



Walsall Council

Corporate Parenting Board

Meeting to be held on: **Monday 6th September, 2021 AT 6.00 PM**

Meeting to be held: Conference room 2, Walsall Council House.

Public access to meeting via: <https://youtu.be/9e12M4OxxY4>

MEMBERSHIP:

Chair: Councillor Wilson
Vice Chair: Councillor Worrall
Councillor Ferguson
Councillor Hicken
Councillor Murphy
Councillor M Nazir
Councillor Mazhar

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.

ITEMS FOR BUSINESS

1.	Introductions and Apologies	
2.	Substitutions	
3.	Minutes To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 1 st July 2021.	<u>Enclosed</u> <u>Pg. 5-10</u>
4.	Young People Engagement To provide the Corporate Parenting Board with update on the activities of the Children in Care Council.	<u>Enclosed</u> <u>Pg. 12-19</u>
5.	Walsall Children's Services Corporate Parenting Board Quarter 1 To consider performance monitoring information for quarter 1.	<u>Enclosed</u> <u>Pg. 20-28</u>
6.	Adoption Service Report To consider the annual service report.	<u>Enclosed</u> <u>Pg. 29-45</u>
7.	Work programme To review the work programme of the Corporate Parenting Board.	<u>Enclosed</u> <u>Pg. 45-47</u>
8.	Date of Next Meeting 15 th November 2021, 6 p.m.	

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 of the total issued share capital of that class.</p>

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

Thursday 1st July 2021 at 6.00 p.m.

Board Members Present:

Councillor T. Wilson (Chair)
Councillor. R. Worrall (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Ferguson
Councillor Hicken
Councillor Murphy
Councillor M. Nazir

Officers Present

David Hughes	Children and Young Persons Champion
Alison Jones	Designated Nurse LAC (Clinical Commissioning Group)
John Dunning	Interim Children's Commissioner for Walsall CCG
Colleen Male	Director, Children's Social Work
Mick McCarthy	Group Manager (Corporate Parenting)
Helena Baxter	Apprenticeship Programme Lead
Helena Kucharczyk	Head of Performance Improvement and Quality
Elise Hopkins	Director – Customer Engagement

Note: This meeting was held in the Council Chamber in accordance with s.102 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Council's Constitution. In order to comply with social distancing requirements as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the meeting was conducted via Microsoft Teams in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders for Remote Meetings.

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. It was noted that a Shadow Board was held directly prior to the meeting to seek the views and experiences of young people. Members confirmed that they could both see and hear the proceedings.

1/21 Introductions and Apologies

There were no apologies for the duration of the meeting.

2/21 Substitutions

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

3/21 **Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meetings held on 22nd March, 2021 were submitted.

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd March, 2021 copies having previously been circulated to each Member of the Board, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record.

4/21 **Young People Engagement**

The Children and Young Persons Champion spoke to the report (annexed) and highlighted the salient points.

Members were informed of the following updates:

- There were new recruits to the Children in Care Council (CiC), and efforts continued to expand its membership further.
- Young People would be provided with the opportunity to work towards ASDAN accredited awards in mentoring.
- Young people will be involved in the development of new children's homes in the Borough.
- There was a continuation in developing champions in areas such as health and social care.
- A young person had drafted a letter, which expressed concern about the local environment. This was escalated to council management and as a result a litter pick had been arranged.
- There had been one-to-one mentoring, by a 19 year old care leaver, to a younger looked after child.
- The Chair of the Board attended the CiC and young people had the opportunity to influence the Corporate Parenting Board work programme. This was positive as young people felt that they had been listened to.
- A promotional video had been produced to encourage young people to participate in the Children in Care Council.
- A need for a 'care leavers' group had been established to focus on specific issues.
- A meeting had taken place on 30th March in relation to the Care Leavers covenant and as a result of this, there would be a 70% discount on water rates for care leavers.

Members congratulated the 'Children and Young Persons Champion' on the success of the promotional video. A Member asked how many young people took part in the CiC. Officers clarified that the full list of young people who had been referred was around 35-40 people and there were around 20 young people who consistently attended the CiC.

The Chair thanked the young person for taking the time to write the letter to the relevant authorities and to Officers for acting on the request. It was also suggested that the Board should be invited to the litter pick.

The Health representative informed the Board that the health team had been working with the Young Peoples Champion and it was hoped a video introducing health checks would be produced in the future.

An Officer responded to a question from a Member to confirm that the resources for the Care Leavers Ambassador had been agreed, and the recruitment to this role would be progressed. The Chair fed back on the CiC to inform the Board that young people reported that they were not aware how to access services. A Member formally moved that a report on options for an app should be taken to the Board. This was moved, seconded and agreed unanimously by the Board.

The Chair thanked young people for attending and participating in the Shadow Board.

Resolved:

- 1. That the Young People Engagement report was noted.**
- 2. That a report is taken to a future meeting of the Board detailing the options for an app, to include functionality and accessibility for young people in care.**

5/21 Walsall Children's Services Corporate Parenting Board July 2021 Quarter 4

The Performance Lead for Children's Services presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). Members were informed the report presented performance at the end of March 2021 and for the previous 12 months. This data was submitted to the Department of Education, some of which was used to benchmark the Authority against other Local Authorities. There had been a reduction in children entering care, however, backlogs in courts due to the Covid-19 pandemic meant that this reduction had not translated to a reduction in the total number of children in care in Walsall. It was hoped that the reduction in these backlogs would address this issue. Members were informed that had been an increase in the number of children placed outside of the Local Authority boundary. This was due to fewer placements available, which had impacted placement sufficiency. Short-term stability had reduced, which was positive, and was lower than comparators. There had been an improvement in initial and annual health checks, which were improving and continuing to improve. It was noted that dental checks had been impacted by the pandemic. Another impact of the pandemic had been a reduction in the number of young people in education, employment or training. However Members were assured that this was an improving picture. It was noted that there was only one care leaver not in suitable accommodation.

A discussion ensued on the 'percentage of visits undertaken to timescale', it was noted that the statutory timescale for this was 0-6 weeks and a Member asked how this

compared to neighbouring authorities. Officers agreed to seek out this information and bring this information back to the Board.

A Member asked for assurance that the percentage of initial health checks completed in timescales would continue to be improved. The Health representative stated that this was monitored on a monthly basis. The Board were assured that everything was being done to improve the percentages. The Board sought assurance that the percentage of children coming into care that had received dental checks would be improved, acknowledging that this was impacted by the pandemic. The health representative stated that this was a national issue, and where there were issues in local dentists this was escalated to NHS England to progress the issue. This was an issue that was monitored, however the backlog may take a few months to improve.

Officers informed Members the service aimed to work with families to overcome issues which could impacted on their ability to have their children remain in their care. It was hoped that the impact of this work had led to a reduction in the number of children coming into care.

The Director (Customer Engagement), asked if it was likely that unaccompanied asylum seeking children would be accepted in to Walsall. The Group Manager stated that children would be accepted in line with the national transfer scheme. In the last month, two children had been received, and two more would be accepted in July, this would not put the authorities' resources at risk. The Board were assured that the Authority was not being put under pressure and national formulas were used. A Member queried how these children could be accommodated if local children were being sent outside of the Borough. Officers responded that this was often about the individual needs of children which meant the most appropriate placement would be identified, whether that be within or outside of Walsall.

Assurance was sought that action was being taken in relation to the one young person who was not in suitable accommodation. It was noted that this was due to the definition of 'suitable accommodation' and that personal advisers were carrying out all necessary checks and were satisfied that the young person was safe and well.

Resolved

That the Walsall Children's Services Corporate Parenting Board July 2021 Quarter 4, report was noted.

6/21 Increasing Employability for Care Experienced Young People

The Group Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board were advised that the report provided an update on care experienced young people that were not in education, employment or training.

Figures relating to care experienced NEET, compared favourably with the England and West Midlands average. The reasons for young people not being in

employment, education or training were described. The NEET action group would concentrate on those young people who would benefit from extra support to make use of opportunities in Walsall. The Board were advised of successes within the Team in placing care leavers.

A Member highlighted a point raised in the Shadow Board, this was the suggestion of a mentoring programme for care leavers. This was supported.

A Member questioned if care leavers would benefit from additional education, Officers confirmed that this was the case and there was a challenge in persuading young people to take up these opportunities due to personal difficulties faced by this group. It was confirmed that this was being progressed, and work was being done with young people to ensure they could access and maintain education, employment and training. The Board were advised that young people's interests were matched with opportunities available, and they were referred on. Officers were asked that the Board were kept updated on this situation. It was acknowledged that care leavers had lived experiences which were beneficial to employers.

In response to a question from a Member, Officers explained that referrals to the NEET Action Group (NAG) would only be made if young people were happy for this to happen, this would allow the Black Country Impact Workers to be more focused. Members stressed to importance of hearing the child's voice at all times.

The Kickstart programme was discussed and in response to challenge from Members, Officer explained that it was 'Walsall Works' who were coordinating this and that there were care leavers who were taking advantage of this scheme.

Recommendations that:

1. The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board writes a letter to West Midlands Police to request that a proportion of apprenticeships are ring fenced for care leavers.

2. A care leaver mentor scheme, for those LAC who are interested in attending university, is developed. A report is provided to the Board detailing the supported provided to those LAC interested in attending university.

3. The Board receives a report providing information in relation to the 'dip sample' of young people leaving custody.

7/21 Virtual School Annual Report

The virtual school annual report was annexed. Those Members with any questions should contact Democratic Services.

8/21 Forward Plan

The Board were advised that this detailed the work of the Board for the following two meetings.

Resolved

That the forward plan be noted.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.30 p.m.

Young Peoples Engagement

Executive Summary:

The “Children in Care Council” (CICC), is the forum where Walsall’s looked after children, young people and care leavers are able to shape and influence the parenting and support that they receive.

This report describes some of the highlights of the CICC since the last Corporate Parenting Board held on 1 July 2021.

The young people have continued to meet virtually every two weeks due to Covid-19. The CICC have worked on many things which include; Interview panels, increasing referrals, discussing a new care leavers group, attended a trip too Woodlands, looking over a draft participation strategy and supporting with the recruitment of a care leaver ambassador (apprentice).

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To provide the Corporate Parenting Board an update on the activities of the CICC which will allow the Board to offer any support to the children, in partnership with senior managers as corporate parents for children in care and care leavers.

We are keen to ensure that the CICC is encouraged to share highlights and raise any issues and concerns they may have on behalf of care experienced young people in Walsall with a view to improving services and outcome for children in the care of Walsall Council.

The Shadow Board has been put in place to ensure that the young people are fully involved in the Corporate Parenting Board and that their views are considered as part of this process.

Recommendations:

The Board notes the activity and events of the Children in Care Council.

Background papers:

Previous Young People Engagement reports.

Corporate Parenting Pledges

The Walsall Promise for all Children in Care and Care Leavers

Resource and legal considerations:

Walsall is committed to ensuring that children and young people are involved in decision making and processes that directly affect their lives through.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced seven Corporate Parenting Principles and 2 of the principles focus on the involvement and participation of children and young people.:

- Encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- Take account of a child or young person's views, wishes and feelings

Article 12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child says that children and young people have the human right to have opinions and for these opinions to be heard and taken seriously and taken seriously.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.
- People have increased independence, improved health, and can positively contribute to their communities.

Citizen impact:

The services and the improvements play a key role in the quality of life and outcomes for the children, young people and families of Walsall. The Council and its partners as Corporate Parents make critical contributions to improve outcomes.

Environmental impact:

None.

Performance management:

The Children's Champion works with children in care and our care experienced young people to ensure that our CICC is a rich and engaging forum. Regular reports are provided to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Reducing inequalities:


The children in care council seeks to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Consultation:

The CICC is one of the key forums through which services for children in care and care leavers seek to consult on service delivery and where children and young people are able to shape and influence the parenting they receive at every level.

Contact Officer:

Full Name – David Hughes

 01922 650555/ 07787 284682

Email: david-j.hughes@walsall.gov.uk

Report: Young People's Engagement and Children in Care Council

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Interview Panels

The CICC have been involved with some very important interviews this July and August.

The first interview panel took place in July where two of our care leavers interviewed four candidates applying for an Assistant Manager positions in our Residential Homes.

The second interview panel which took place on the 4th of August, two of our care leavers put the pressure on three candidates applying for Head of Service positions within Children's Social Care.

All questions were created by the young person's panel and they also had the opportunity to use the Council's scoring sheet and then following the interviews met with our Director Colleen Male to provide valuable feedback.

We would just like to thank Newell Phillip-Hamilton for stepping in to offer support in the absence of David Hughes.

1.2 Increase in referrals

Following the continued promotion of the CICC we have seen an increase in more young people being introduced to the Children in Care Council over the last two months which shows that what we are doing to promote must be working.

We welcome all of our new young people and care leavers to the group with open arms. As a group we continue to work on new and creative ways in spreading the news of the wonderful work the CICC does and this seems to have a positive effect.

The CICC wanted to say thanks to staff that have promoted the CICC with young people and to mention that without the staff and teams doing their job in promoting, we wouldn't be able to do our job.

1.2 Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN).

ASDAN is an education charity and awarding organisation which provides curriculum programmes and qualifications to help young people develop knowledge and skills for learning, work and life.

Our mission is promote and offer our children and young people involved in the CICC the opportunity to have a go at starting an ASDAN award of their choice. There are many to choose from such as: Mentoring, Personal Development, Creative Arts, Community Projects and Sport (to name a few).

This initiative can help give something new for young people to work towards which they can own, do in their own time at their own pace. Once the short course is completed they will get 1 - 2 credits and will be given the opportunity to continue to work towards more credits [Page 15 of 47](#) chosen awards or could choose another

subject area if they wish. These credits are recognised nationally and can highlight the commitment of each individual which can help when moving into further education or employment.

1.3 Face-to-face meetings

We now have the 'Green light' to go ahead with our CICC meetings to take place in person as a group. We will do this in a phased and responsible way and will trial a blended style incorporating both the use of virtual and physical attendance. We want to include as many attendees as possible so we may mix up the days, times and ways in which the meetings are run.

The Children's Champion will continue to work with Public Health to ensure that we are complying with current guidance.

1.5 Trip to Woodlands Outdoor Adventure

On Wednesday 11 August we took part in a fantastic outdoor pursuit's full day of activities. We took part in Archery, Assault Course, Zip wire and Rock Climbing. This helped us all gain new skills, made us more confident, helped in building stronger relationships as a group and made us work together as a team.

The CICC and the Children's Champion wanted to say a special thanks to Newell Phillip-Hamilton and Lashone Richards for helping out on the day.

We had amazing feedback from all that attended and some good friendships were built showing real good connections with opportunities for some of our older influencers to mentor younger care experienced people. Please see the additional slides at the end of this report for more details.

1.6 Contributing to the development of Participation Strategy

During the CICC meeting on 12 August our young people gave feedback on the proposed Participation Strategy. This is still in its infancy and our 'Influencers' were deciding on what should be included within the strategy, how it should look in terms of the colours and graphics.

The CICC will continue to be consulted and will get to work with other young people that come into contact with professionals in Walsall to help change and encourage the way we listen to the voices of young people.

1.7 Care Leavers Ambassador

We have now advertised for one full time care leaver ambassador. This is a ring fenced position for care leavers in Walsall where they will be given the opportunity to work towards a Level 2 Customer Services qualification. The successful ambassador will work alongside and be managed by the Children's Champion.

We will be getting them involved with all projects and areas of the role and we really hope this will help to further develop the opportunities for children in care in Walsall. The main areas of work will be:

- Supporting the children's champion to develop and maintain the Children in Care Council and the Care Leaver's Group
- Help organise and support social and leisure activities
- Support the workshops established by TLC and Black Country impact staff to promote ETE opportunities
- Help to organise interview panels for staff recruitment
- Ensure that information is circulated to young people
- Help to co-ordinate feedback to proposed service development
- Act as a mentor and role model to young people

2. Other news

2.1 Care leavers group

Some of us at the CICC feel we are out growing the current group as we are getting older and as we mature our priorities and needs change. We have highlighted the need to set up a care leavers group which the Children's Champion is progressing.

The Children's Champion has now met with the managers in TLC (Transition Leaving Care) as well as some other local authorities and in September we should trial our first meeting to help plan the role out of this new initiative in Walsall. The Care Leavers Group will be designed and developed by care leavers and will be fully supported by the Children's Champion and Care Ambassador to help promote, facilitate and ensure the smooth running of it.

2.2 Care Leavers App and Walsall Website

We have met with an app provider to discuss the effectiveness of viability of introducing this in Walsall. We have found that some local authorities have withdrawn from introducing an app due to the patchy use of it by young people and the resources required to maintain it. For some, it has not given value for money. We are still exploring the viability of options with other local authorities.

We are also working with colleagues to introduce a page on our website dedicated to care leavers which will contain many of the features of a basic app, such as the local offer, events and important communications. We believe that this will all be in place before the end of the calendar year.

2.3 Litter Pick

At the time this report has been submitted we have not yet managed to do the litter pick which we discussed during the last Board. The Children's Champion is working in partnership with Clean and Green and with Maria's Foster Carer to see this take place before the school summer holidays are over. We hope to provide an update at the Board meeting in September.

3. Celebrations and Achievements

- One of our care leavers has gained employment and continues to work within the hospitality industry.
- One of our care leavers is entering into her second year at University studying Psychology.

- One of our care leavers was successful in her application to two Universities and has chosen to attend Plymouth to study medicine.
- One of our care leavers is off to study at Walsall College to pursue his career of one day becoming a social worker.

4. Dates for forthcoming events and children in care council meetings.

24th August (Event) Possible Foot/ Disk Golf 11 – 2
26th August CICC meeting
WC 6th September Pending interviews for Care Leaver Ambassador
9th September CICC meeting
23rd September CICC meeting
30th September Possible first Care Leavers Group meeting
October/ November Care leavers week

Meetings will continue to be held every other week with new blended approach both virtually and in person at Transition Leaving Care Hub.

Finally I would like to remind everyone and anyone working with children in Walsall that Participation and Engagement should be at the forefront of everyone's agenda.

Working 'With' Children, capturing 'Their' voice and being 'Proactive' in every engagement opportunity should not be an add on to the work we do with young people but should be seen as a matter of cause and be a priority for all in shaping the support and services in which we provide. Sometimes we get too wrapped up in our processes and need to be more focused on some basic things like getting to know our children well, spending time with them and listening with the intent to understand their perspective not always to respond with solutions.

David Hughes
Children's Champion

This week we took 14 care experienced young people to Woodlands Outdoor Adventure in Aldridge. They really enjoyed taking part in challenging and adventurous activities such as archery, zip wire, rock climbing and completing the assault course.

They gained confidence, developed resilience and had some quality time to get to know other young people with care experience and share their views. If you are working with any care experienced young people and care leavers and want to know more about getting involved then please get in touch with the Children's Champion.

David Hughes on 07787 284682 or david-j.hughes@walsall.gov.uk.



Persevering

Trying out new things



Click here
for
audio



Walsall Children's Services Corporate Parenting Board September 2021 Quarter 1

**Please Note: 2020-21 benchmarking data is not yet available so
comparisons are against 2019-20 data.**



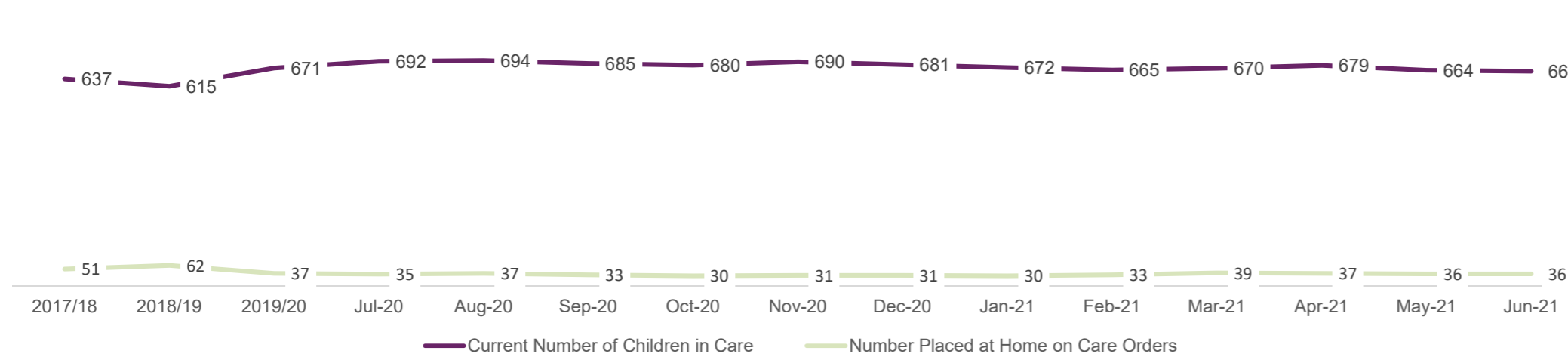
Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

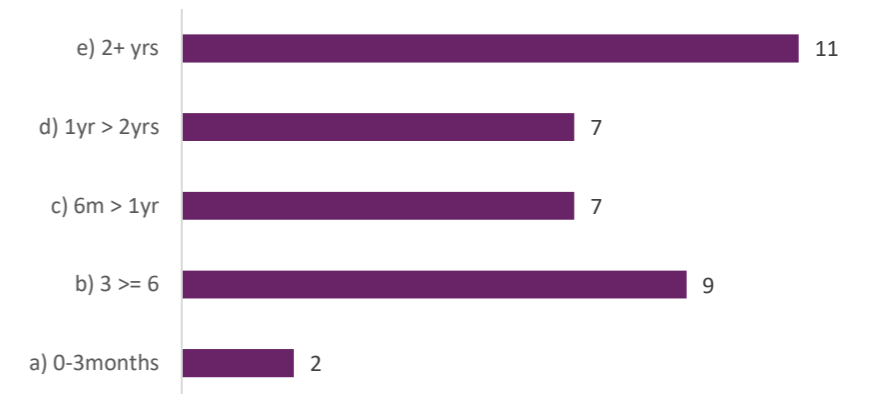
Current Children in Care (CiC) Profile



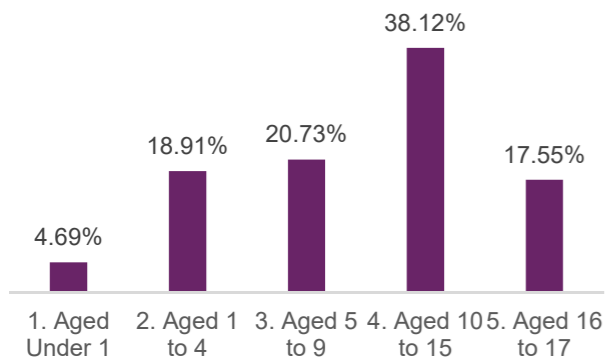
Number of Children in Care in Walsall (12 Month Rolling)



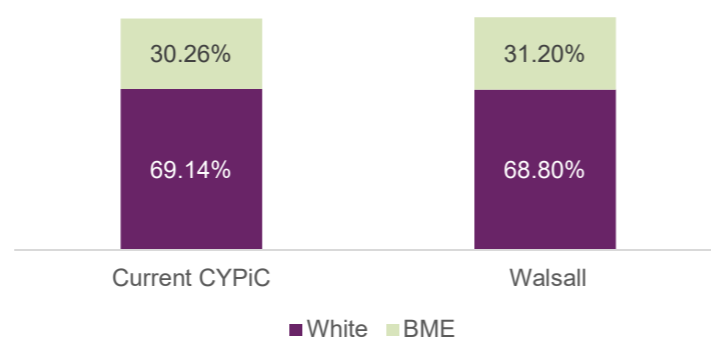
Length of Time placed at home on full care orders



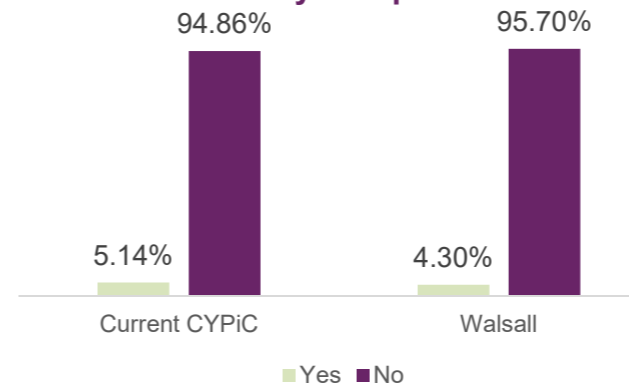
% of current CiC by age



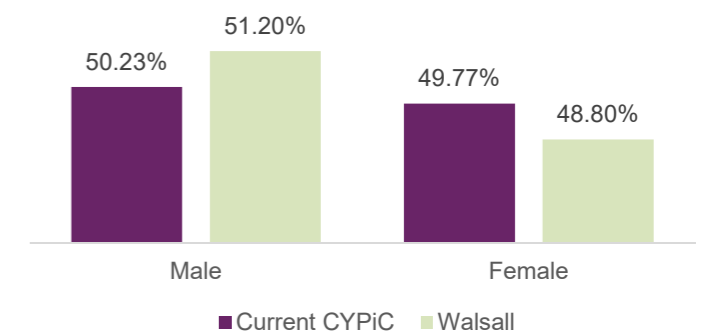
Ethnicity Comparison



Disability Comparison



Gender Comparison



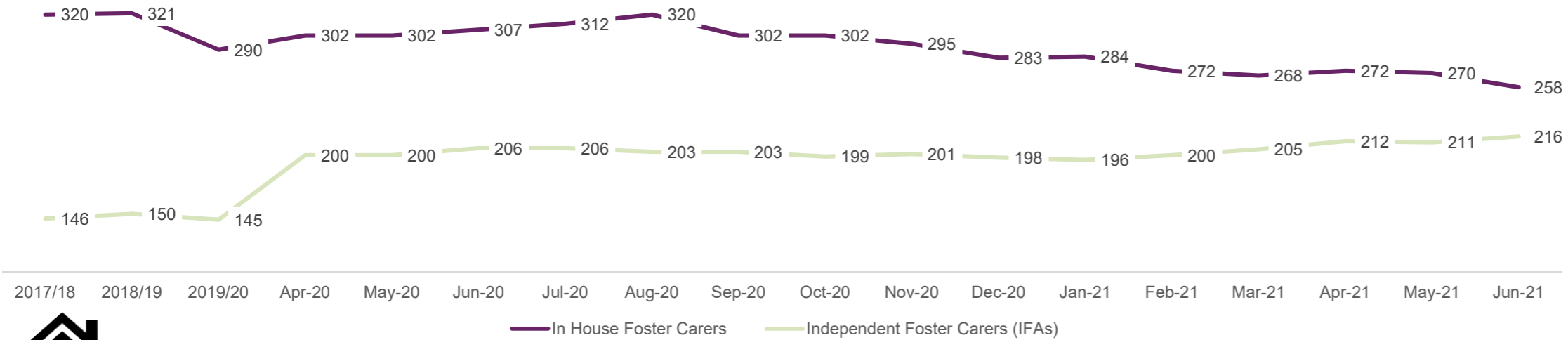
Commentary

Demographic data has been taken from the 2019 mid-year population estimates. A slightly lower proportion of Children in Care are from BME backgrounds compared to the Walsall Child and Young Person population (0-17s). A slightly higher percentage of Children in Care have a disability (5.14%), compared to the overall 0-17 population (4.30%). A slightly higher percentage of Children in Care are female (48.80%) compared to the overall 0-17 population of Walsall (51.20%).

The current Children in Care population has continued to decrease slightly from 670 at the end of 2020/21 to 661 at the end of Q1 of the current year (2021/22). The current rate of 96 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 36 children placed at home on full care order, this has decreased from 39 at the end of 2020/21. 18 of the 36 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.

CiC Placement Analysis

Breakdown of Foster Placements (12 Month Rolling)



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



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

88
13.5%

2020/21 Walsall = 14.5%
2019/20 Walsall = 11.0%
2019/20 West Midlands = 14.0%
2019/20 Stat Neighbours = 18.1%

% CiC 3 or more placements in a year

39
5.9%

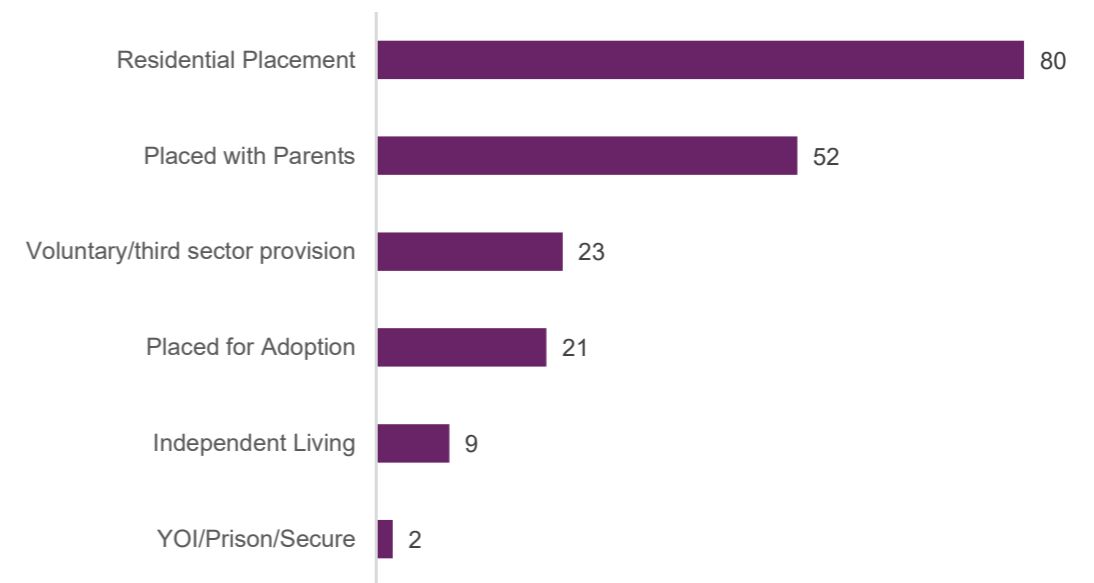
2020/21 Walsall = 7.5%
2019/20 Walsall = 9.0%
2019/20 West Midlands = 10.0%
2019/20 Stat Neighbours = 9.4%
2019/20 England = 11.0%

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

219
65.8%

2020/21 Walsall = 62.5%
2019/20 Walsall = 68.0%
2019/20 West Midlands = 69.0%
2019/20 Stat Neighbours = 67.1%

Current CiC by Placement Type (non-fostered)



Commentary

Trends for children placed with in house foster carers have continued to decrease during the first quarter of 2021/22, following sustained decreases during the previous 2 quarters. Currently Walsall has 258 children placed with 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 216 children placed with independent fostering agencies. This figure has increased further during quarter 1, but has remained fairly constant during the reporting period.

13.5% of Walsall's CiC are placed 20 plus miles from their home address and 5.9% of the CiC population have had 3 or more placements within a year. Both figures have have decreased compared to quarter 4, of the previous year, with the latter figure now much lower than the 2019/20 outturn for Walsall. The percentage of CiC in the same placement for over 2 years if CiC for over 2.5 years has increased compared to the final quarter of 2020/21, but remains lower than the Walsall outturn for 2019/20. The figure for all three [Page 22 of 47](#) are lower than regional, national and statistical neighbour averages.

Statutory Visits and Reviews



% Visits undertaken to timescale

Where a statutory visit has been undertaken to timescale in accordance with the child's plan.

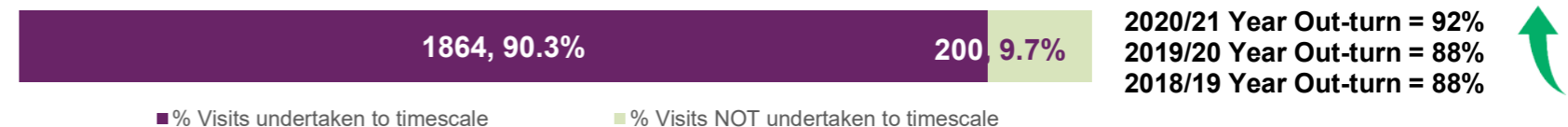
Time Since Last Visit Undertaken	Number	%
a) 0 - 6 weeks	612	92.6%
b) 6 - 12 weeks	39	5.9%
c) 12 - 18 weeks	5	0.8%
d) 18+ weeks	1	0.2%
No Visit Recorded - new in last month	4	0.6%
Total	661	100.0%



Reviews carried out within timescale (12month Rolling)

Where reviews for children looked after are carried out within timescale

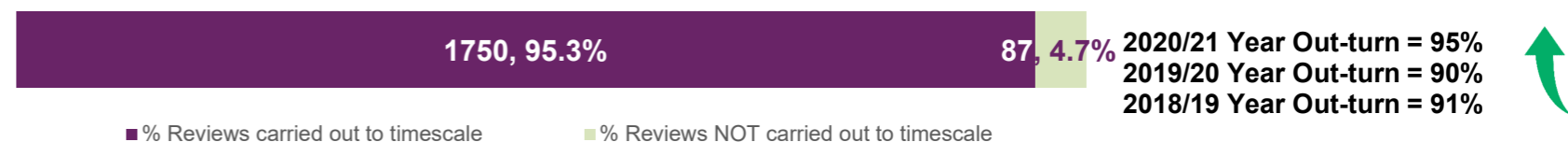
Time Since Latest Review	Number	%
a) 0 > 3 months	355	53.7%
b) 3 > 6 months	293	44.3%
c) 6 > 9 months	4	0.6%
d) 9 > 12 months	1	0.2%
e) 1 year or more	0	0.0%
No review	0	0.0%
No Review - new in last month	8	1.2%
Total	661	100.0%



2020/21 Year Out-turn = 92%
2019/20 Year Out-turn = 88%
2018/19 Year Out-turn = 88%



% of children in care by time since last visit



2020/21 Year Out-turn = 95%
2019/20 Year Out-turn = 90%
2018/19 Year Out-turn = 91%



% Time Since Latest Review



Commentary

The proportion of CiC where a statutory visit has been undertaken to timescale in accordance with the child's plan is 90.3% with 92.6% seen within 6 weeks of the previous visit or coming in care. There were 4 CiC with no visits recorded at 30th June 2021, these are new children who have entered into care during the month.

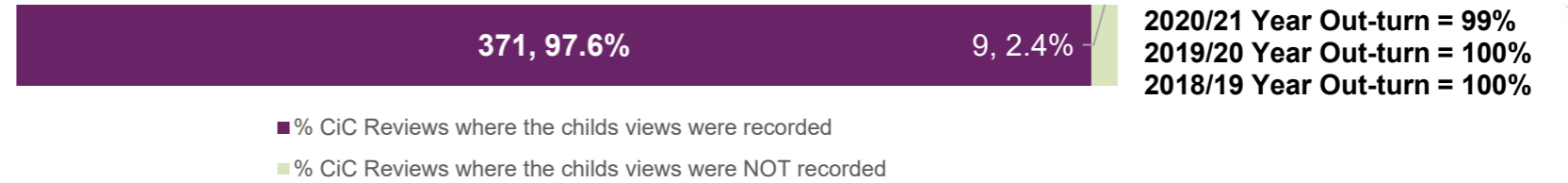
95.3% of reviews have been undertaken within timescales. This is higher than the 2019/20 out-turn of 90%. 98.0% of current Children in Care have had a review within the last 6 months. 0.8% (5) children currently have overdue reviews.

Views of the child



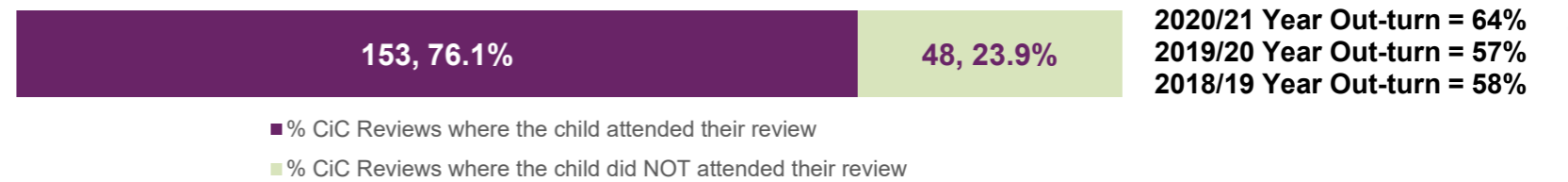
% CiC Reviews where the child's views were recorded

The proportion of CiC reviews where the child's views were recorded (this is where the review took place and a "PN" code has been selected)

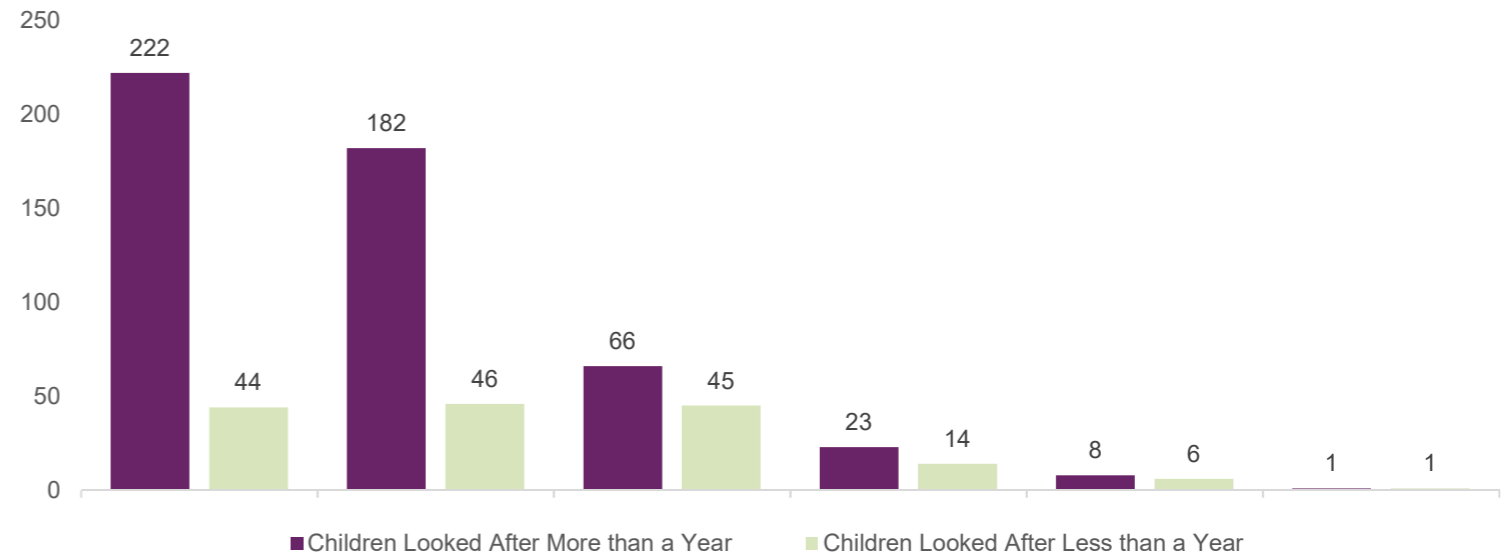


% CiC Reviews where the child attended their review

The proportion of CiC reviews where the child's physically attends their review.



Number of CiC who have remained with the same social worker for the past 12 months



Type of Participation at Review	Number	%
PN0 - child under 4 at time of review	447	N/A
PN1 - child attends and speaks for themselves	852	65.3%
PN2 - child attends and an advocate speaks for them	29	2.2%
PN3 - child attends and conveys their views non-verbally	16	1.2%
PN4 - child attends; does not speak for themselves / convey their views	27	2.1%
PN5 - child does not attend but asks advocate to speak for them	67	5.1%
PN6 - child does not attend but conveys their feelings to the conference	263	20.2%
PN7 - child does not attend nor conveys their view to the conference	22	1.7%
Total Reviews	1751	
No Participation Code Reported	28	2.1%

Commentary

The child's views were recorded at 97.6% of CiC reviews. This is lower than 2019/20 and 2018/19, but higher than 2017/18. In 2019/20, 76.1% of children attended their review. This has increased from 64.4% at the end of the previous quarter, and is also higher than the out-turn for the previous three years. The number of children experiencing a change of social worker has increased slightly compared to the previous year. The number of CiC for more than 1 year who have remained with the same social worker for the past 12 months is 222. This has decreased from 283 at the end of the previous quarter.

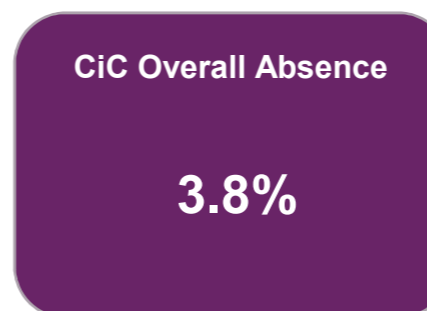
Education - Termly Data (Note 2019 is the latest published data we have, due to the covid-19 pandemic, the next release is due sometime in 2021)

Figures highlighted are provisional				
KS2	Maths	Reading	Writing	RWM
Walsall Current - CiC 2019	55%	34%	55%	28%
Walsall Borough 2019	77%	70%	77%	61%
Stat Neighbours CiC 2019	52%	52%	55%	42%
England 2019 CiC	51%	49%	50%	37%
KS4	%	%	Attain 8	Prog 8
Walsall - CiC - 2020	15.8%	29%	23.0	-0.88
Walsall Borough 2020	40.9%	65%	47.4	-0.11
Stat Neighbours 2020 CiC*	N/A	27%	22.2	-1.21
England 2020 CiC	10.9%	24%	21.4	-1.23
Ofsted Rated Schools		Exclusions**		
No Students Attending Good or Outstanding Schools	EYFS	39	At least one fixed term Exclusion 2019	8.6%
	Primary	160		
	Secondary	161		
	Combined	360		

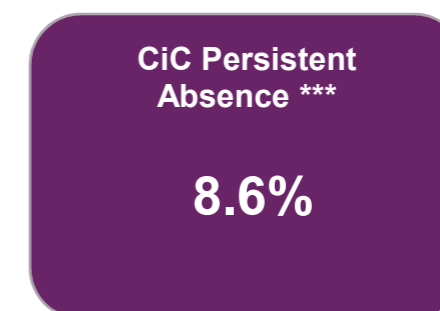
**A pupil is classed as persistently absent if they miss 10% or more possible sessions (due to authorised or unauthorised absence).

***There have been no permanent exclusions

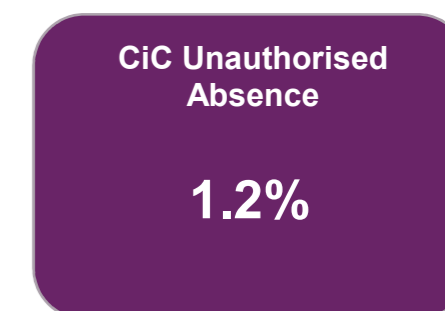
Progress 8 data is based on 2019, the DfE are reporting on it for 2020.



2018/19 Walsall = 3.6%
2018/19 West Midlands = 4.2%
2018/19 Stat Neighbours = 4.4%
2018/19 England = 4.7%



2018/19 Walsall = 7.5%
2018/19 West Midlands = 9.0%
2018/19 Stat Neighbours = 10.3%
2018/19 England = 10.9%



2018/19 Walsall = 1.1%
2018/19 West Midlands = 1.1%
2018/19 Stat Neighbours = 1.4%
2018/19 England = 1.4%



RAG Ratings of PEPS

The quality assurance process changed in 2020/21 from PEPs being rated good and requires improvement to being rated inadequate, requires improvement, good and outstanding, this enables us to distinguish between very good and very poor PEPs'.

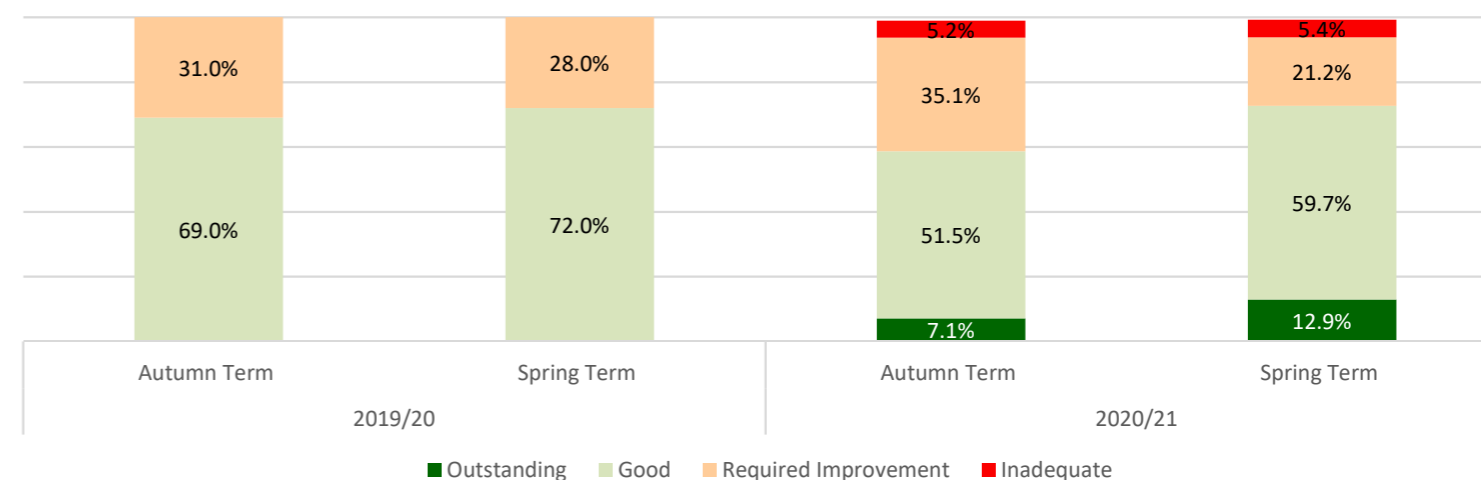
Methodology

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.

RAG Ratings of PEPS



Commentary

The proportion of ePEP's that were completed at the end of the spring term was 99.6% , The percentage of ePEP's that were completed for a full academic year was 99.9%. CiC overall absence, Persistent Absence and Unauthorised Absence are currently all below both Statistical neighbour and England averages. The percentage of PEPs RAG rated as outstanding has increased in spring term from 7.1% to 12.9%, PEPs RAG rated Good have also increased from 51.5% in Autumn Term to 59.7% in Spring Term

Health and Well-being



% Initial Health Check Completed in Timescale

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

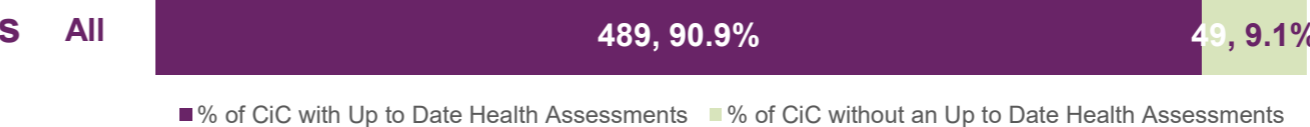


20120/21 Year Out-turn = 75%
2019/20 Year Out-turn = 49%
2018/19 Year Out-turn = 75%

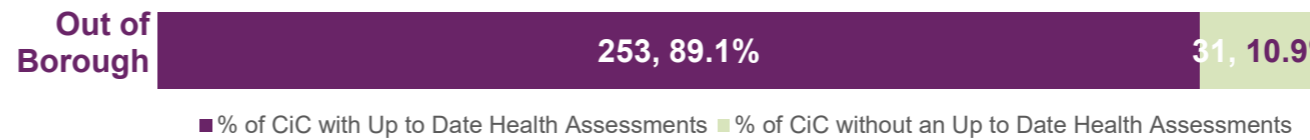


% of CiC with Up to Date Health Assessments

Where the child is over 5 and has been in care for over a year

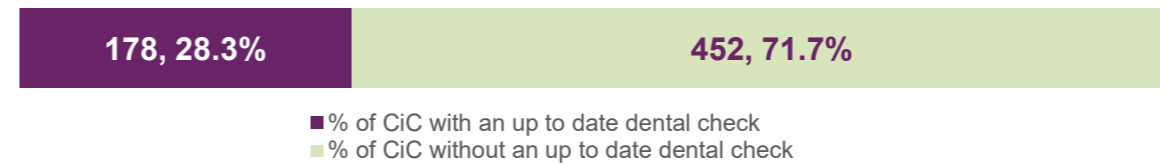


2020/21 Walsall = 92%
2019/20 Walsall = 80%
2019/20 West Midlands = 87%
2019/20 Stat Neighbours = 90%



% of CiC with an up to date dental check

Where a dental check has been completed within 12 months



2020/21 Walsall = 47.2%
2019/20 Walsall = 92%
2019/20 West Midlands = 82%
2019/20 Stat Neighbours = 90%



Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

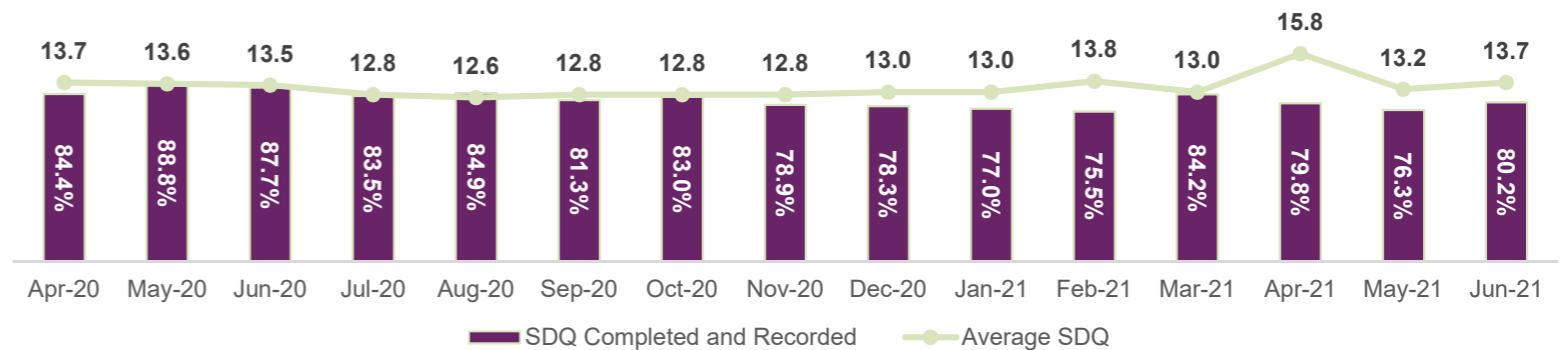
The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire should be completed for every child looked after for at least 12 months and aged 5 to 16 years-old.

Average SDQ Score
13.7

Breakdown

Score	Considered	Number	% of those eligible for SDQ	% against all Children Looked
Score 0 - 13	Normal	242	54%	38.1%
Score 14 - 16	Borderline	51	11%	8.0%
Score 17 - 40	Cause for Concern	154	34%	24.2%

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 in care with an initial health check decreased from 75.2% during the final quarter of 2020-21, to 71.4% in quarter 1 of 2021/22. The percentage of children in care with an up to date dental check is a cumulative figure, and currently stands at 28.3%. 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.

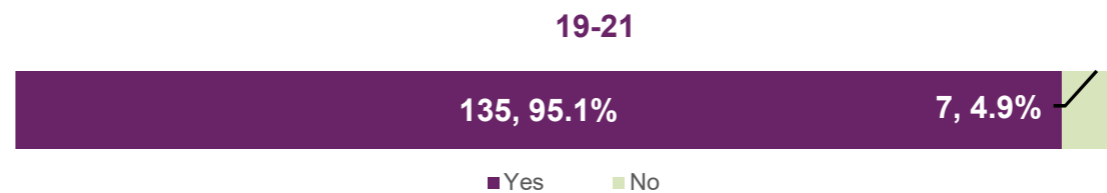
The proportion of SDQ's completed and recorded has decreased slightly to 80.2%, compared to 84.2% at the the end of quarter 4. The average SDQ score is currently 13.7. This has increased since the previous quarter (13.0), and is slightly higher than the average for quarter 1 during 2020-21 (13.5) (Lower is better). 24.2% of 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



Care Leavers in touch

Care Leavers where the local authority is in touch aged 19-21

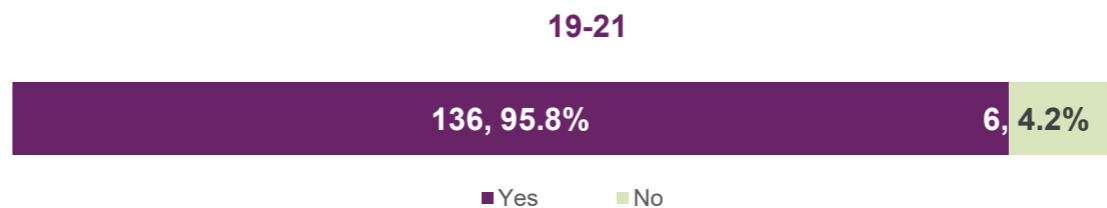


2020/21 Year Out-turn = 94%
2019/20 Year Out-turn = 95%
2019/20 West Midlands = 95%
2018/19 Stat Neighbours = 96.5%



Care Leavers in suitable accomodation

Care Leavers whos accomodation is classed as suitable for age

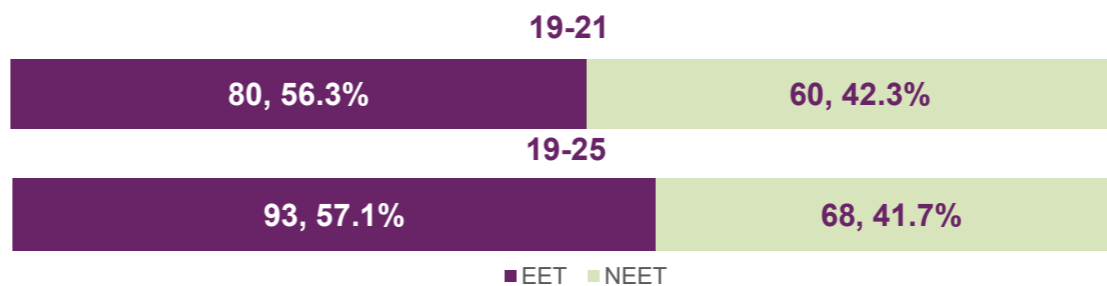


2020/21 Year Out-turn = 89%
2019/20 Year Out-turn = 89%
2019/20 West Midlands = 85%
2019/20 Stat Neighbours = 86.4%



Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training

Education, Employment and Training of Care Leavers aged 19-21

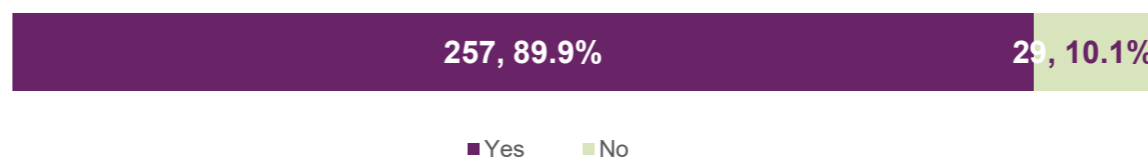


2020/21 Year Out-turn = 51%
2019/20 Year Out-turn = 54%
2019/20 West Midlands = 50%
2019/20 Stat Neighbours = 45.6%



Care Leavers available to work - All Ages

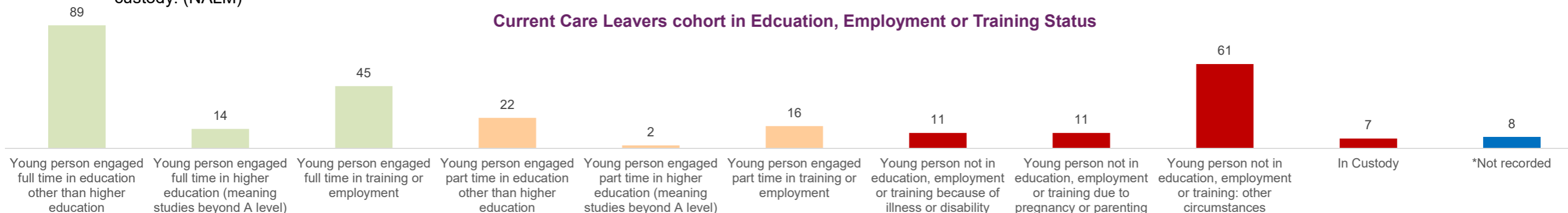
Care Leavers who are available to work this excludes all those that are not available for the labour market due to illness/disability, pregnancy or young mothers or being in custody. (NALM)



2020/21 Year Out-turn = 54%
2019/20 Year Out-turn = 74%
2018/19 Year Out-turn = 63%

2020/21 Year Out-turn = 86%
2019/20 Year Out-turn = 86%

Current Care Leavers cohort in Education, Employment or Training Status



Commentary

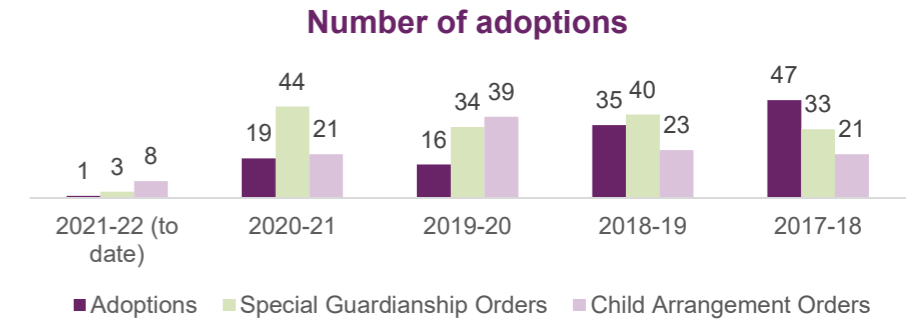
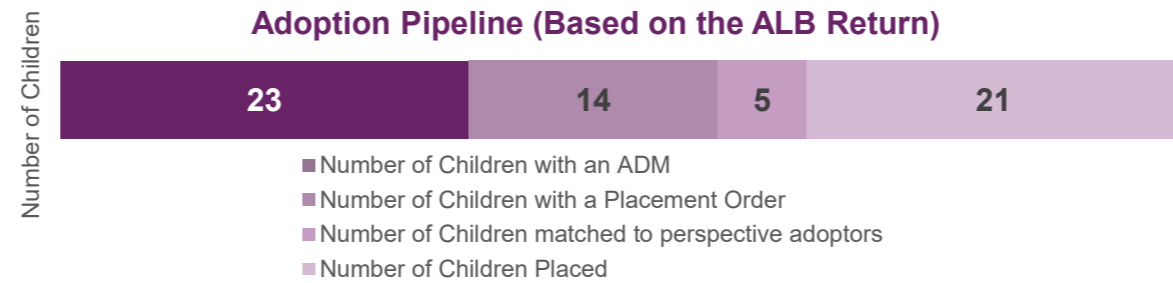
The percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training for the first quarter of 19-21 was 56.3%. This is continuing to improve following reductions during the pandemic. The 19-25 cohort has seen another increase during quarter 1, with 57.1% care leavers in Education, Employment or Training compared to 54.3% for quarter 4 of 2020/21. Managers had expected this figure to decrease 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.

89.9% 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. 7 of Walsall's care leavers are currently in custody, a decrease of 2 since the end of Q4. The number of of care leavers in suitable accommodation has increased to 95.8%. The proportion of care leavers in touch with the council has increased from 94% to 95%.

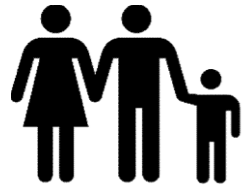
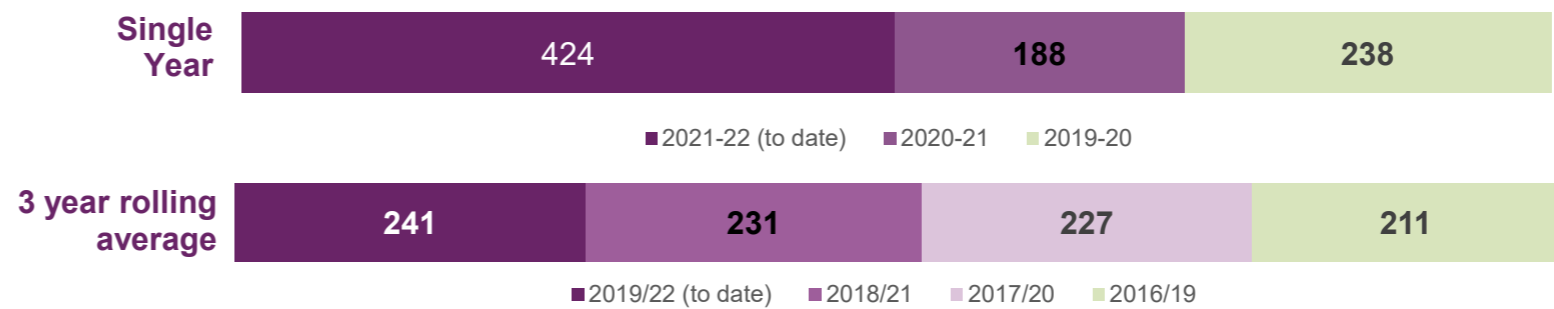
Adoption and Permanency



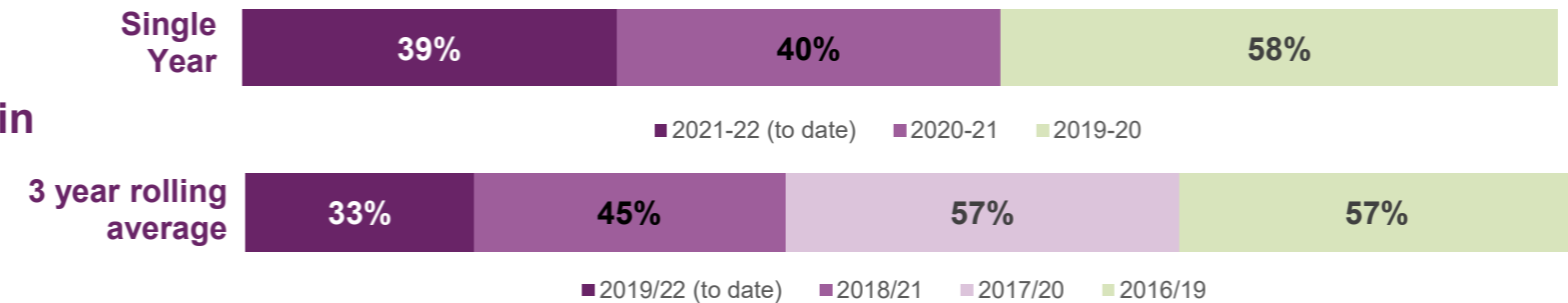
Adoption Pipeline



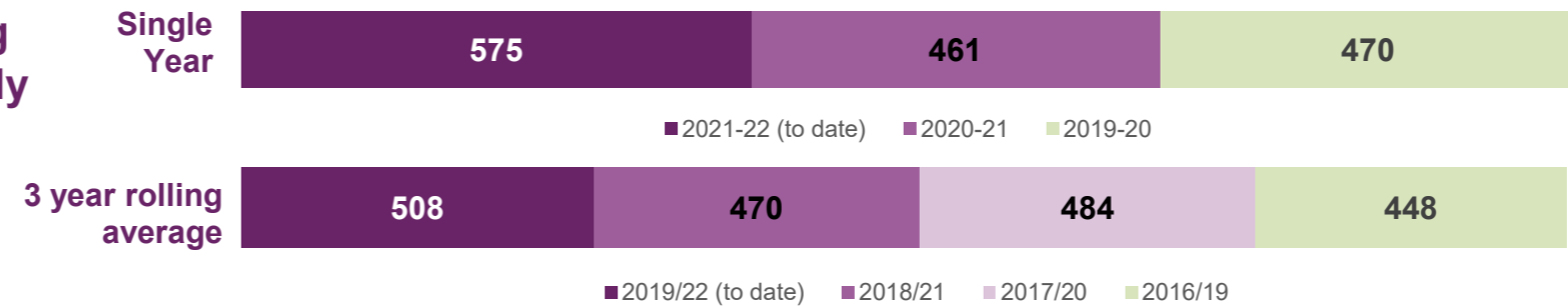
A2 - Average time between receiving court authority to place and finding a match



A3 - % Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family



A10 - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (stopped at point of fostering for foster carers adoptions)



Commentary

There was one adoption during the first quarter of 2021/22, based on the latest ALB data. In 2020/21, 19 were children were adopted. This is an 19% increase compared to 16 during 2019/20.

So far during the current year, children had a longer wait than in 2020/21 between receiving court authority to place and finding a match - this was 241 days compared to 231 days in 2020/21. 39% of Children wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. Between April and June 2021, 3 Children have ceased to be looked after due to special guardianship orders and 8 due to child arrangement orders.



Report title: **Adoption Service Report**
01 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

Date of report: 20 August 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 2020/21.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 31 March 2021.

Adoption@Heart is a Regional Adoption Agency, providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. The service is hosted by 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 2021:

There were seventeen children subject to placement orders, but not yet placed for adoption. Five had already had a change of plan away from adoption and for one their foster carer was in the process of being considered to adopt them therefore family finding was on hold. A further three children were linked or matched to adoptive parents but not yet placed as at 31 March.

The remaining 8 were the subject of active family finding,

Of these 8 children 5 were part of the same two sibling groups and the timescales these children had been waiting since their placement order was granted are set out below.

Less than 3 months:	2
Between 3 and 6 months:	5
Between 6 and 12 months:	1
Between 12 and 24 months:	0
Children waiting over 2 years:	0

2.1 Children Made Subject to Placement Orders:

Full year 2020/21

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

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
0	3	4	2	1	1	24

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

Financial Year:	17/18	18/19	19/20
	28	18	23

The number of placement orders granted in year is consistent with previous years.

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

As at 31 March 2021 there were 22 children with the decision to be placed for adoption (SHOBPA), but not yet subject to a placement order.

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

For the full year 2020/21

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

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
5	3	4	0	0	7	38

Financial Year:	17/18	18/19	19/20
	37	25	40

The numbers of children with a plan of adoption the year is consistent with previous years performance and there is no evidence of a reduction in adoption care planning decisions.

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

There were 4 children subject to a change of plan away from adoption during the 12 month period to 31 March 2021.

2.5 Number of Children Placed for Adoption during the period:

For 12 months to 31 March 2021:

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep
1	5	6	2	3	3

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total in year
2	10	2	1	1	0	36

Children Placed in Previous Years:

Financial Year:	17/18	18/19	19/20
Children Placed:	29	26	13

The number of children placed has increased significantly in comparison to previous year which was affected by transition to the new regional service.

3. Number of Children Adopted

The number of children legally adopted by their adoptive parents in the full year 2020/21 was 22.

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

Financial Year:	17/18	18/19	19/20
Children Adopted:	46	32	16

Court delays caused by Covid-19 and the impact on the courts, will be a contributory factor in delaying the adoption of children however the low number of children placed in 2019/20 will also be a contributory factor. The numbers of children leaving care nationally via adoption has reduced continuously since 2017.

Adoption Scorecard Performance:

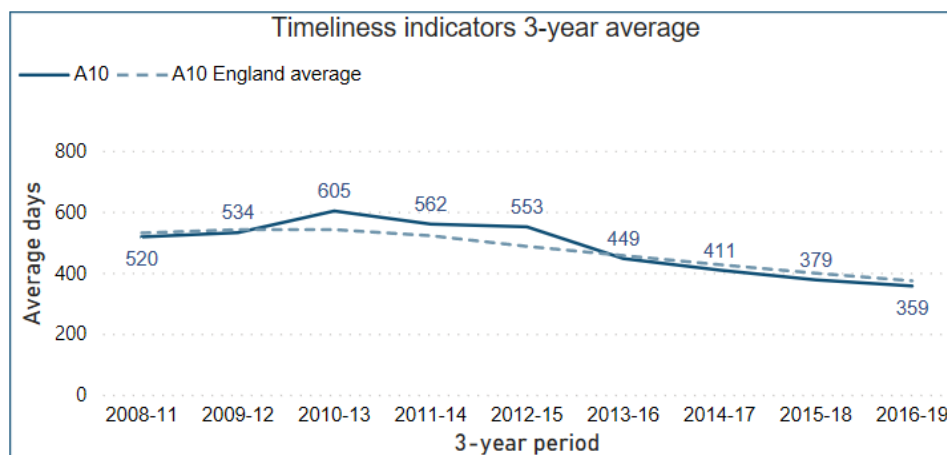
In 2014, as part of its' Adoption Reform Agenda, the government introduced Adoption Scorecards to track local authority performance and to tackle delay in the adoption system. Scorecards are produced for a 3-year rolling average, with the latest data being published for April 2018 - March 2019 (Published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

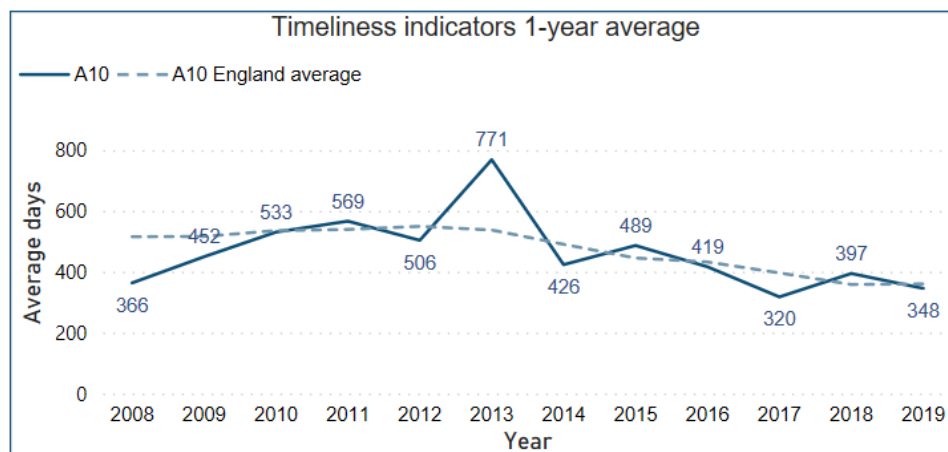
The current indicators are:

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.

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: 348	2019 England average: 363	Average time in 2019 was shorter than in 2018	2016-19 average days: 359	2016-19 England average: 376





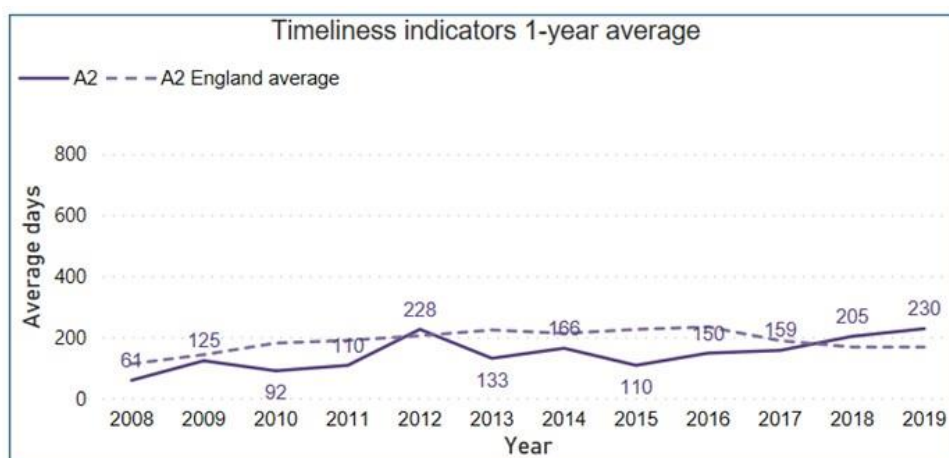
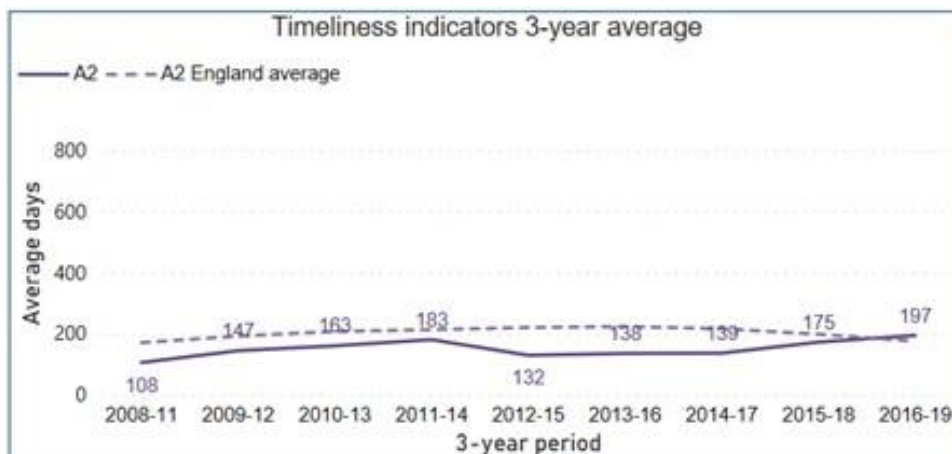
A10: Average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster care adoptions:

2019:		2016-19:	
LA average days:	Stats neighbours average:	LA average days:	Stats neighbours average:
348	391	359	398

A10: Single year and three year average performance are within threshold and below England average

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



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:		2016-19:	
LA average days:	Stats neighbours average:	LA average days:	Stats neighbours average:
230	186	197	197

A2 performance for both single year and three year average is significantly above threshold and national average, evidencing a delay from the point of obtaining a legal order to matching children with adopters.

3.1 Early Permanency

There were 6 Walsall children placed in early permanence placements via Foster for Adopt.

4. Recruitment of Adopters

4.1 New Enquiries:

For the period from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021, 638 new enquiries were received by the Adoption@Heart Recruitment Team.

This is in comparison to 349 enquiries received last year.

4.2 Information Events:

157 attendance at information events and 52 phone consultations (mix of single and joint applicants).

4.3 Registrations of Interest:

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

Full year 2019/20	64
Full year 2020/21	117

4.4 Adopter Approvals:

The service approved 69 adopters in the full year, an increase of 19 over the 50 approved in 2019/20.

5. Marketing Report

Between 1st April 2020 and 31 March 2021 there were:

- 638 enquiries
- 52 phone consultations and 157 virtual information events attended
- 23,169 website visits, made up of 17,938 unique visits
- 442 Twitter followers
- 2,133 Facebook likes

Marketing brief:

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a lot of marketing activities, including the Adoption@Heart one year anniversary campaign, had to be put on hold. However, a summer campaign took place

across July and August, which featured a digital campaign with The Metro, a Free Radio Black Country campaign across 4 weeks and a series of blog posts from Adoption@Heart social workers detailing their working week from home. A myth busting social media campaign took place across Facebook.

Face-to-face information events were put on hold and Adoption@Heart changed the format of these and delivered them virtually instead. Virtual information events were launched in June and attendance has been higher than previously. During October, the first event took place where adopters appeared on camera, alongside Social Workers. This format has been much more engaging, enabling adopters to interact with the agency and have their questions answered.

Regular meetings have taken place with the Communications Leads for the four partner agencies. The meetings are used to discuss marketing activity, how the other communications leads have been supporting Adoption@Heart, utilising the knowledge of their areas and resources, what support is needed and how the partnership can work going forward.

LGBT+ adoption and fostering week took place in March 2021. Adoption@Heart had support from LGBT+ adopters to share their stories across multiple platforms, including video, social media, blog posts, news articles and radio interviews. A video shared online featuring Jen and Lisa has currently been viewed over 6,000 times and has reached 14,400 people.

Whilst the national You Can Adopt campaign took place between September and December 2020 (and aimed to bust myths around who is eligible to adopt, as well as exploring what the adoption process involves), the service continues to use its own material provided by the campaign for marketing activity. Content is regularly shared via social media, to ensure the campaigns key messages are highlighted within recruitment activity, as well as across the partner agencies.

A national siblings group campaign commenced in April 2021. The campaign will continue to empower potential adopters with the confidence that #YouCanAdopt instils. The campaign focused on sibling groups and was driven by the latest data and by concerns about the number of sibling groups still waiting to be adopted. As well as this, the campaign also continued community engagement work, to target prospective adopters from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority backgrounds.

Sadly, an Adoption@Heart approved adopter lost her life due to Covid-19 early 2021. Her husband wanted to honour his wife by offering a charitable contribution in her name to an adoption agency and Adoption@Heart worked closely with Adoption Focus (VAA) on a joint campaign. This attracted television and radio coverage in the West Midlands and aimed to promote greater awareness of adoption within Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

6. Requirements on the Preparation of Adoption Report Regulations

6.1 Complaints:

There have been two 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 by the agency not to progress their application. Their complaint related to this decision and delays in communicating this in a timely way. The complaint was partly upheld due to the delay, but the decision not to invite to stage two was not changed. Learning has been identified and discussed with the relevant staff.

A second formal complaint was received in the previous year 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 escalated to stage two and was referred to the Local Government Ombudsman. The LGO found that there had been fault on the part of service for undertaking initial assessment work with the individual prior to inviting her to formally register her interest to adopt. No fault was found with the decision not to progress the applicant into stage 1 of the assessment process or any aspect relating to the grounds for that decision.

Practice in the adopter sector widely is not in line with statutory guidance in this area. Most adoption agencies take the view that it would be poor use of resources and misleading to potential adopters not to undertake an initial consideration of their circumstances and suitability. In order to effectively meet the needs of children in need of adoptive families, the adoption agency must focus its resources strategically, in assessing those individuals most likely to become approved adopters. Adoption@Heart's practice reflects common and best practice in the sector. The Head of Service has been working closely with the DfE in relation to the difference between best practice and the Statutory Guidance.

Despite this, the Council accepts that it should have been made clear to the complainant that she was entitled within the statutory guidance to submit a Registration of Interest to agency, albeit, the outcome of this process would not have been any different in relation to the outcome for the applicant. A small change has been made to the agency's procedure in relation to terminology and information given to potential adopters at this stage of the process.

The LGO have indicated that they intend to issue a Public Interest Report on this matter in July 2021. The report will highlight the fault found against Adoption@Heart, whilst also highlighting the wider issue about practice in the sector and the statutory guidance. Full communication with Directors in each Local Authority has taken place.

6.2 Staffing:

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

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

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

The Business Support Team have an additional post of Senior Business Support Officer, which has been created and recruited to in the year.

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

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 Development:

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 developed and agreed across the partnership.

Adoption Support:

Increasing the range of services available to adopters with in the adoption support offer for the region, as well as improved 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.

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 2020/21.

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

LA/ Trust	In House	Interagency	Total placed
Sandwell	11	24	35
Wolverhampton	14	24	38
Walsall	20	16	36
Dudley	10	4	14
Total	55	69	123

For comparative purposes, the performance of each LA / Trust in placing children is in the table. 36 Walsall children were placed with adoptive parents in the year.

Early Permanence:

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

As per the table below, 26 children have been placed via Foster for Adoption in the full year 2020/21, six were Walsall children.

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

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

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

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.

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 full year 2020/21 the distribution of placements across the partnership is more even with Walsall and Wolverhampton having more placements than Sandwell but very similar performance. This has levelled out with thirty three percent of children placed being from Sandwell.

The number of children placed by Dudley is lower than in the previous year and this should be seen in the context of the numbers of children with adoption plans and SHOBPA decision (sections 2.3 and 2.5 of this report).

Inter-agency usage has remained high during the year at fifty six percent of children placed externally across the partnership as a whole. Forty four percent of Walsall children were placed with inter-agency adopters. 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 full year. This increase is the result of development work done within the service and across the partnership.

7.3 Adoption Panels:

Adoption Panels met were held on fifty occasions during 2020-2021. There are at least four panels a month for adoption matters to be heard. There is also flexibility within the panel system, allowing for extra and special panels to be arranged in order to enable additional cases and emergency matters to be heard, as and when directed by the courts. The service aims to avoid delay for children and ensures matters are dealt with in a timely manner.

The service has three adoption panel chairs, due to one chair leaving during the year. A fourth chair is in the process of being recruited. The three chairs in post are those who were transferred to the service in 2019.

The Agency Decision Makers from Wolverhampton make all the decisions regarding the suitability for approval of all prospective adopters. The SHOBPA decisions remain in the three Local Authorities and the Trust. Agency Decision Makers are very flexible with regard to early decisions with regard to matches, in order to enable transitions that work best for the child, for example using school holidays.

Panels have made positive recommendations on sixty-nine adopter approvals and one hundred and twenty-four matches in the period. All recommendations made by panel have been positive and all have been supported by the ADM.

Panel continues to be supported by a very committed group of staff. There are 1.5 Panel Advisors, 1 part time Panel Co-ordinator and 2 full time equivalent Panel Administrators.

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

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

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.

7.4 Partnership Working:

Considerable progress was made during the year in strengthening engagement and communication across the partnership. This has improved the interface between the service and partners and improved understanding of roles and responsibilities between the service and Local Authority partners.

Practice workshops were held in all partner services during the year and specific training was delivered in relation to the quality of Child Permanence Reports.

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

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

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

A partnership event took place in November 2020 with a focus on key areas of practice and strengthening communication and engagement within the partnership. Over one hundred and twenty staff attended and a further partnership event is planned in June 2021.

8. Adoption Support

Adoption@Heart's Adoption Support Team model changed during 2020/21, subsequently, recruitment, assessment, linking and support to adopters pre order, remain in the Recruitment and Assessment Team, this offers ongoing support by a worker known to adopters and is common practice across the sector.

As a result of this model change the Adoption Support Team now specialises in all key provision of post adoption support, and now supports families pre and post order. The team also commissions therapeutic services via applications to the Adoption Support Fund, plus post adoption contact, access to records and birth parent support.

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

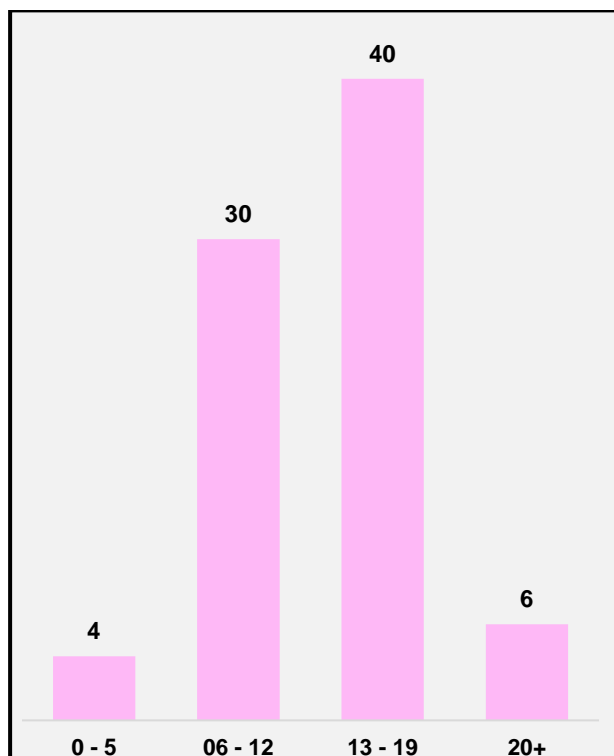
The number of adoptive families seeking adoption support continues to rise and this presents a challenge for the service. Additionally, families require support over a sustained period, and we continue to support a significant number of legacy cases transferred at the time of the launch of the RAA in 2019.

The type of support requested by adoptive families differ with support relating to emotional health and wellbeing, to help the child to develop more positive behaviours, improve family life and relationships and parents and carers to develop skills in therapeutic parenting; to help the family bond together; to help the child's engagement with learning and to address child to parent violence.

The Adoption Support Fund was established in 2015 by the Government to help adoptive families access support and settle into their new lives following adoption. The Government committed ongoing funding for 2020-21 financial year in advance of the spending review settlement.

300 ASF applications were made by the service during April 2020 - March 2021, this is an increase in applications.

The table below identifies that adolescence can be a particularly challenging time for adoptive families and we see the largest cohort of families accessing adoption support with children aged 13-19 years old. Young people are likely to face challenges relating to identity and self-concept, attachment and security and we are experiencing unsolicited contact by adoptees or birth parents which have the potential to destabilise adoptive families.



Covid 19 Adoption Support:

The DfE allocated £8 million from the Adoption Support Fund for adoptive families to meet needs arising from the coronavirus outbreak, we used our share of funding to pay for therapies to help adoptive families, including online counselling and couples therapy, virtual peer-to-peer support, plus specialist webinars through The Adopter Hub and National Association of Therapeutic Parents.

Post Adoption Contact:

Adoption@Heart is responsible for post adoption contact arrangements on behalf of Walsall Council. There are three full-time Family Support Workers who are responsible for administering the service. They offer support to adoptive parents and birth relatives. The service has continued remotely during Covid 19, albeit there has been delay in the exchanges at this time as access to post is limited to once a week.

Access to Records:

The provision of birth records counselling and access to information is of vital importance in enabling adopted adults to understand the circumstances of their adoption and enhance their sense of identity.

Future Developments:

Practice development work, as below, is currently being undertaken with a view to improving the support offer to adoptive families in the region.

- Review and transformation of the planning and management of Adoption contact
- Development of a multi-agency, multi-professional service delivery model with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Virtual Schools
- Regional Approach to offering support to birth parents at risk from repeat removals
- Regional commissioning framework for ASF providers
- Development of Psychological and therapeutic services
- Transracial Training
- Closer working with MASH to support understanding about the impact of trauma in adoptive families.
- Transitional support for older aged adoptees

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 Chairing of this board has remained with Sandwell during the year 2020/21.

In May 2020 an Operations Group was established, with a view to increasing engagement, oversight and operational involvement of Heads of Service and other managers from each partners service. This group has continued to meet 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. Management Board is chaired by the Deputy Director for Children's Social Care in Wolverhampton, as host Local Authority for Adoption@Heart.

Report completed by:



Mark Tobin
Head of Service

Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme 2021/22

	<i>Report to AD</i>	<i>18th June</i>	<i>20th August</i>	<i>1st November</i>	<i>27th December</i>	<i>7th February</i>	<i>21st March</i>
	<i>Report to Democratic Services</i>	<i>22nd June</i>	<i>25th August</i>	<i>4th Nov</i>	<i>31st Dec</i>	<i>10th Feb</i>	<i>24th March</i>
	<i>DMT for noting</i>	<i>24th June</i>	<i>26th August</i>	<i>11th November</i>	<i>13th January</i>	<i>10th February</i>	<i>24th March</i>
Lead Officer	Board date	1st July	6th Sept	15th Nov	11th Jan	21st Feb	4th April
David Hughes	Young People Engagement						
Alison Jones	Health Passports						
Mick McCarthy	Local Offer						
Jivan Sembi	Housing Report						
Mark Tobin Adoption @Heart	Annual Adoption Report						
Mark Burrows	Fostering Annual report						
Helena Kucharczyk.	Performance Monitoring	Q4	Q1	Q2		Q3	
Lorraine Thompson	NEET						
Alison Jones	CAMHS and emotional wellbeing of Children in Care and Care Leavers			Invite CAMHS			
Lorraine Thompson – not required to attend.	Assurance report – virtual school	Information.					
Alison Jones	Assurance report –CCG						

Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme 2021/22

Mick McCarthy	Corporate Parenting Strategy						
Debbie Sylvester with CGL	Independent Visiting Service Annual Report						
Mick McCarthy	Increasing Employability for Care Experienced Young People						