured agreement to introduce a Support and Stability Team
- Secured agreement to provide improved training offer to Foster Carers and employees
- Secured agreement to trial dedicated telephone support line for Foster Carers
- Introduced Case File Auditing
- Re-established Mockingbird Steering Group
- Established Action Plan to improve work into and out of Fostering Panel
- Working towards Performance Scorecard being in place for 1/4/21.
- Started Scoping Exercise for SGO Support (pre & post order)
- Relaunched Recruitment & Retention Group
- Introduced Practice Improvement Group
- Secured agreement for increase Mockingbird Hubs from 3 to 6
- Secured agreement for slight uplift on allowances for Foster

12.2 Service priorities moving forward are

- Increase recruitment of foster carers from diverse backgrounds.
- Maximise the capacity of internal foster carers and increase the proportion of looked after children placed with internal foster carers
- Maintain an assertive and robust focus on marketing, recruitment and assessment of foster carers.
- Extend the range of in-house fostering provision
- Increase range of support that is available to foster carers

Author

Mark Burrows

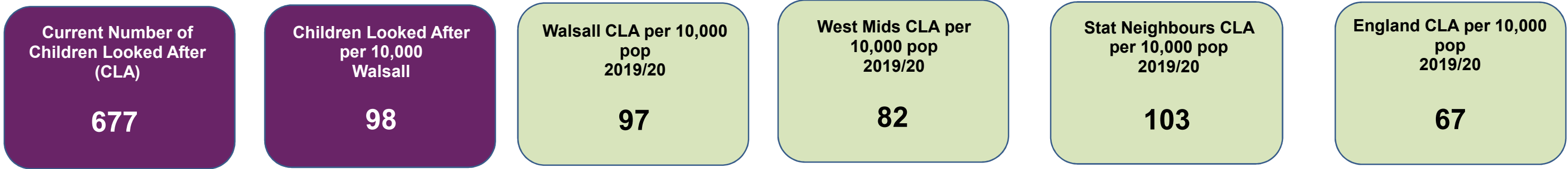
Group Manager Provider Services

mark.burrows@walsall.gov.uk

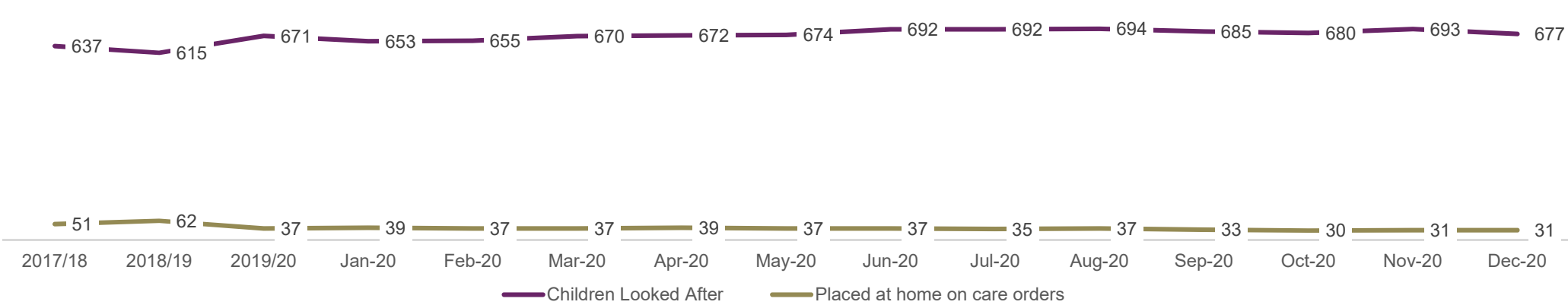
Walsall Children's Services Corporate Parenting Board February 2021 Quarter 3

**Please Note: where there is an 2019/20 benchmarking data has
been updated where available**

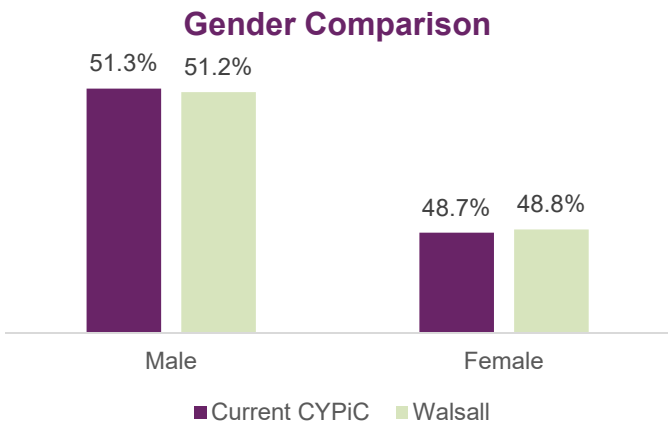
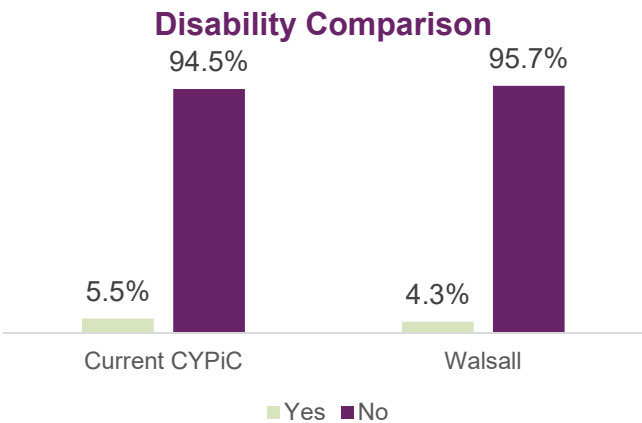
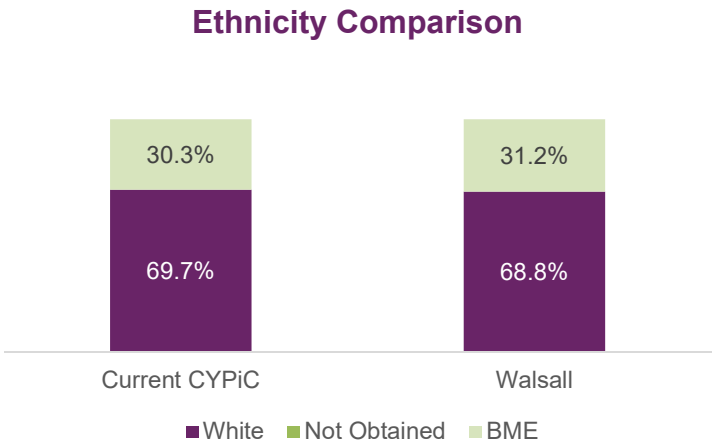
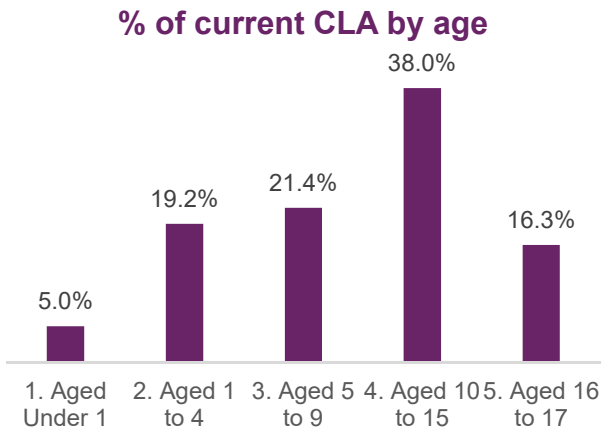
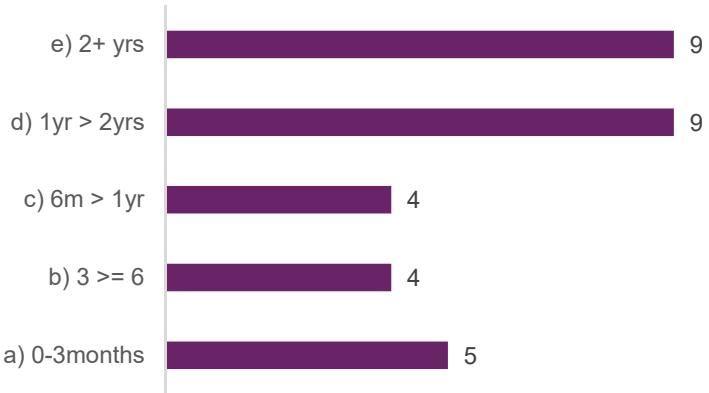
Current Children Looked After (CLA) Profile



Number of Children Looked After in Walsall (12 Month Rolling)



Length of Time placed at home on full care orders

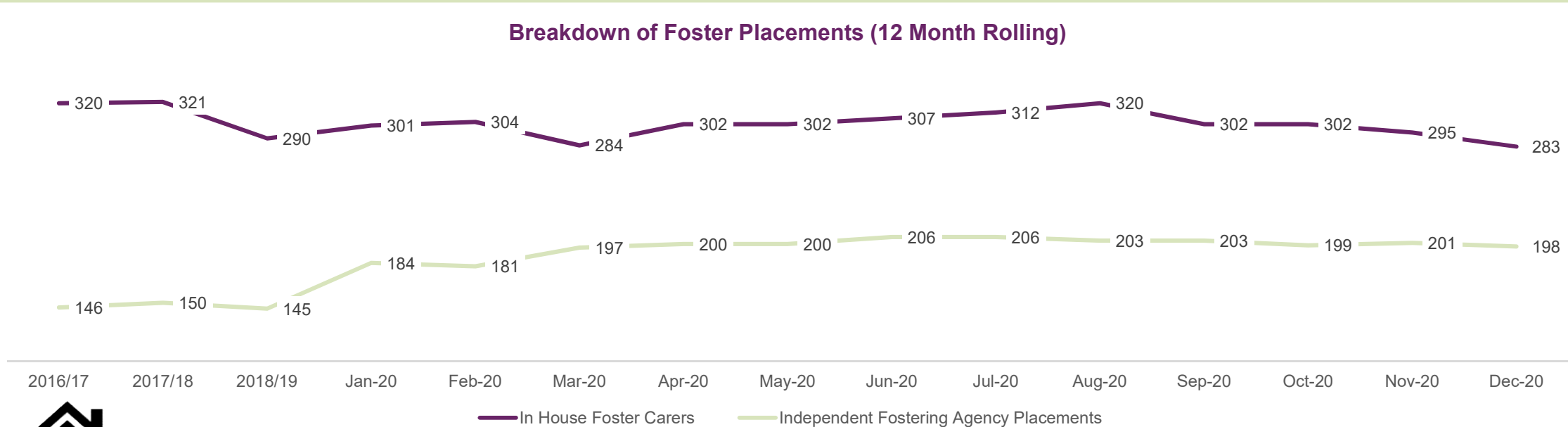


Commentary

Demographic data has been taken from the 2019 mid-year population estimates. A slightly lower proportion of Children Looked After are from BME backgrounds compared to the Walsall Child and Young Person population (0-17s). The current Children Looked After population has continued to decrease slightly from 692 at the end of Q1 to 677 at the end of Q3. The current rate of 98 per 10,000 remains below that of our statistical neighbours but is still considerably higher than the 2019/20 England and West Midlands averages. We currently have 31 children placed at home on full care order, this has decreased from 33 at the end of quarter 2. 18 of the 33 have been placed at home for over a year. Work is continuing with the courts to revoke care orders for children who are placed at home where appropriate.

CLA Placement Analysis

Breakdown of Foster Placements (12 Month Rolling)



The number of CLA placed with in house foster carers has been decreasing but IFA's remains stable.



% CLA placed 20 mile+ from home, outside of LA boundary

108
16.2%

2019/20 Walsall = 11.0%
2019/20 West Midlands = 14.0%
2019/20 Stat Neighbours = 18.1%
2019/20 England = 16.0%

% CLA 3 or more placements in a year

68
10.0%

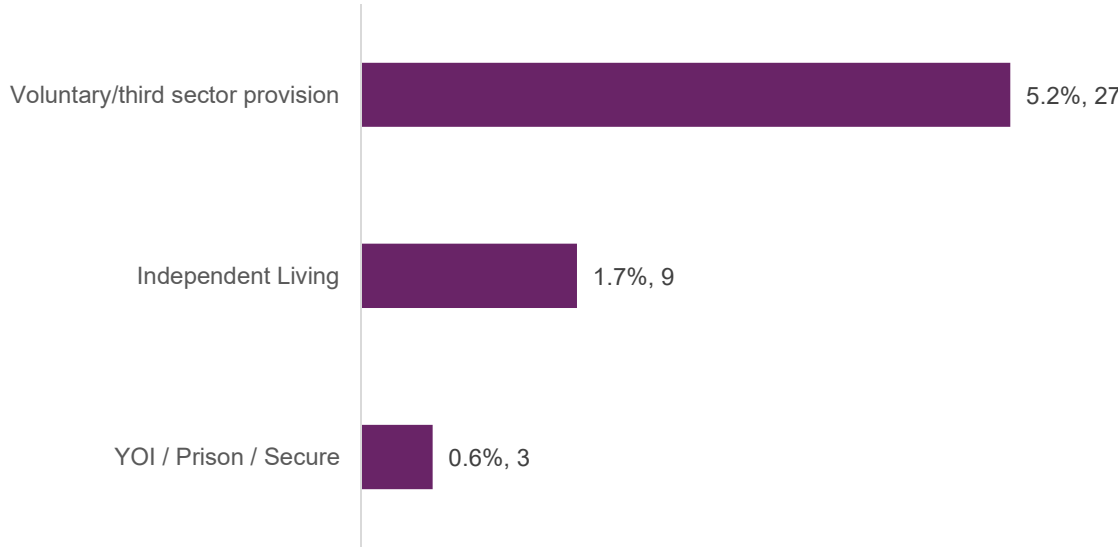
2019/20 Walsall = 9.0%
2019/20 West Midlands = 10.0%
2019/20 Stat Neighbours = 9.4%
2019/20 England = 11.0%

% of CLA in same placement for over 2 years if CLA for over 2.5 years

205
60.3%

2019/20 Walsall = 68.0%
2019/20 West Midlands = 69.0%
2019/20 Stat Neighbours = 67.1%
2019/20 England = 68.0%

Current CLA by Placement Type (non-fostered)



Commentary

Trends for placements with in house foster carers have decreased during quarter 3, following a peak of 320 during August 2020. Currently Walsall has 283 in house foster carers. The figure is the lowest figure during the current reporting period, and lower than the out-turn for the previous three years. Walsall has 198 independent fostering agency placements. This figure has decreased slightly since the end of quarter 2, but has remained fairly constant during the reporting period and is considerably higher than the figure for the previous three years..

Just over 16% of Walsall's CLA are placed 20 plus miles from their home address and 10% of the CLA population have had 3 or more placements within a year. Both figures have increased compared to the 2019-20 out-turn. The figure for 3 or more placements is now higher than Statistical Neighbour averages for the same period. The figure for CLA placed 20+ miles away from home is now higher than the West Midlands regional average, whilst the figure for 3 or more placements is in line with the regional average. [Page 64 of 72](#)

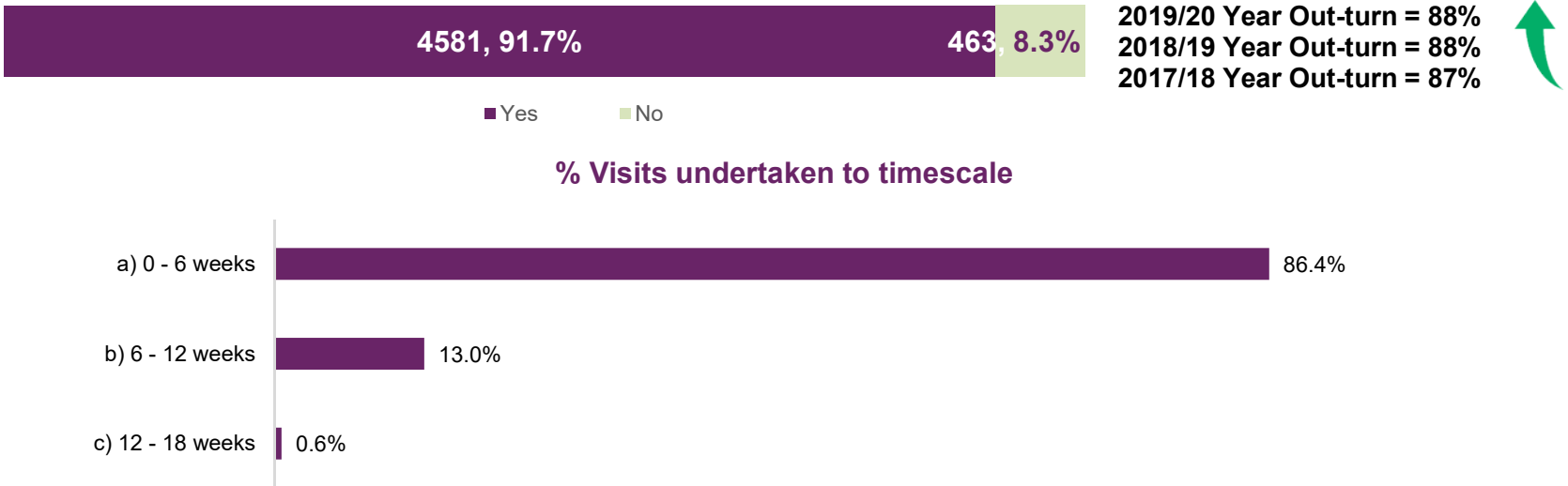
Statutory Visits and Reviews



% Visits undertaken to timescale

Where a statutory visit has been undertaken to timescale in accordance with the childs plan.

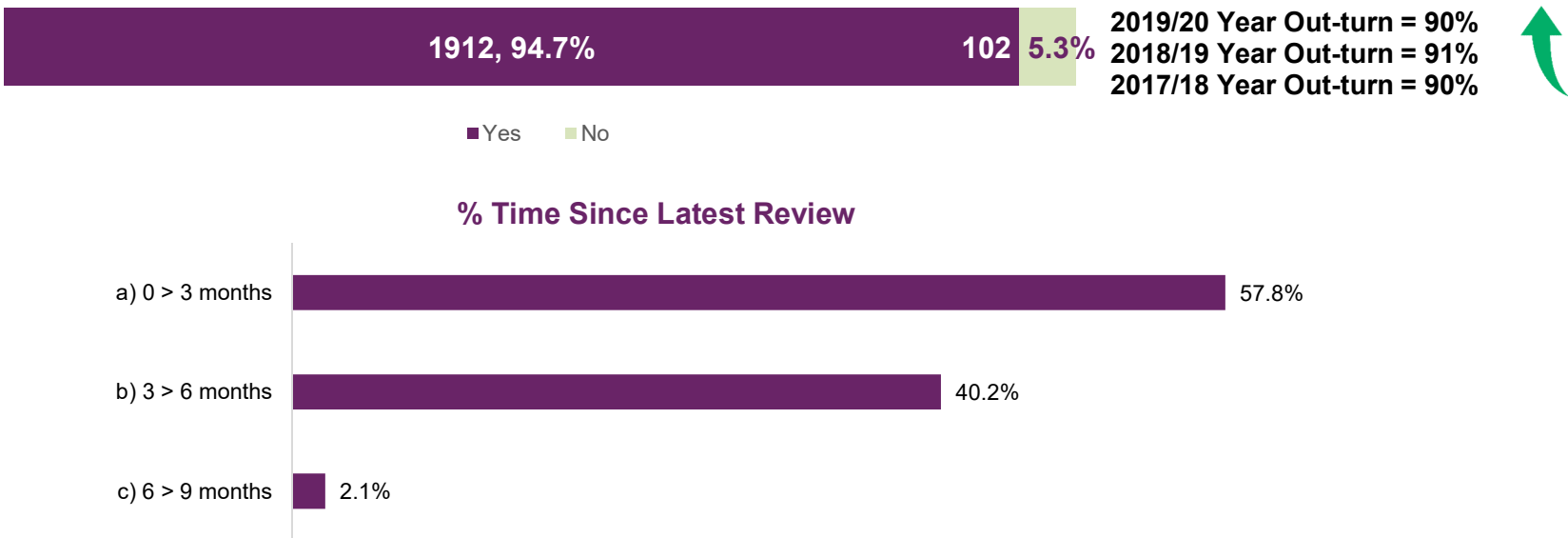
Time Since Last Visit Undertaken	Number	%
a) 0 - 6 weeks	585	86.4%
b) 6 - 12 weeks	88	13.0%
c) 12 - 18 weeks	4	0.6%
d) 18+ weeks	0	0.0%
No Visit Recorded	0	0.0%
Total	677	100.0%



Reviews carried out within timescale

Where reviews for children looked after are carried out within timescale

Time Since Latest Review	Number	%
a) 0 > 3 months	391	57.8%
b) 3 > 6 months	272	40.2%
c) 6 > 9 months	14	2.1%
d) 9 > 12 months	0	0.0%
e) 1 year or more	0	0.0%
No review	0	0.0%
No Review - new in last month	0	0.0%
Total	677	100.0%

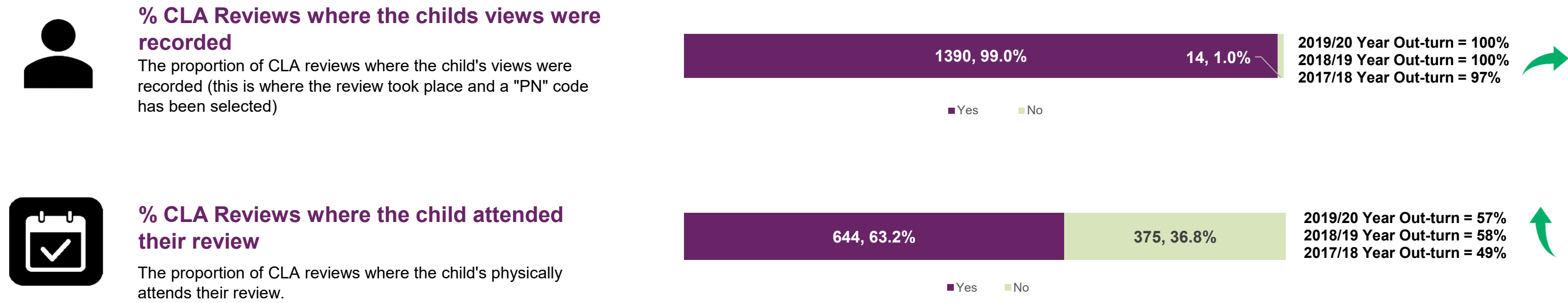


Commentary

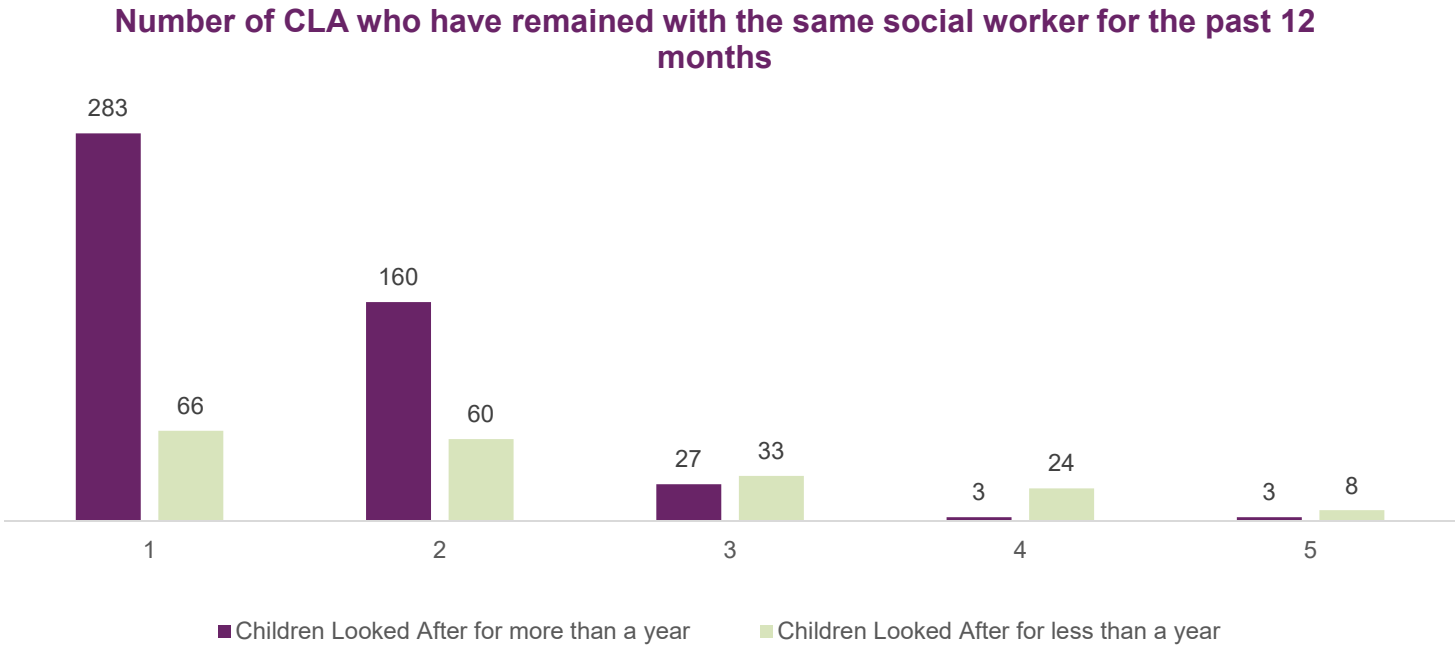
The proportion of CLA where a statutory visit has been undertaken to timescale in accordance with the child’s plan is 91.7% with 90.3% seen within 6 weeks of the previous visit or coming in care. There were 2 CLA with no visits recorded at 31st December 2020

94.7% of reviews have been undertaken within timescales. This is higher than the 2018/19 out-turn of 91%. 97.1% of current children looked after have had a review within the last 6 months. 1.6% (11) children currently have overdue reviews.

Views of the child



Type of Participation at Review	Number	%
PN0 - child under 4 at time of review	371	N/A
PN1 - child attends and speaks for themselves	593	58.2%
PN2 - child attends and an advocate speaks for them	14	1.4%
PN3 - child attends and conveys their views non-verbally	15	1.5%
PN4 - child attends; does not speak for themselves / convey their views	22	2.2%
PN5 - child does not attend but asks advocate to speak for them	73	7.2%
PN6 - child does not attend but conveys their feelings to the conference	267	26.2%
PN7 - child does not attend nor conveys their view to the conference	21	2.1%
Total Reviews	1390	
No Participation Code Reported	14	1.4%



Commentary

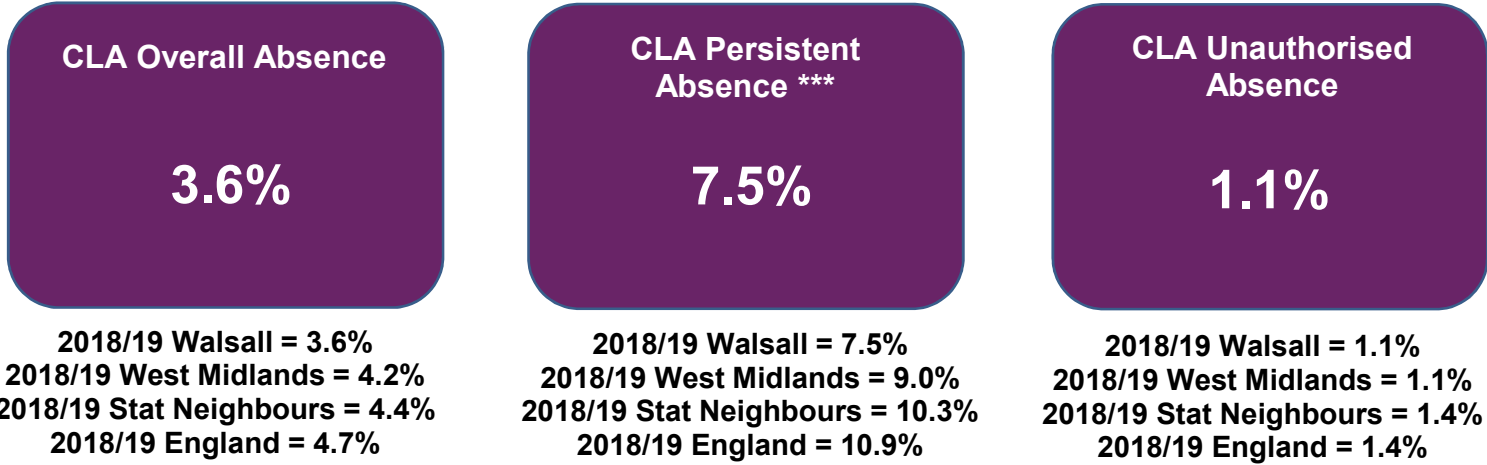
The child's views were recorded at 99% of CLA reviews. This is lower than 2019/20 and 2018/19, but higher than 2017/18. In 2019/20, 63.2% of children attended their review. This is higher than the out-turn of 57% in 2019/20. The number of children experiencing a change of social worker has increased slightly compared to the previous year. The number of CLA who have remained with the same social worker for the past 12 months is 283 compared with 302 during quarter 2.

Figures highlighted are provisional				
KS2	Maths	Reading	Writing	RWM
Walsall Current - CLA 2019	55%	34%	55%	28%
Walsall Borough 2019	77%	70%	77%	61%
Stat Neighbours CLA 2019	56%	52%	55%	43%
England 2019 CLA	51%	49%	50%	37%
KS4	%	%	Attain 8	Prog 8
Walsall - CLA - 2019	C*	18%	21.0	-0.88
Walsall Borough 2019	36%	58%	44.0	-0.11
Stat Neighbours 2019 CLA*	N/A	22%	17.12	-1.28
England 2019 CLA	7%	18%	19.2	-1.23
Ofsted Rated Schools		Exclusions**		
No Students Attending Good or Outstanding Schools	EYFS	97%	Atleast one fixed term Exclusion	7.7%
	Primary	79%		
	Second	69%		
	Combin	75%		

* 'C' Where the data is deemed to be sensitive all figures have been replaced with the letter c (confidential). In addition, secondary suppression may be applied to preserve confidentiality.

**A pupil is classed as persistently absent if they miss 10% or more possible sessions (due to authorised or unauthorised absence).

***There have been no permanent exclusions



CLA with an up to date ePEP

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

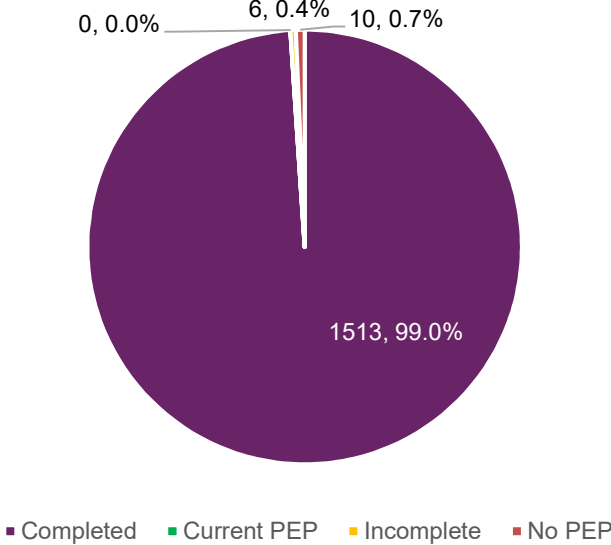
Methodology

Attainment in English and maths (9-5) From 2017, this measure looks at the percentage of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above in both English and maths. Pupils can achieve the English component of this with a grade 5 or above in English language or literature. There is no requirement to sit both exams.

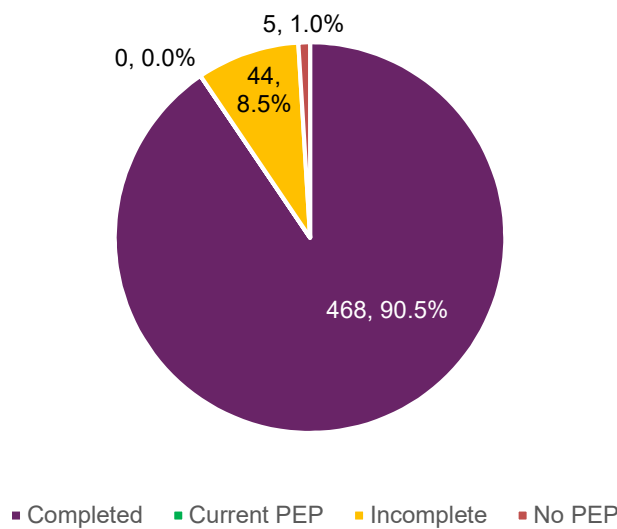
Attainment 8 - Attainment 8 measures the average achievement of pupils in up to 8 qualifications including English (double weighted if the combined English qualification, or both language and literature are taken), maths (double weighted), three further qualifications that count in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and three further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or any other non-GCSE qualifications on the DfE approved list.

Progress 8 - Progress 8 aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of key stage 2 to the end of key stage 4. It compares pupils' achievement – their Attainment 8 score – with the average Attainment 8 score of all pupils nationally who had a similar starting point (or 'prior attainment'), calculated using assessment results from the end of primary school.

ePEPs Complete/Current/Incomplete
Academic Year 2019/20



ePEPs Complete/Current/Incomplete
Autumn Term to Date



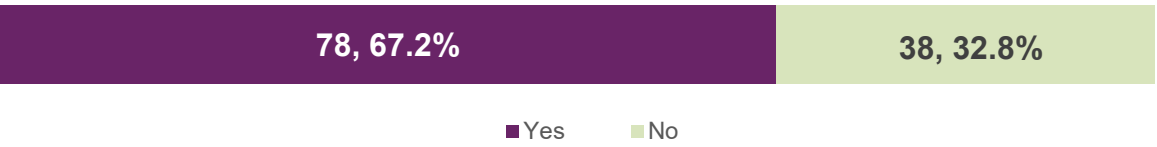
Commentary

The proportion of ePEP's that were completed at the end of the autumn term (31st December 2020) was 90.5% , The percentage of ePEP's that have been rated as good in terms of quality is 69%, with 31% rated as requiring improvement. CLA overall absence, Persistent Absence and Unauthorised Absence are currently all below both Statistical neighbour and England averages. The percentage of CLA attending Good or Outstanding schools is 75%, whilst this figure rises to 97% for Early Years pupils.

Health and Well-being

% Initial Health Check Completed in Timescale

Assessments in timescale of CLA admission for those in care for 28 days or more



2019/20 Year Out-turn = 49%
2018/19 Year Out-turn = 75%
2017/18 Year Out-turn = 63%

% of CLA with Up to Date Health Assessments

Where the child is over 5 and has been looked after for over a year



2019/20 Walsall = 80%
2019/20 West Midlands = 87%
2019/20 Stat Neighbours = 90%
2019/20 England = 90%

% of CLA with an up to date dental check

Where a dental check has been completed within 12 months



2019/20 Walsall = 92%
2019/20 West Midlands = 82%
2019/20 Stat Neighbours = 90%
2019/20 England = 86%

Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

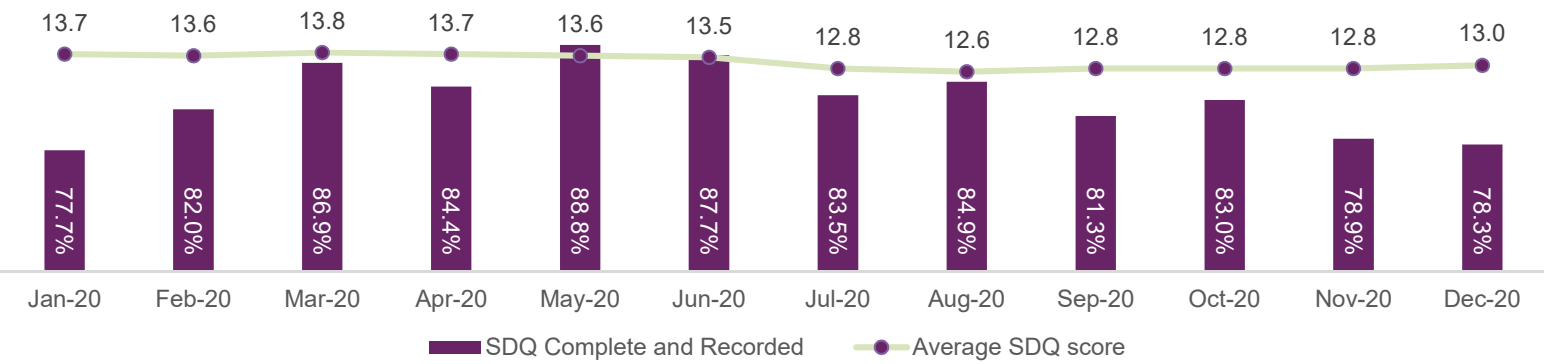
The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire should be completed for every child looked after for at least 12 months and aged 5 to 16 years-old.

Average SDQ Score
13.0

Breakdown

Score	Considered	Number	% of those eligible for SDQ	% against all Children Looked
Score 0 - 13	Considered Normal	129	50%	19.1%
Score 14 - 16	Borderline	34	#DIV/0!	5.0%
Score 17 - 40	Cause for Concern	93	#DIV/0!	13.7%

Number of children looked after for at least 12 months aged 5 to 16 with an SDQ score (Rolling 12 months)

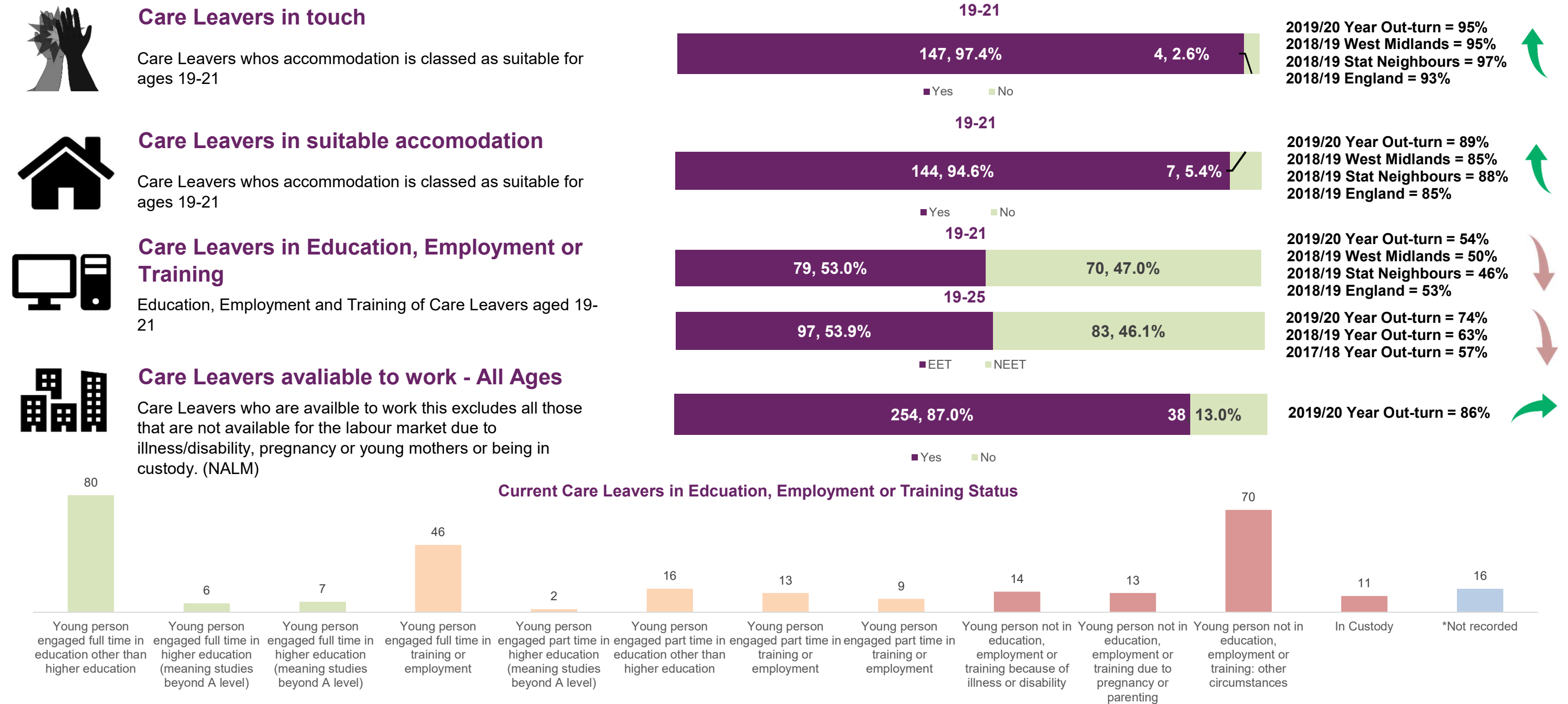


Commentary

The percentage of children looked after with an initial health check decreased to 67.2% during the quarter 3 of 2020-21, from 86.6% in quarter 2 - however, we are assured that health checks are taking place and the decrease in performance is due to recording and reporting issues which are being addressed. The percentage of children looked after with an up to date dental check has increased slightly during quarter 3, but is still below the out-turns for the previous three years. Dental checks were affected by dentists being closed at various points during the pandemic. Significant work has been undertaken, and continues to be taken in partnership with health to improve the processes and accuracy of data recording in relation to health assessments and to ensure that children and young people receive their assessments on time.

The proportion of SDQ's completed and recorded has continued to decrease during quarter 3, following increases between January and June 2020. The average SDQ score is currently 13.0. This has increased since the previous quarter, where the average SDQ score was 12.8, but is lower than the average for quarter 2 during 2019-20 (14.0) (Lower is better). 126 children currently have an SDQ score that suggests there is cause for concern in their emotional and mental well-being based on the answers they gave to the questionnaire.

Care Leavers

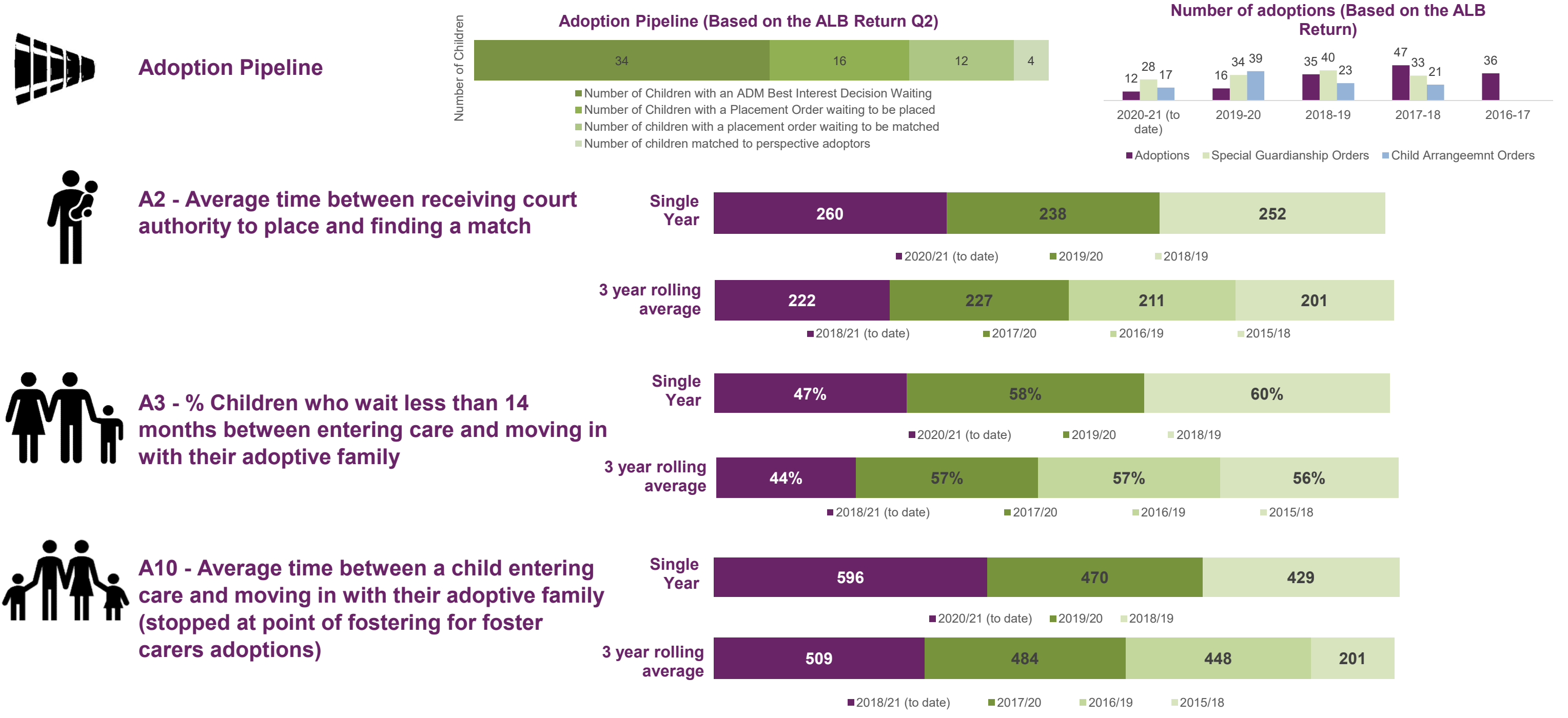


Commentary

The percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training for the 19-21 and 19-25 cohorts has seen a slight increase this quarter. 53.02% care leavers aged 19-21 are in Education, Employment or Training compared to 51.02% for quarter 2. However, this is still below the out turns of 54% for 2019-20 and 63% for 2018-19. Managers had expected this figure to continue to decrease during quarter 3, as the government's furlough scheme was expected to come to an end. This reduction is still expected, but has been delayed somewhat, due to the extension of the furlough scheme.

86.99% of care leavers are available to work - excluding those not available for the labour market (NALM) due to illness, disability, pregnancy or being a young mother or because they are in custody. 11 of Walsall's care leavers are currently in custody, an increase of 3 since the end of Q2. The proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation has increased to 94.6%. The proportion of care leavers in touch with the council has also increased and is currently at 97.35%, which is above the 2019/20 out turn of 95%, and higher than regional and national averages for the same period.

Adoption and Permanency



Commentary

In 2019/20, 16 were children were adopted. This is a reduction of over 50% compared with 2018/19. By the end of quarter 3 of the 2020/21 reporting year, 12 children had been adopted, indicating that the final figure for 2020/21 will be similar to 2019/20. Children had a longer wait in 2020/21 between receiving court authority to place and finding a match - this was 260 days compared to 238 days in 2019/20. 47% of Children wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. Between April and December, 28 Children have ceased to be looked after due to special guardianship orders and 17 due to child arrangement orders.

Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme 2020/21

Lead Officer	Board date	11 th January	15th February 2021	22 nd March 2021
	<i>Report to AD</i>	<i>14th December 2020</i>	<i>21st January 2021</i>	<i>1st March 2021</i>
	<i>Slides to Young People</i>			
	<i>Report to Democratic Services</i>	<i>30th December 2020</i>	<i>4th February 2021</i>	<i>11th March 2021</i>
David Hughes	Young People Engagement			
Alison Jones	Health Passports			
Zoe Morgan	Local Offer			
Jivan Sembi	Housing Report			
Mark Tobin Adoption @Heart	Regional Adoption Agency			
Mark Burrows	Fostering Annual report			
Helena Kucharczyk.	Performance Monitoring		Q3	
Lorraine Thompson	NEET			
Alison Jones And TBC	CAMHS and emotional wellbeing of Children in Care and Care Leavers			
Lorraine Thompson	Assurance report – virtual school			
Alison Jones	Assurance report –CCG			

