



Walsall Council

Corporate Parenting Board

Monday 13 November 2023 at 5.30pm

Meeting Venue: TLC Hub, Brineton Street, Pleck, Walsall, WS2 9EP

[Livestream Link](#)

Membership:

Councillor S. Elson (Chair)
Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor A. Hicken
Councillor N. Latham
Councillor V. Waters
Councillor R. Worrall
Vacancy

Advisors:

NHS Walsall.
Head of Virtual School.
Director, Customer Engagement.

Quorum:

3 Members

Democratic Services, The Council House, Walsall, WS1 1TW
Contact name: Nikki Gough Telephone: 01922 654767 Email: nikki.gough@walsall.gov.uk

[Walsall Council Website](#)

**If you are disabled and require help to and from the meeting room,
please contact the person above**

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</p>

	hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.
--	--

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.

Part 1 – Public Session

1. Apologies
2. Substitutions
To receive notice of any substitutions for a Member of the Committee for the duration of the meeting.
3. Minutes
To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 4th September 2023].
(Enclosed)
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended):
To agree that the public be excluded from the private session during consideration of the agenda items indicated for the reasons shown on the agenda.
6. Update on action plan created by Young People.
(Enclosed)
7. Corporate Parenting Board Strategy and Action Plan
(Enclosed)
8. Fostering Service Annual report 2022-2023
(Enclosed)
9. Adoption Service Report 2022- 2023
(Enclosed)
10. Work Programme
(Enclosed)
11. Date of next meeting
The date of the next meeting will be 9 January 2023.

Corporate Parenting Board

Monday 4th September 2023 at 6.30 p.m.

Conference room 2, Walsall Council House

Board Members Present:

Councillor S. Elson (Chair)
Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor A. Hicken
Councillor Nawaz
Councillor R. Worrall

Officers Present

Rita Holmer	Interim Director, Children's Social Work
Colleen Male	Interim Executive Director, Children's Services
Zoe Morgan	Head of Service
Catherine Masterson	Designated Children in Care Nurse - Black Country ICB
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service
Lorraine Thompson	Head of Virtual School

6 Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Latham.

7 Substitutions

Councillor A. Nawaz substituted for Councillor Latham for the duration of the meeting.

8 Minutes

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2023, were submitted.

(see annexed)

Resolved (Unanimous)

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2023, copies having previously been circulated to each member of the Board, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

9 Future Governance of Corporate Parenting Board

The Head of Service presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed).

Members questioned why the recommendations within the report differed to those previously suggested, and Officers confirmed that there was not an appetite for de-constituting the Board at this time. It was stressed that it was important to ensure that young people were engaging with the Board, and it was hoped that Walsall could pioneer a new approach at some point in the future.

Members challenged how other local authorities operated their Corporate Parenting Boards, Officers confirmed that there was no clear best practice model operating. The proposed way of working was described and the difficulties experienced by young people attending formal Board meetings was acknowledged.

It was agreed that the effectiveness of the Board in 'engaging young people' would be on the agenda for the first meeting of the new municipal year to ensure that this was satisfactory.

Members expressed satisfaction with the options proposed within the report and agreed that engagement with young people was very important. Officers agreed that the action plan (detailing feedback from engagement sessions) would be 'rolling' and included on each agenda.

Resolved that:

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Board remains a committee meeting. Reports, minutes, and the meeting will remain in public and/or private depending on the sensitivities and/or participants for each meeting.**
- 2. That the arrangements for engaging with young people are reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Board in 12 months time.**

10 Placement Sufficiency Strategy and action plan

The Head of Service presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board was informed that the report presented the Childrens Sufficiency Strategy for the next three years. Members were asked to consider and comment on the approach and implementation of the 2023-2026 sufficiency strategy.

The aims of the placement sufficiency strategy were described by the Head of Service alongside the summary of needs and trends in Walsall. This included an increase in boys and Black and Asian ethnic groups entering care. Members were informed that there had been a reduction in the number of children living in foster homes (in the previous year) due to a shortage of available foster carers. The service intentions in relation to fostering, residential, supported accommodation, and permanence were detailed along with the priorities and action plan.

In response to a question around unregistered placements Officers confirmed that it was a residential home which was not registered with Ofsted. The legalities of this were discussed and the Board was informed that in such circumstances the Local Authority would work with providers to support this registration. Members were informed that there were not a sufficient number of locally registered providers.

In response to challenge around the right children becoming looked after, the Interim Executive Director stated that through the family safeguarding model families were supported to ensure that children remained in their own homes as this produced better outcomes for the child. The turning point service, which was aimed at adolescents, had been successful in supporting families to stay together. It was stressed that services needed to evolve to respond to societal changes.

A discussion was held on the need for children to be living in communities and to be supported appropriately to do so. Training was carried out through the safeguarding partnership and extensive teamwork took place with partners. Further information was provided on the capital grant scheme, Members were informed that small grants, for building work, could be provided to connected carers to ensure children could remain within extended families.

Further to Member questions, Officers stated that analysis suggested that an increased number of foster carers were needed for boys, older children, sibling groups of 2/3 and more complex children.

Resolved that:

- 1. That the Placement Sufficiency Strategy and action plan be noted.**
- 2. That the Placement Sufficiency Strategy be reviewed in 6 months.**

11 Quarterly Performance Report

The Interim Executive Director presented the report (annexed), highlighting the salient points. The key quarter 1 performance for Children's Services for 2022/23 (relating to children in care and care leavers) was described.

A Member questioned the percentage of children in care who had received a dental check and asked what action was being taken to improve this figure. Officers confirmed that there had been difficulties accessing dental care however a dental pathway had been put in place to improve this issue as such it was expected that it would incrementally improve.

In response to a question the Head of the Virtual School confirmed that there were around 20 care leavers at university. It was agreed that once this information was collated that it would be shared with the Board (via e-mail).

Resolved that:

- 1. The Corporate Parenting Board note the report.**
- 2. The number of care leavers at university will be shared with Board Members once available.**

12 Work Programme 2023/24

Councillor Jukes provided feedback on her visit to Hilton Road residential home, all of which was extremely positive. She read a poem written by a young person in care.

Members discussed the work programme, and were reminded by the Chair that the next meeting would be held at the TLC Hub and would start at the earlier time of 5.30pm to accommodate young people.

Resolved that:

The following changes were made to the work programme:

- The Virtual School Annual report would be moved to April.**
- The Corporate Parenting Strategy would be considered at the next meeting.**

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.40 p.m.

Signed

Date



UPDATE ON ACTION PLAN
CREATED BY CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE FEB 2023

***YOU SAID
WE DID...***



HELP US TO
UNDERSTAND WHAT
OUR CARERS CAN
AGREE TO, WHAT
THEY CANT AND
WHY

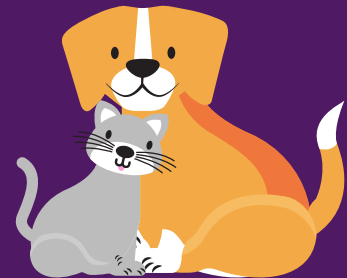
I can do this

What we have done

The children in care council have met with fostering managers to develop guidance for foster carers and children and young people about sleepovers and about having pets.

What's next?

Develop child friendly version of the delegated authority form.



What we have done

Refreshed care leaver offer, updated website and started design of leaflet

Met with Leisure services re offer for care leavers to bring friend.

Agreed Leisure and Housing to present reports at Corporate Parenting Board

Sent out newsletter and survey for care leavers and children in care

Extended offer of activities for care leavers- including football, separated migrant group, walking event, documentary making, young parents group, pamper day with college, art gallery event, national DOLs photography

**MAKE SURE WE
HAVE A FAIR OFFER
OF SUPPORT**



Whats next?

Communication campaign regarding the local offer.

Develop suite of videos with young people in care and careleavers to understand process and their rights

**MAKE SURE WE
HAVE A FAIR OFFER
OF SUPPORT**





**MAKE SURE WE
HAVE HELP TO
MAKE US FEEL WE
FIT IN SCHOOL.**

Whats have we done?

Appointed an Education, employment and training officer to support post 16 providers

Appointed an attendance mentor to support children in care and care leavers who may be experiencing emotionally based school avoidance.

Commissioned a careers advisor to work with young people aged 14-19 to advice and guidance regarding pathway in education, employment and training.

Further developed pathway to education, employment and training

Whats Next?

Working with shops and businesses in Walsall to provide work experience placements for children in care – Asda have offered work experience placements in all departments of their store.

Utilising our care leaver documentary to support promotion of opportunities for work experience and apprenticeships with partners and businesses.

The Virtual School are due to appoint their 4th apprentice who is care experienced.

We are advertising for the new participation apprentice which will be ringfenced for a care leaver.

**HELP US TO HAVE
MORE
OPPORTUNITIES
LIKE WORK
EXPERIENCE AND
APPRENTICESHIPS
THAT CAN HELP US
TO UNDERSTAND
WHAT OUR
OPTIONS ARE.**



**HELP US TO HAVE
BETTER LASTING
RELATIONSHIPS
WITH OUR FAMILY
WHILST IN CARE.**



What have we done?

Drafted permanency pathway which includes requirement for use of keeping in touch tool.

Mandatory reunification training for all staff in family safeguarding and corporate parenting teams

IROs reviewed family time arrangements for the children in their care

Whats next?

Development of approach regarding family networks and life-long links

**TALK TO US IN A
WAY THAT DOESN'T
MAKE US FEEL
DIFFERENT AND IS
RESPECTFUL**



What have we done?

Young people audits and findings shared with heads of service/

Amended a number of mosaic forms to better reflect language that cares including the child in care review form

Training for staff about writing to the child delivered.

Rolling programme of Total Respect training delivered.

Training at staff conference around child's world and language that cares. Participation and language that cares training designed and rolling out from Dec 2023

[Page 18 of 97](#)

Training for designated teachers about writing personal education plans to the child

**TALK TO US IN A
WAY THAT
DOESN'T MAKE
US FEEL
DIFFERENT AND
IS RESPECTFUL**



Whats next?

Total respect training for members and SLT

Develop approach to writing to the child so is more consistent

Continue review of mosaic and associated forms so reflect our commitment, including annual fostering review

More training for our partners to support them on the journey

Language that cares when thinking about equalities and diversity

**Corporate Parenting Board
13 November 2023**

Title of the Report: Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025

Executive Summary:

Walsall Council has a duty to seek out every opportunity to support children and young people in our care. The 3-year strategy and the action plan were approved by the Board in January 2022. This report provides an update on the progress against the action plan for 2022/23 and the proposed action plan for 2023/24. The Corporate Parenting Strategy and revised Action Plan is presented to the Corporate Parenting Board for approval and assurance that we will deliver our ambition to support children in our care and care experienced leavers.

This report informs the Board of the performance of the Council as a corporate parent, and the outcomes that have been achieved for the children in its care from April 2022 to March 2023.

The Council works in partnership with others to ensure that families who need support in the community to care for their children within their family and family network. For some children this is not possible, and they become children in our care. Every councillor and officer within a council has a statutory responsibility to make good decisions for children in our care and care experienced young people (also known as care leavers) as a parent would for their own child, in this context councillors are Corporate Parents.

The corporate parenting strategy sets out our ambition for our children in care and care experienced young people, and how this will be achieved. The Corporate Parenting Action Plan will make the ambition in the strategy a reality.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To agree the Board's shared partnership ambition for children in our care and care experienced young people

To support Walsall Council in meeting its legal responsibilities in regard children in our care and care experienced young people.

Recommendations:

The Board members are asked to

1. The Board committee note the progress against the action plan for 2022/23
2. Agree the priority areas and action plan for the delivery of the strategy.

Background papers:

None

Resource and legal considerations:

There are no resource implications associated with the development of the strategy.

The Council has various duties under the Children Act 1989 to children in its care and to children and young people who leave its care. It also has a duty under s 1 Children and Social Work Act 2017, in carrying out functions in relation to the children and young people in its care and formerly in its care who meet statutory criteria to have regard to the seven corporate parenting principles.

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:

There are no environmental implications associated with the development of the strategy.

Performance management:

The delivery of the strategy will be monitored through the Corporate Parenting Board.

Reducing inequalities:


Successful delivery of a strategy to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers will have a significantly positive impact on the outcomes of one of the most vulnerable groups.

Consultation:

The children in care council is one of the key forums through which services for children in our care and care experienced young people 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: Jivan Sembi

 01922 658412/0555

Jivan.sembi@Walsall.gov.uk

Report: Corporate Parenting Strategy and Our Action Plan	
1.0	Background
1.1	This strategy highlights the collective responsibility we all have in fulfilling our duty as corporate parents. The strategy outlines the mission, vision and values that we will uphold and sets out our key priorities and actions we will take to achieve them, identifying measures that will tell us whether we have been successful.
1.2	Corporate parenting refers to the shared responsibility across the Council to ensure that children and young people in our care or leaving care are supported to thrive. Children in our care and care experienced young people are vulnerable individuals who often have difficult and traumatic experiences in some of the most formative years of their lives.
1.3	This Corporate Parenting Strategy is informed by the views of Children in Care Council and was agreed by the Board in 2022. It is aligned with Corporate Plan and the changed legislative and national policy context. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 guides the actions of corporate parents towards children in care and care leavers. These are covered in detail in Walsall's Corporate Parenting Strategy,
1.4	<p>The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out how the Council will deliver its role as a corporate parent and ensure that children and young people have the support, care and encouragement to reach their full potential. This report informs the Board of the performance of the Council as a corporate parent, and the outcomes that have been achieved for the children in its care from April 2022 to March 2023.</p> <p>Revised Strategy can be found in Appendix 1 The Action Plan for 2022/23 can be found in Appendix 2 The Action Plan for 2023/24 can be found in appendix 3</p>
2.0	Policy, Legislative & Regulatory Context
2.1	<p>The Children and Social Work Act 2017, defines in law, the role of corporate parents and set out seven corporate parenting principles that require all services within a local authority, including staff, elected members and partner agencies, to recognise their role as a corporate parent and encourage them to look at the support and services they provide.</p> <p>Our Corporate Parenting Strategy seeks to embed these principles within the council and beyond with our Partners and broader community The principles underpin everything we will do and explain how the collective ambitions for children and young people will be made real.</p>
2.2	The seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people</i> • <i>to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings</i> • <i>to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people</i> • <i>to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners</i> • <i>to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people</i> • <i>for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and</i> • <i>to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.”</i>
2.3	<p>The key policy change for children in care and care experienced young people since 2022 is set out in the Government’s publication of Stable Homes, Built on Love Implementation Strategy which addresses the recommendations to reform Children’s Social Care, as set out in the Independent review of children’s social care: Final report; Child Protection in England; and the Children’s Social Care market study.</p>
2.4	<p>The Stable Homes, Built on Love Implementation Strategy is built around six key pillars.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families 2. A decisive multi agency child protection system 3. Unlocking the potential of family networks 4. Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care 5. A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one 6. A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data
2.3	<p>Pillar 4 which focuses on improving how we care for our children and care experienced young people has six key “missions” to improve the care system</p> <p>1. Ensure strong, loving relationships for care-experienced children. The government will provide funding to increase the number of local authorities with family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes. They will also explore ways for care-experienced people to legally formalise a lifelong bond with someone they care about.</p> <p>2. Increase the number of local, high-quality, stable and loving homes. The government will work with local authorities to deliver a fostering recruitment and retention programme. It will set up an expert group to review standards of care, regulations and guidance and explore ways to increase financial oversight of large providers of homes. It will also pilot a regional approach to care provision through Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs)</p> <p>3. Strengthen and extend corporate parenting responsibilities across the public sector. The government has consulted on corporate parenting principles to identify areas in need of improvement and the possibility of extending the range of bodies the principles apply to.</p> <p>4. Improve education, employment and training outcomes.</p>

	<p>The government will look at expanding the Virtual School Head role to children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25. It will increase the funding of post 16 education for children in care and establish an accreditation scheme for providers of further education to aspire to when working with care leavers. Plans also include expanding the number of jobs and apprenticeships available to care leavers.</p> <p>5. Increase suitable accommodation for care leavers and reduce homelessness.</p> <p>Plans include increasing the leaving care allowance and removing the local connection requirement for care leavers seeking access to social housing.</p> <p>6. Reduce disparities in mental and physical health outcomes and improve wellbeing.</p> <p>Existing guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of children in care will be updated and extended to cover care experienced young people up to the age of 25. The government will also look at supporting the training needs of social care practitioners around mental health.</p>
<p>2.4</p>	<p>Stable Homes, Built on Love sets out key milestones for delivery. Phase 1 (up to the end of March 2025) will focus on addressing urgent issues, setting the national direction and laying the foundations for reform. Phase 2 will focus on embedding reform, subject to funding, parliamentary time and the outcomes of related consultations.</p> <p>These changes will inform the revision of our Corporate Parenting Strategy in 2024/25</p>
<p>2.5</p>	<p>The Corporate Parenting Strategy has 5 key strategic priorities: Our priorities respond directly to Our Promises, a list of commitments to children and care leavers, developed and agreed by the young people themselves and endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Safety and Permanency: All of our children and young people will be safe from harm, with stability provided through secure homes and excellent carers.</i> 2. <i>Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing: We will educate our young people to encourage a happy and healthy lifestyle, making sure that professionals work together to ensure that all their health needs are met.</i> 3. <i>Education and Employment: We will champion our young people and help them succeed in education and training, supporting lifelong learning and the pursuit of their interests.</i> 4. <i>Transitions and Independence: Our young people will be prepared for the world of work and supported to become active citizens when they leave care. They will be prepared for independence in the best way possible.</i> 5. <i>Influence and Involvement: Children and young people are at the heart of service design, delivery and evaluation</i>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Summary</p> <p>At the core of the strategy is our intention to drive the corporate parenting principles and delivery for our children, young people, and young adults into all areas of the Council and our partners, and to unashamedly leverage all opportunities to improve the life chances of</p>

children in care and those who have left care. It reflects the high aspirations that we have and what can be achieved by everyone working together to promote the best interests of children in care and those that have left care.

It is an aspirational strategy, which will be delivered through the development of an annual delivery plan and by championing this work across the whole Council and with the wider community of partners across Walsall who can make a difference to the lives of our children and young people.

Walsall has a significant record of investment in services for our children in care and our care experienced young people, we have a partnership that is committed to achieving improved outcomes for our children. The strategy sets a high ambition for how we can continue to build on that investment and see meaningful transformation in the life chances of the most vulnerable in society.

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025

Our promise to you

	Contents	Page
	Foreword	3
	Introduction	4
	Walsall's Children in Care	6
	Walsall's Promise to Children in Care & Care Experienced young people	7
	Our priorities	9
	• Safety and Permanency	9
	• Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing	10
	• Education and Employment	11
	• Transitions and Independence	12
	• Influence and Involvement	13
	Leadership	14

FOREWORD BY PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The council's relationship with children we care for and care experienced young people is unlike any other relationship we have with people living in Walsall. We know that there is no greater responsibility than as a corporate parent. Because we are your 'Corporate Parents' we have legal and moral responsibilities towards you just like we have towards our own children. We need to be good parents and try to be the best possible parents we can be for you all.

We know that getting the best start in life is crucial as early experiences have lifelong impacts and shape our futures. We support all children we care for and care experienced young people to thrive and flourish; reach and exceed their potential and expand their life chances.

When it is time we help you leave our care to become resilient and independent adults. We have big ambitions for you and take a 'whole council' approach to caring for you and raising you, involving staff who work at the council, carers and Elected Members and our Partners alike.

We do this together, bringing together all of our resources and capacity so that we are able to achieve the best possible outcomes for you. We are passionate about doing the best for children we care for and care leavers and we want everyone connected to the council and all of our partners to share this passion.

We have identified priorities and actions to show how we plan to deliver on the promise. We understand that each child in our care is an individual and our approach reflects this. We are ambitious for every child in our care and will encourage them to achieve their full potential, by overcoming challenges to progress well in education, learning and training.

This document is all about the promise we have made to you, children in our care and care experienced young people which is based on your views. It is this promise that has shaped our vision and how we plan to meet our corporate parenting responsibilities.

For us, this is not just about fulfilling duties, but about ambition and aspiration. We value and care for you, not only through those who look after you on a daily basis but also through those who make decisions that affect your lives.

Councillor Elson, Chair of Corporate Parenting Board

Colleen Male Interim, Executive Director Children's Services

Introduction

Walsall's Corporate Parenting Board brings together all services and provides a welcoming forum for our children in care and care experienced young people to influence the shape of range of services available to them.

To secure the best possible outcomes we need the collective commitment from the whole Council, all elected members, council employees, as well as our partners - Health services, Police, Probation, Housing Providers, Schools and Colleges and voluntary sector. We all act as good parents, committing resources and working together to improve the lives of children in our care and care experienced young people. Alongside our corporate parenting principles, there are a number of priorities that underpin this strategy and the services that both ourselves and our partners provide children in our care and young people in our care.

This strategy outlines our priorities for supporting children in our care and sets a framework for the council and partners to be held accountable on their promises. Delivery against our commitments will be monitored diligently by the Corporate Parenting Board.

We know all children are unique and have individual needs and circumstances. We work closely with children in our care and care experienced young people and ensure that their 'Voice' is truly heard. Members will listen to young people and check that they are happy and healthy, receiving a quality education and have access to training and employment opportunities, as well as their own home to go to when the time comes to live independently.

Our relational approach means we engage directly and routinely with our children, their carers and care experienced young people as well as our staff who support them, encouraging them to share experiences so that we can better understand the issues they face and adapt services to meet their needs. Children's experiences will always form the centre of our approach in Walsall.

This means it is our responsibility as Corporate Parents to

- Keep our cared for children safe and secure, we stick with them and go the extra mile for them
- Create a culture where we know and believe in all our children and young people. We help them to achieve their goals and ambitions - by recognising their needs, talents and aspirations
- Listen and make our children and young people's ideas happen, ensure their lived experiences improve practice and make sure they know and understand their story and their plans
- Believe in our children and young people and help them to be the best they can be both now and, in the future
- Embrace and celebrate the individuality of our children and young people
- We want our children and young people to be healthy and happy
- We will listen to our children and young people's worries and work with them to find solutions
- We want our care experienced young people to become confident and resilient adults living within their own community with support from trusted adults

Children and Social Work Act 2017 – Corporate Parenting Principles

There are seven corporate parenting principles, which always guide our work

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- To help those children and young people gain access to, and make best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

How does Walsall compare Nationally?

	Nationally	West Midlands	Statistical neighbours	Locally
	at 31 March 2022			31 March 2023
Number of children we care for	82,170 70:10,000	88:10,000	100: 10,000	650 93.7:10,000.
Number of children living with foster families	70%	73%	74%	75%
Number of olds care experienced young people that we support.	33,590 19 - 21 year olds			236 18 -25 year olds
Percentage of care experienced young people In Touch (19 - 21-year-old)	92%	91%	95%	92%
Percentage of 19 -21 year old care experienced young people in education, employment or training	55%	52%	50%	54%

Our Promise to You - Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People:

Our Promise to You is a list of commitments developed with young people and children's services decision makers to ensure that our children in care and care experienced young people get the right services and support. Our 'Promises' form our Pledge to You as children in our care and care leavers. A pledge is important. It tells our Children and Young People what we promise to do for them as their Corporate Parents.



The Promise
Younger children
5 – 11 years

Sometimes children are not able to live with their parents and so they may need to be placed in our care. When this happens, there are a number of things that we will do to make sure that you are safe and well cared for. We call these our 'promises to you'.



Education

- We promise to help you to play and learn at a school that is right for you
- We will help you join clubs and after school activities near to where you live
- We will help you to make friends
- We will tell you how well you are doing and let you know how proud we are of you

Keeping you safe

- We promise to make sure you live somewhere safe where there will always be someone to take care of you
- We will make sure you can keep things that are important to you like your favourite toys.
- We will make sure you always have someone that you can talk to when you are feeling sad
- We will listen to what you like and don't like

Keeping you healthy

- We will make sure you stay well and can see a Doctor when you are poorly
- We will help you to eat healthy food and drinks that will make you grow big and strong
- We will help you to be happy and feel good about yourself
- We will help you to play safely outside and enjoy exercise

Keeping in touch

- We promise to help you to understand the reason why you are in care and will keep a copy of your life for you to look at.
- We promise to help you keep in touch with your family and friends, if it is safe to do so.
- We will help you stay in touch with Foster Carers and friends if you want to and will tell you if this can't happen
- We will make sure that you have a social worker that you can talk to

The Promise

Older children
12 - 15 years



Every child in our care will be treated fairly and respected as individuals. We will always seek to do everything we can to support and inspire you to be the best you can be. Through everything we do, we will help you to develop strong and meaningful relationships with your family, friends, carers, teachers and social workers so that you are given the very best support available.

Education and Training



- We promise to make sure that you have the best education possible and help you to plan for your future
- We promise to help you to enjoy new experiences and develop your own interests and hobbies
- We promise to celebrate your achievements and tell you how proud we are of you
- We promise to try and make sure that you don't have to change school
- We promise to make sure that you get all the help and support you need to learn, achieve and succeed

Keeping you safe



- We promise to provide you with a safe and comfortable place to live
- We promise to listen to you and involve you in decisions that affect your life.
- We promise to help you feel safe, both in and out of your home.
- We promise to encourage and support you to express your views
- We promise to provide you with a trusted adult that can help you if you are feeling worried
- We promise not to do anything that will make you stand out as a child in care

Keeping you healthy



- We promise to support and encourage you to have a healthy lifestyle
- We promise to make sure you are cared for by people who can keep you safe and healthy and will teach you how to learn to look after yourself as you get older
- We promise to help you to access a range of leisure activities
- We promise to listen to any health issues you may have and will help you to get the support you need

Keeping in touch



- We promise to help you to understand the reason why you are in care
- We promise to help you keep in touch with your family and friends, if it is safe to do so.
- We promise to respect you as individuals and listen to what you want
- We promise to help you keep a record of important events, achievements and people in your life that are important to you
- We promise to help you take part in things you want to do such as school trips and fun activities



The Promise Older children and Care Leavers aged 16-25

By listening to our care experienced young people, we have developed a list of 'Promises' that form our Pledge to you as children in our care. A pledge is an important part of running a service for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. It tells Children and Young People what we promise to do for them as their Corporate Parents.

Education, Training & Employment



- We promise to help you with your education and with finding the right employment and training opportunities.
- We promise to encourage and support you into college or university and give you clear information about the support you can expect.
- We promise to ensure that you have opportunities for work experience and employment such as apprenticeships and traineeships.
- We promise to support you to have different experiences and access to activities that may interest you.

Keeping you safe



- We promise to help you to decide where you want to live and will help to keep you safe and comfortable.
- We promise to help you to stay with your foster carers if this is possible.
- We promise to help you to manage your money and ensure you have financial stability ready for your future.
- We promise to help you to get important documents like passports and driving licences.
- We promise to pay for your council tax, even if you live outside of Walsall Council.
- We promise to provide you with opportunities to build your confidence so that you are able to make your own decisions about your safety.

Keeping you healthy



- We promise to help you to access health services and have access to your health passport.
- We promise to go with you to health appointments and support you if you need it.
- We promise to help you to access local leisure facilities to help you keep fit and well.
- We promise to make sure you have someone to talk to or can access support with your mental wellbeing.

Keeping in touch



- We promise to help you to keep in contact with people that are important to you.
- We promise to celebrate your achievements with you.
- We promise to respect you as individuals and have high aspirations for your future.
- We promise that you will always have someone to contact.



Walsall Council



Our priorities

Our priorities respond directly to Our Promises to You, a list of commitments to children and care leavers, developed and agreed by the young people themselves and endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board.

- Safety and Permanency
- Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing
- Education and Employment
- Transitions and Independence
- Influence and Involvement

Safety and Permanency

All of our children and young people will be safe from harm, with stability provided through secure homes and excellent carers.

Walsall works hard to ensure the right support is provided at the right time so that children can remain with their families. We always celebrate our family successes and we will support children to remain at home if it is safe to do so. However, if concerns about safety or wellbeing persist, swift action is taken to ensure the child has a safe and secure place to live, even if this means having to go into the care of the Local Authority.

We have a duty to ensure to ensure our young people have a safe place to stay. As corporate parents, we listen to and train our carers to have all the tools they need to be the best carers to our young people. We also understand the importance of support networks and make sure our young people have adults that they can rely on and provide as much stability as possible.

We know that uprooting children from their homes or having to change placements can be tough, so we work hard to find long and suitable families and homes for our young people that will allow them to flourish and make a success of their lives.

We commit to:

- Provide young people with a safe home to live with carer who are suitable and well trained. Young people will be happy and taken care of, and only moved again if absolutely necessary.
- Our Turning Point service will continue to make a direct contribution to helping children to remain with their families
- We will ensure that social work plans are child focused, culturally informed and consider the perspectives of partners in health and education.
- We will continue to help our children find stability, build trust with professionals and identify risks early to avoid young people entering the criminal justice system.
- We will give our young people all the information we can about their new family, home and where they will be living. They will be given information about the support available from youth services, including on education, training and careers.
- Ensure continuity of care for our young people so that they maintain a sense of stability and do not experience too many different professionals.
- We'll draw on the rich experience of our foster carers and enable them to provide best possible care for looked after children and young people.
- We will continue to challenge ourselves to offer the best services and develop our approaches.
- Continuing to explore family and friends in order for children to return to family and not remain in care for longer than necessary if appropriate.
- Promote and champion the specific needs of unaccompanied and separated young people including support with acquiring citizenship.

Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing

We will educate our young people to encourage a happy and healthy lifestyle, making sure that professionals work together to ensure that all their health needs are met.

Often our children have had tough starts in life and many children and young people experience the trauma of being separated from their families and communities. Being happy and confident in identity is a key factor in looking after our mental wellbeing, particularly when it comes to race, sexuality, disability and gender. It's therefore crucial that we encourage our young people to be comfortable in who they are and demonstrate sensitivity and inclusivity of difference for our young people to thrive.

We are commit to:

- Care planning will consider the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our children and care leavers
- We will support our children and young people to understand the importance of their health assessments and ensure that no one misses out on healthcare, with regular assessments to help identify need.
- We'll encourage all young people to attend their assessments by offering flexible arrangements both face to face and virtual appointments. Medical appointments will be kept even if the young people live outside of Walsall.
- Provide a holistic health assessment within four weeks of a child entering care, and annually thereafter (or six-monthly for Under 5's). Our health team will listen to their problems and understand their needs, reviewing their physical health, growth and development.
- We will ensure and promote access to mental health services. For those with specific needs will be offered support from the FLASH Team for those who live within Walsall or within 20 miles. We will work with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or other providers to secure support.
- We will educate our young people and encourage a happy, healthy and active lifestyle, providing free access to leisure facilities. Maintaining an open dialogue about all aspects of their health; from healthy eating, exercising and staying safe, to sexual health, smoking, alcohol and substance misuse.
- We will support young people with substance misuse issues and intervene early to provide all the support they need.
- We will ensure that our children and young people know how to access their health records.
- We will ensure that the information about their health is kept confidential and only shared with people who need to know.

Education and Employment

We will champion our young people and help them succeed in education and training, supporting lifelong learning and the pursuit of their interests.

Ensuring that our children in care and care experienced young people are in good education, employment, apprenticeships and training will always be a priority for us as we know they offer the greatest opportunities for our young people to build a successful career.

All our young people are unique and have different interests and hobbies which provide opportunities to improve confidence, mental wellbeing and feel connected to something they love. In Walsall we maintain high aspirations for our young people and help them to make the most of their talents.

Walsall's Virtual School has high expectations and helps the children in our care and leaving our care to achieve the very best. Although the pupils attend many different schools and settings, we operate as if they all attend one school. We have high aspirations for their education, employment and training and we expect schools and settings to provide a quality learning environment which meets their needs and encourages and develops their ambition.

Virtual School monitors, supports and challenges academic achievements and attainment in partnership with schools, carers, social workers and personal advisers. We hold schools to account for the impact of the provision on pupil's progress through the education system using Personal Education Plans and monitoring the use of Pupil Premium plus .

The Virtual School is committed to ensuring that the Voice of the child will be reflected in our planning to effectively support all pupils and their views are sought at every Personal Education Plan meeting.

Virtual School deliver a variety of out of school activities throughout the year for children and young people of all ages. Some examples of the positive activities provided through the School are Summit2success Programme, Aspire to University and our Year 6 residential. We use pupil premium to fund sport, art and music activities and provide 1:1 tuition and other bespoke educational packages when needed. We celebrate the success of our children and young people through annual celebration events.

We have a Governing body, like any school, we provide reports on the work of the school and the progress and achievements of the children.

We commit to:

- Social workers and personal advisors working with our Virtual School, which ensures monitoring, support and advice for young people throughout the year.
- We'll help to ensure all children and young people achieve their full potential through education, training and good quality employment, making the most of their talents.
- We will identify any Special Education Needs (SEN) and meet these needs through an Education Health Care Plan or other SEN support, helping our young people overcome barriers to education attainment.
- Making sure they have a place at a good school or college and attend regularly.
- We will guarantee that every young person has access to digital devices, study resources, tuition and a high quality Personal Education Plan. They will also have excellent support from a Designated Teacher at their school.
- Ensuring our care experienced young people have a Pathway Plan that has clear information about what support is available once they leave care, go to university or undertake vocational training and apprenticeships. Also connecting them into training, coaching and other opportunities through *Endless Possibilities* and *Walsall Works*.

Transitions and Independence

Our young people will be prepared for the world of work and supported to become active citizens when they leave care. They will be prepared for independence in the best way possible.

Leaving care, like leaving home, is a critical transition for our young people and supporting them through this transition into adulthood is a major responsibility for us as corporate parents. This is not simply a matter of helping young people acquire a checklist of life and independent living skills – although it is those things – but also helping young people develop resilience, have a comfortable sense of self and have options for their futures. We recognise that young people mature at different paces and that some young people will struggle to gain independence and struggle in independence.

Working with our partners in health, education and CAMHS and Walsall Housing Group we are developing services so that young people remain living in the borough where they grew up with access to wrap around support while developing their independent living skills.

In Walsall we listen carefully to our care experienced young people and assess their needs to make sure they have all the services required for a successful transition into adult life. This includes making sure they have suitable accommodation while preparing for independence.

We commit to:

- Ensure that all young people in our care over the age of 16 years have a pathway plan specific to their needs and aspirations.
- We will make every effort to help young people remain living with their foster carer after 18 and up to the age of 21 if they wish (Staying Put)
- Once a young person leaves school, we will help them to make the most of their opportunities in training, further education and employment.
- From the age of 17, you will have a personal advisor to help them to become independent. Care experienced young people can continue with this support up until the age of 25 if they wish to do so.
- Care experienced young people will have the best housing and support offer we can give them. We want all our young people to live in our borough and have access to their communities
- We will ensure our care experienced young people are given as much help as possible to find suitable housing, supported to move and settle into their new home, with provisions made to ensure they're happy, safe and are able to sustain the tenancy.
- We will help our care experienced young people learn the practical skills needed to live independently, such as managing budgets and applying for jobs.
- We will ensure that individual needs are taken into account and the needs of young parents are supported through their transition.
- We will ensure that our care experienced young people know what their entitlements are and provide leaving care financial support, setting up home grant and other forms of financial relief (eg from council tax) in line with our financial assistance policies.
- We will ensure that all young people understand and have access to our local offer
- Young people will continue to receive advice as they gain independence; developing personal resilience as they journey into adulthood.
- Fully support any young person who wishes to pursue higher education to obtain places and apply for student loans. We will fund vacation accommodation for young people as necessary.
- Continue our work with further education colleges, employment training providers, Walsall Works and Endless Possibilities to help young people access high quality training and apprenticeships.
- Challenge ourselves and our partners to provide specific internship, apprenticeship and employment opportunities for our looked after young people and care leavers.

Influence and Involvement

Children and young people are at the heart of service design, delivery and evaluation

Children and young people's Voices must be at the centre of our approach to corporate parenting. We want mutually respectful and collaborative relationships with our children and young people. This means embedding a culture of fully involving young people in all matters affecting them, welcoming and encouraging their participation, actively listening to and genuinely taking account of their views.

The Children in Care Council (CICC) is a voice group for children in care and care experienced young people in Walsall. They meet every month to discuss what improvements need to be made to the support young people receive, particularly those in care or are care leavers. The CiCC meets and invites the Director of Children's Services, senior managers and Councillors to let them know what they are doing and ensure that young people are consulted on matters which affect their lives. The CiCC is regularly involved in decision making at various levels and hold decision makers to account. With the direct purpose of representing Walsall's children in care and care experienced young people the CiCC has had a clear and effective impact on the support that our children receive.

As Corporate Parents, we know that we cannot make effective decisions for young people and provide the support they need without their help, thoughts and views.

We commit to:

- An active Children in Care Council ensuring that the voices of children and young people is central to our work
- Appoint Care Ambassadors to strengthen the voices of children and young people
- We will ensure that children in care and care experienced young people participate in their planning and reviews
- We will ensure we learn from complaints received from young people
- We will ensure care experienced young people are engaged in their pathway planning and reviews
- Our independent reviewing officers will meet our children and young people
- We will enable access to advocacy

Leadership

Our Corporate Parenting Board will take lead responsibility for the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and action plan in each of the five key priorities.

The Board will:

- Be a forum for regular, planned and detailed discussion of thematic presentations
- Be a positive link with cared for children and care leaver forums
- Be a mechanism to listen to our cared for children and care leavers; to promote their voice and have influence in decision making
- Receive regular progress reports, service plans and performance reporting aligned to the corporate parenting action plan.
- Consider areas of good practice, developing services and make recommendations to support continued improvement and development
- Provide a governance structure for corporate parenting which provides strong challenge and scrutiny

How will we know that we are doing a good job!

We need to make sure that we do all the things that we have said we will do. Often this involves many people from different organisations across education, care and health and so it is important that we check in with each other. Sometimes we need to ask each other difficult questions, particularly if we think something is not working well or when something goes wrong?

The Corporate Parenting Board and elected members of the council will ask for updates about how well things are going. Corporate Parenting Board will bring together updates from our children in care council and our young people leaving care forum.

The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, Head of the Virtual School, Partners and managers will regularly offer to attend our children and young person meetings and may be 'called in' by the children to do so.

The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum will regularly be asked to think about the Promise and the ways in which services that help them have changed for the better. This information will be feedback to the Corporate Parenting Board will seek to ensure that current and future priorities, decisions and services will reflect the needs of cared for children and care leavers. The first question the Board will ask of themselves, is, "would this be good enough for my child?"

The Corporate Parenting Strategy will be monitored and evaluated by the Board through:

- Children and young people feel valued and able to shape and influence services
- Performance data will be provided to support and evidence progress on the five priorities
- Our audits telling us about the lived experience of children and young people
- Assurance reports for:
 - Annual Independent Reviewing Officer Report
 - Annual Fostering Report and Statement of Purpose
 - Annual Adoption Report
 - Annual Report of the Virtual School
- Annual health of Children in Care Assurance Report
- Improved placement stability and reduction in unplanned endings
- Placement Sufficiency Strategy and Action Plan
- Increased number of care experienced young people entering education, training or employment
- Review and revise our Local Offer for Care Experienced young people

Corporate Parenting Strategy - Our Action Plan 2022-23

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
Leadership	a. Ensure that elected members are aware of and understand their corporate parenting responsibilities	Deliver updated training to members about what Corporate Parenting is and the function and responsibility of the Corporate Parenting Board and wider Children's Services in being effective corporate parents.	All new and existing Corporate Parenting Board members to participate in Respect training to support their understanding of their roles and responsibilities as Corporate Parenting. 50% of our Councillors complete Respect Training between 2022/23, including Councillors that sit on Corporate Parenting Board	Children's Champion / Head of Service March 2023	The Director or Social Work, all Heads of Service and 4 elected members of the Corporate Parenting Board have completed Total Respect Training in 2022/2023. An offer of bespoke Total Respect Training is in place. We have promoted Total Respect Training for all our Councillors and we have yet to achieve the desired target. We are now proposing to review with Elected members the best way to move this forward.
		Revise and offer Respect Training in conjunction with Children in Care Council	6 courses of Respect Training to be made available during 2022/23. Increased our pool of trainers and train a further 4 young people support the delivery of Respect training.		In 2022/23 a total 10 courses were delivered in conjunction with young people to meet our demand. We have increased our pool of trainers with 4 young people supporting the delivery of Total Respect training.
Safety and Permanency	b. Support and enable more children and young people to remain with their	Review and update the Staying Put Policy to make staying put arrangements more attractive to foster	New Policy in place (documentation)	Head of Service for Children in Care. March 2023	The Staying Put Policy was revised in 2021 however a review of the financial support package was paused pending the outcome of

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
	foster carers post 18 years of age.	carers and young people. Ensure that young people and foster carers are aware of the option to stay put and it's benefits?	<p>Care experienced young people age 19 and 20 staying put</p> <p>Target – minimum of 40% of care experienced young people stay put.</p> <p>2019-20 - 12/40 (30%)</p> <p>2020-21 - 17/37 (46%)</p> <p>2021-22 -41% staying put</p> <p>14/49 (23%) staying put 2022-23</p>		<p>the National Care Review which recommends that Staying Put arrangement should be extended to age 23.</p> <p>Although there is reduction to 23% children staying put. The number of children living with their foster families and remaining staying put was proportionally higher. 14 of the 18 remained in staying put arrangements(49 in total left care)</p> <p>Further work is underway to scope and agree a revised financial support offer to encourage more young people to remain with their foster carers. The revised financial offer will be implemented in April 2024</p>
	c. Ensure that more children leave care by achieving permanence in line with their care plans	Continued permanence tracking and care planning which focuses on permanency planning to ensure children do not remain in care longer than is in their best interests	<p>2022-23 Targets</p> <p>Up to 20 children to be reunified with parents with care orders revoked</p> <p>Up to 20 children leaving care via SGO</p> <p>Up to -20 children leaving care via Adoption</p>	All Heads of Service for Help and Protection; Children in Care & Family Safeguarding and Localities March 2023	<p>All children in our care are regularly reviewed via Permanence Panels and tracked jointly by the Permanence Coordinator and relevant Group Managers.</p> <p>We have exceeded the targets agreed in 2022/23 to ensure that children leave care by achieving permanence, specifically via</p>

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
			<p>Previous years</p> <p>Reunification to Parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27 (14%) returned home 2019-20 • 21 (13%) returned home 2020-21 • 11 (11%) returned home in 2021-22 <p>Special Guardianship Order</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 (15%) SGOs in 2019-20 • 37 (23%) SGOs in 2020-21 • 17 (9%) SGOs at 2021-22 <p>Adoption</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 (9%) Adoptions in 2019-20 • 19 (10%) Adoptions in 2020-21 • 29(15%) Adoptions in 2021-22 		<p>reunification to their parents, adoption and special guardianship.</p> <p>36 (21%) returned home 2022-23</p> <p>26 (15%) SGO in 2022-23</p> <p>27 (16%) Adoptions in 2022-23</p> <p>Our Projection for 2023/24 are:</p> <p>15 children reunified to parents</p> <p>25 Adoptions</p> <p>25 Special Guardianship</p>
	d. Placement Sufficiency Strategy – Review and analysis of data so that there is clarity on number and type of placements required	Exploring what sufficiency of provision, we have available in Walsall, from both a fostering and residential perspective and elsewhere to meet these needs, the quality of that	Review of Placement Sufficiency undertaken and action plan in place. (Documentation)	Head of Service Children in Care and Commissioning Manager March 2023	The Placement Sufficiency Strategy has been completed and is supported by an Action Plan. The Children’s Regulated Services Board will monitor the progress of the Action Plan. The Strategy will be present to the CPB in 2023 for

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
		<p>provision and how much it costs.</p> <p>Action Plan to be put into place setting out key priorities and intentions for our commissioning and development of sufficient provision and the practice that underpins this.</p>			approval and progress of the Action Plan.
	e. Increase placement sufficiency by increasing the number of in-house foster placements.	<p>Review branding and recruitment plan</p> <p>Review and consult with foster carers on our revised financial offer to foster carers.</p> <p>Scope and develop fostering scheme to support children from children’s residential care</p>	<p>Measure of success</p> <p>Increase fostering households by 20 new placements in 2022/2023</p> <p>Establish a further 2 Mockingbird Hubs in 2022/23</p>		<p>We have increased fostering households by creating 18 additional places in 2021 -22 and a further 11 in 2022-23.</p> <p>This is an area significant concern for us within the context of nation and regional challenges.</p> <p>Fees and Allowances have been revised based on DfE rates and the improved offer was implemented in April 2023.</p> <p>Considerable work has been undertaken to improve our branding, marketing and strengthened our financial support. A detailed report has been presented which sets out the detail.</p>

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
					We have established 5 Mockingbird Hubs to date, The 6 th Mockingbird Hub carer is appointed and constellation carers are being identified.
	f. Increase placement sufficiency by increasing the internal residential homes		2 new children's homes purchased and operational by 2022/23	July and October 2023	Properties for both Homes have been purchased. Staffing for both homes is in place. Home 1 – Ofsted Registration completed in July 2023. Home 2 – Planning Permission granted in July and Ofsted registration application has been submitted. Building works are underway. Home Manager has been appointed. We expect to be operational in the Autumn 2023.
Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing	g. Ensure the health needs of our children in care are met in a timely way.	Ensure that the completion of health assessments and dental checks are within statutory timescales Effective and timely liaison with health colleagues to ensure needs of children placed out of Borough are met and a smooth	Measured by report to Board and performance	Social Workers, Looked After Children Health Team (Walsall Health Trust), Walsall ICB March 2023	The CCG and Health Trust provided an Annual Assurance Report to the CPB in January 2023. Quarterly performance reports presented to the CPB in July 2022' November 2022 and April 2023 which have provided further scrutiny of health outcomes for the children in care.

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
		transition of services if children move placements			Regular monitoring meetings between health and children's services remain in place. An escalation process in place to ensure assessments are timely .A weekly health performance dashboard is shared with Children in Care health Teat at Walsall Health Trust and the Designated Nurse for CiC.
			<p>Measure of Success</p> <p>Health Assessments – 2022/23 target = 85% agreed by Black Country ICB for the 4 LAs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 91% in 2021/22 • 85% in 2020/21 <p>Dental Checks - 2022/23 Target 90% children will have an annual dental check</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 88% in 2021/22 • 43% in 2020/21 <p>Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire. 2022-23 - Target = 95% of children</p>		<p>88% of children received timely health assessments, similar to WM but Lower than SN and Eng.</p> <p>88% of children received the annual dental check, lower than our target but higher than WM, Lower than Eng & SN</p> <p>In 2022/23 a revised Dental Pathway has been established to improve access to dental care.</p> <p>The reduction in review health assessments and dental assessments is due to an increase of children living at a distance and access to</p> <p>94% in of children have received an SDQ which supports us to meet</p>

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
			<p>will have an up to date SDQ.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% in 2021/22 • 99% in 2020/21 		<p>their emotional and wellbeing needs.</p>
	<p>h. Enable care experienced young people to understand their health needs and how to access additional support when they need it.</p>	<p>Ensure all care experienced young people receive their health passport and a copy is kept on their file</p> <p>Review and reset regular drop-in</p> <p>advice service for children in care aged 16+ and care leavers</p>	<p>Measure of Success (Performance Indicators) - proposed indicator for 2022-23 Target health passports to be agreed with CCG and Health Trust</p> <p>100% of care experienced young people are offered their health passport</p> <p><i>90% of young people receive their health passport.</i></p>	<p>Looked After Children Health Team (Walsall Health Trust) and Walsall ICB</p> <p>March 2023</p>	<p>The Children in Care Health Team now offer a weekly clinic at the TLC Hub and specifically for our 16/17 year olds.</p> <p>All 51 young people leaving care were offered a Health Passport as they are leaving care. 86% (45) young people received their health passport.</p> <p>2 young people declined/ whereabouts unknown and 4 young people in custody and will be provided their health passport when they are released.</p> <p>The Designated Nurse for Children in Care are reviewing an App for young people and when this is fully operational it will provide young people with access to their information and other health services more easily. From April 2023 all care experienced young</p>

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
					people have access to free prescription up to the age of 25.
Education and Employment	i. Ensure that children in care and care experienced young people can access education, employment or training	<p>Ensure care experienced young people are supported to access supported internships and traineeships as opportunities develop</p> <p>Embed the pre-apprenticeship support offer for care leavers</p>	<p>Measure of Success (Performance Indicators)</p> <p>2022-23 Target</p> <p>At least 60% of care experienced young people age 19 to 21 will be in Education, Employment or Training (in line with national performance.)</p> <p>At least 65% of 16/17 year olds will be in education, employment or training</p>	<p>Head of Service working with Virtual School ; Impact. Walsall Together Endless Possibilities</p> <p>March 2023</p>	<p>In April 2022 – the Corporate Parenting Board received a report in relation to young people not in education, employment and training. Securing work and learning opportunities for care experienced young people has been a challenge in 2022/23.</p> <p>In 2022/23 - 54% of our young people aged 19-21 were in work or learning and this has remained inline with our performance in 2021-22 and the West Midlands average (54%); higher than our statistical neighbours (50) but slightly lower than England average (55).</p> <p>At 31 March 2023 78% (79 of 102 children) children in care age 16 or 17 were in education, training or employment and this exceeds the target of 65%</p>

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
		.All young people who are available for work are reviewed each month.			The NEET Action Group continues to meet with a focus ensuring that more young people are in work and learning. The Group reviews progress of young people supported by real time performance dashboard. This ensures that managers review the interventions required to support and prepare young people to engage in work or learning.
Transitions and Independence	j. Children in care and care experienced young people will receive high quality and consistent support to transition to adulthood and develop their independent living skills	To jointly review housing pathways and simplify the nomination and referral documentation for care leavers, ensuring that that the language used is more reflective of the needs of care leavers Review joint Housing Protocol for Care Experienced young people between Children’s Services and Money Home Job and WHG	Revised Housing Protocol is in place (documentation) Target 2022-23 90% of care experienced young people age 19 to 21 will be living in suitable accommodation (in line with national performance.)		Revised Housing Protocol has been agreed by the Directors of Social work and Customer Engagement. We have involved young people in the development of the protocol and their feedback is incorporated. The protocol was reviewed by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities during the focus visit in March 2023. 96% care experienced young people age 19 to 21 were living in suitable accommodation. The majority of those not in suitable accommodation were in custody.

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
		Co-produce care and pathway plans with children and their networks – writing ‘to’ the child. (audit) -	Target 2022-23 95% of pathway plans are up to date Audits scrutinize the quality of pathway plans		There has been considerable focus on the quality of care and pathway plans. Our Audits have identified that most of our plans are co-produced with children and young people and the majority of plans and recording are written to the child. 89% of Pathway plan for young people aged 19 to 21 were up to date at March 2023. This below the target due to staff turnover in 2022.
		Develop and embed an independence programme for children in care and care experienced young people. Review and develop preparation for independence support for care leavers Undertake a baseline survey to establish how children and young people feel about their transition experience	Independence Programme in place and agreed with children and young people. (documentation) Revision of toolkit and support offer set up (documentation) Increase the proportion of children and young people who say their transition experience was positive <i>(target to be established after baseline survey completed)</i>		We are revising the program of independence preparation and toolkit in line with the development of the Training Flat and scoping the House Project. A survey will be undertaken in 2023/24 to seek the views of care experienced young people

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
	<p>k. Young People with complex disabilities/ needs/risks will have access to timely referrals / assessments to support their transition to adulthood.</p>	<p>To develop an All Age model setting out Pathways to Adulthood which will review transition processes and pathways between children’s services and adult social care services to support young people’s transition to adulthood.</p>	<p>Pathways to Adulthood Toolkit in place and embedded. (documentation)</p> <p>Case File Audit 6 months after Toolkit goes live to measure impact.</p>	<p>Adults and Children Social Care Group Managers Head of Service</p> <p>March 2023</p>	<p>A Joint Pathway to Adulthood Toolkit has been agreed with Adults Social Care and Health and is yet to be fully operational. As part of the toolkit Future Planning Panel have been established to embed the transitions pathway and will commence meeting in 2023.</p> <p>A joint audit will be undertaken in 2024 to measure the effectiveness of the transitioning planning.</p>
	<p>i. Care Experienced young people will have an up to date and accessible local offer which meets their needs.</p>	<p>Consult with our care experienced young people to revise our offer in line with best practice.</p> <p>Develop a local offer leaflet that is accessible to young people.</p> <p>Undertake a baseline survey to identify what proportion of care experienced young people know what the local offer is and how they can access information and repeat the survey annually.</p>	<p>Local Offer is reviewed and updated annually (website and documentation)</p> <p>Local offer available and accessible to young people (website documentation)</p> <p>Increase the proportion of care experienced young people who understand what the local offer is and how to access it <i>(target to be set following baseline survey)</i></p>	<p>Head of Service Corporate Parenting</p> <p>March 2023</p>	<p>The website is updated routinely to ensure that this reflects up to date information about the Children in Care Council , Local Offer and other services</p> <p>https://go.walsall.gov.uk/children-and-young-people/children-care-and-care-leavers</p> <p>We have involved our young people in the regional developments in relation to developing our local offer, this has included development of community facilities, health nurse consultation, their health passport,</p>

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
					<p>free prescriptions offer and a training flat.</p> <p>A booklet has been developed based on the revised offer which will be available for young people by September 2023.</p>
	<p>m. Maximise the benefits of the Care Experienced young people Covenant Regionally.</p>	<p>Engage with Care Experienced young people Covenant to continue to strengthen our offer to Care Leavers.</p> <p>Raise awareness of the Covenant with Members.</p>	<p>Learning from the Care Experienced young people Covenant is shared with Corporate Parenting Board (documentation)</p> <p>Learning is used to raise aspiration for Care experienced young people in Walsall through improved service delivery (case studies)</p>	<p>Head of Service Corporate Parenting and Practice Quality and Improvement</p> <p>March 2023</p>	<p>The Care Leavers Covenant is actively promoted with young people and new offers are developed these are shared with our young people. E.g career opportunities, apprentices and MyBank.</p> <p>Learning from our care experienced young people is shared with the Corporate Parenting Board via Young People’s Engagement Reports at each meeting of the Board.</p>
<p>Influence and Involvement</p>	<p>n. Language that Cares</p>		<p>An agreed language with children in care and care experienced young people (the words we use).</p>	<p>Heads of Service Practice Quality and Improvement</p>	<p>A language the cares steering group is in place and is progressing the Language that Cares Action Plan. It has reported progress to the Corporate Parenting Board. Language that Cares is a Practice Priority for 2023/24. Our Children in Care Council are fully involved .</p>

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
	<p>o. Children and young people will be kept up to date with key information including a calendar of events.</p>	<p>Options paper to be developed and shared with young people</p> <p>Work to be undertaken to identify a suitable platform to display and make information accessible to children and young people.</p> <p>Work is undertaken on information to be shared on platform and that it is child appropriate.</p>	<p>Revised platform is in place (documentation)</p>	<p>Heads of Service Practice Quality and Improvement. Head of Performance.</p>	<p>In February 2022 an options paper was considered by the Board. Consultation with Children in Care Council. Between February and March 2022 there was further consultation with our young people. In addition, a range of apps available were explored and considered with Children in Care Council.</p> <p>There was very little interest from our care experienced young people in an App. Their suggestions were that we strengthen the use of other social media platforms such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Website 2. WhatsApp /Snapchat 3. Use of QR codes to signpost to our Local Offer, Surveys via WhatsApp/OR codes 4. Written information is provided via quarterly Newsletters which include OR codes and other information

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
					<p>5. Contact with their personal advisors</p> <p>In the main our young people told us that they preferred an interactive dialogue via WhatsApp / Snapchat and this is enhanced with better access to written information via website, newsletters and through their personal advisors.</p> <p>“We do like to be informed and like to access information but having this on an app would make us feel more excluded as opposed to included”</p> <p>Our young people want us to ensure that our Local Offer and service information is current and relevant on the website. We continue to maintain this.</p>
	p. Review of current website	Undertake a baseline survey to identify what proportion Children and young people know where to go to access information.	Increase the proportion of children and young people who tell us that they know where to go to access information and that the information available is helpful (target to be set following baseline survey)	Head of Service Corporate Parenting	In 2023/24 further work is underway to enhance the look and feel of the website so it’s more accessible for young people.

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
	q. Children in Care Council (CICC) so that it is able to represent the voice of all children in care and is able to hold the Corporate Parenting Board to account	Increase numbers and range of children and young people involved in the CICC.	Children and young people consistently involved in staff interview panels		Young people are routinely involved in recruitment of a range of staff and managers across children's services. The expectation that our young people are involved in staff recruitment is embedded in practice.
			Increase participation of children and care experienced young people engage with CICC and CPB		Young People Engagement' reports to every Corporate Parenting Board meeting. The reports highlight activity at CiCC, key updates, partnership working as well as celebrations and achievements of young people. The reports evidenced that we are involving broader involvement of children and young people.
		Ensure CICC is enabled to engage fully with the work of the Corporate Parenting Board	Review our approach to so it enables children and care experienced young people engage with CICC and CPB		<p>The Board has considered feedback from how young people viewed their involvement with the Board. There were 2 sessions held in October 2022 and February 2023 the TLC hub. These were positive sessions, which generated feedback from young people on how support to them could be improved.</p> <p>An Action Plan was developed in repose to the issues identified and</p>

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
					<p>as a result of the feedback we have refreshed our approach. The Children in Care Council and the Board have agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people’s priorities for issues to be considered by the Board will be sought via an engagement sessions. • Corporate Parenting Board reports are shared with the appropriate children’s participation forum in a child friendly way, incorporating any feedback for our children and young people • A schedule of informal meetings would be held with the Corporate Parenting Board being “called in” by Children in Care Council, Care Leavers forum and the Childrens home forums.
		Develop, recruit and appoint 2 posts for Care Ambassadors Apprenticeships	2 Care Ambassadors will be appointed (case studies)	Children’s Champion, Children in Care Council and CPB	Care Ambassadors are appointed as apprentices and one young person has since secured permanent employment in March 2023. Further apprentices will be appointed in 2023/24

Corporate Parenting Strategy - Our Action Plan 2023-24

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
Leadership	a. Ensure that elected members are aware of and understand their corporate parenting responsibilities	<p>Deliver updated training to members about what Corporate Parenting is and the function and responsibility of the Corporate Parenting Board and wider Children's Services in being effective corporate parents.</p> <p>Develop a toolkit to support members to understand their corporate responsibilities as part of member induction/ refresher training.</p>	<p>All new and existing Corporate Parenting Board members to participate in Respect training to support their understanding of their roles and responsibilities as Corporate Parenting.</p> <p>Target agreed by CPB was 50% of our Councillors complete Respect Training including Councillors that sit on Corporate Parenting Board</p>	<p>Children's Champion / Head of Service</p> <p>March 2024</p>	
		Provision of bespoke Total Respect Training to support elected members to participate to achieve the desired target			
Safety and Permanency	b. Support and enable more children and young people to remain with their foster carers post 18 years of age.	<p>Review and update the Staying Put financial offer to make staying put arrangements more attractive to foster carers and young people. Ensure that young people and foster carers are aware of the option to stay put and it's benefits.</p> <p>Workforce development and guidance for staff around benefits of staying and to embed</p>	<p>New financial offer in place by April 2024 (documentation)</p> <p>A minimum of 40% of care experienced young people stay put.</p> <p>2020-21 - 17/37 (46%)</p> <p>2021-22 -41% staying put</p> <p>2022/23 14/49 (23%)</p>	<p>Head of Service for Children in Care.</p> <p>March 2023</p>	

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
		awareness of new financial package.			
	c. Ensure that more children leave care by achieving permanence in line with their care plans	<p>Continued permanence tracking and care planning which focuses on permanency planning to ensure children do not remain in care longer than is in their best interests.</p> <p>Revise permanency tracking and panels and establish an escalation process.</p>	<p>2023-24 Projections are :</p> <p>15 children reunified to parents; 25 secure adoption and 25 secure Special Guardianship</p> <p>Reunification to Parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 (13%) returned home 2020-21 • 11 (11%) returned home in 2021-22 • 36 (21%) returned home 2022-23 <p>Special Guardianship Order</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37 (23%) SGOs in 2020-21 • 17 (9%) SGOs at 2021-22 • 26 (15%) SGO in 2022-23 <p>Adoption</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 (10%) Adoptions in 2020-21 • 29(15%) Adoptions in 2021-22 • 27 (16%) Adoptions in 2022-23 	All Heads of Service for Help and Protection; Children in Care & Family Safeguarding and Localities March 2023	

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
	<p>d. Placement Sufficiency Strategy and action plan to be presented to CPB for approval.</p> <p>e. Sufficiency Action Plan to be robustly tracked to deliver the key priorities identified.</p>	<p>Maintain an overview of our sufficiency requirements and responding to demands</p> <p>Action Plan to be monitored against delivery targets put into place setting out key priorities and intentions for our commissioning and development of sufficient provision and the practice that underpins this.</p>	<p>Placement Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan is robustly monitored and is delivering desired outcomes.</p> <p>Report to CPB on the progress of the Action plan (Documentation)</p>	<p>Head of Service Commissioning Manager</p> <p>March 2024</p>	
	<p>f. Increase placement sufficiency by increasing the number of in-house foster placements.</p>	<p>Robust oversight of the recruitment and marketing plan</p> <p>Launch New Horizons Fostering Scheme to help children move from residential care.</p> <p>Maintain fees and allowances in line with DfE recommended rates</p> <p>Deliver on the actions set out in the sufficiency strategy action plan</p>	<p>Measure of success Increase fostering households by 25 new placements in 2023- 24</p> <p>Establish the 6th Mockingbird Hub in 2023-24</p> <p>(Documentation)</p>		

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
	g. Increase placement sufficiency by increasing the internal residential homes		<p>2 new children’s homes purchased and operational by 2022/23</p> <p>Home 1 – Ofsted Registration completed in July 2023.</p> <p>Home 2 – operational by October 2023</p>	October 2024	
Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing	h. Ensure the health needs of our children in care are met in a timely way.	<p>Ensure that the completion of health assessments, SDQ and dental checks are within statutory timescales.</p> <p>Monitor completion through performance dashboard and monthly meeting with Health</p> <p>Effective and timely liaison with health colleagues to ensure needs of children placed out of Borough are met and a smooth transition of services if children move placements</p>	<p>Measured by quarterly report to Board and performance</p> <p>Annual Assurance Report report from the ICB and Health Trust provided an Annual to the CPB</p> <p>Measure of Success - 2022-24 targets</p> <p>85% of health assessments are undertaken within the statutory timescales.</p> <p>90% of children with receive annual Dental Checks</p> <p>95% of children will have an up-to-date SDQ.</p>	<p>Social Workers, Looked After Children Health Team (Walsall Health Trust), Walsall ICB</p> <p>March 2024</p>	
	i. Enable care experienced young people to understand their health needs and how to access	Ensure all care experienced young people receive their health passport and a copy is kept on their file.	Measure of Success (Performance Indicators) - proposed indicator for 2022-23 Target health passports to be	Looked After Children Health Team (Walsall Health Trust) and Walsall ICB	

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
	additional support when they need it.	Review the how health passports are informing transition planning for young people.	<p>agreed with CCG and Health Trust</p> <p>100% of care experienced young people are offered their health passport.</p> <p><i>90% of young people received their health passport.</i></p>	March 2024	
Education and Employment	j. Ensure that children in care and care experienced young people can access education, employment or training	<p>Ensure care experienced young people are supported to access supported internships and traineeships as opportunities develop</p> <p>Appoint an Education Employment and Training Officer as part of the 16+ offer.</p> <p>Revise and strengthen the pre-apprenticeship support offer for care experienced young people setting out specific expectations of council based apprenticeships and internships</p> <p>Neet Action Group to develop an action plan setting out the key actions to improve EET outcomes.</p>	<p>Measure of Success (Performance Indicators)</p> <p>2022-23 Target</p> <p>At least 60% of care experienced young people age 19 to 21 will be in Education, Employment or Training (in line with national performance.)</p> <p>At least 65% of 16/17 year olds will be in education, employment or training</p>	<p>Head of Service working with Virtual School Walsall Together Endless Possibilities</p> <p>March 2023</p>	

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
Transitions and Independence	k. Children in care and care experienced young people will receive high quality and consistent support to transition to adulthood and develop their independent living skills.	The joint Housing Protocol for Care Experienced young people agreed in 2022-23 is kept under review to address any changes in national policy between Children’s Services and Money Home Job and WHG Development of guidance and training for staff across housing and children’s services	The revised Housing Protocol is actively used in meeting the accommodation pathways for children leaving care. (documentation) Target 2023-24 90% of care experienced young people age 19 to 21 will be living in suitable accommodation (in line with national performance.)		
		Co-produce care and pathway plans with children and their networks – writing ‘to’ the child. (audit) – CJA Workforce development training to be delivered to support purposeful planning and writing to child 2023/24 Audit to be undertaken in Q3 2023/24	Target 2023-24 95% of pathway plans are up to date Audits scrutinise the quality of pathway plans		
		Develop and embed an independence programme for children in care and care experienced young people.	Independence Programme in place and agreed with children and young people. (documentation)		

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
		<p>Workforce development to including IROs and embedding the revised toolkit and programme via monthly TLC/CP workshops</p> <p>Review and develop preparation for independence support for care leavers including the use of training flat</p> <p>Undertake a baseline survey to establish how children and young people feel about their transition experience</p>	<p>Revision of toolkit and support offer set up (documentation)</p> <p>Increase the proportion of children and young people who say their transition experience was positive (<i>target to be established after baseline survey completed</i>)</p>		
	<p>l. Young People with complex disabilities/ needs/risks will have access to timely referrals / assessments to support their transition to adulthood.</p>	<p>The joint Pathway to Adulthood toolkit to be launched to embed the transition processes and pathways between children's services and adult social care services to support young people's transition to adulthood.</p> <p>To establish the joint Future Planning Panel chaired by Adult Social Care Services</p>	<p>Pathways to Adulthood Toolkit in place and embedded. (documentation)</p> <p>Case File Audit 6 months after Toolkit goes live to measure impact.</p>	<p>Adults and Children Social Care Group Managers / Heads of Service</p> <p>March 2024</p>	
	<p>m. Care Experienced young people will have an up to date</p>	<p>Continue to consult with our care experienced young people to</p>	<p>Local Offer is reviewed and updated annually https://go.walsall.gov.uk/children-</p>	<p>Head of Service Corporate Parenting</p>	

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
	and accessible local offer which meets their needs.	<p>revise our offer in line with best practice.</p> <p>Co-produce with young people local offer leaflet and video that is accessible to young people.</p> <p>Undertake a baseline survey to identify what proportion of care experienced young people know what the local offer is and how they can access information and repeat the survey annually.</p>	<p>and-young-people/children-care-and-care-leavers (website and documentation)</p> <p>Local offer available and accessible to young people (website documentation)</p> <p>Increase the proportion of care experienced young people who understand what the local offer is and how to access it (<i>target to be set following baseline survey</i>)</p>	<p>March 2024</p>	
	n. Maximise the benefits of the Care Experienced young people Covenant Regionally.	<p>Engage with Care Experienced young people Covenant to continue to strengthen our offer to Care Leavers.</p> <p>Refresh awareness raising of the Covenant with Members.</p>	<p>Learning from the Care Experienced Young People Covenant is shared with Corporate Parenting Board (documentation)</p> <p>Learning is used to raise aspiration for Care experienced young people in Walsall through improved service delivery (case studies)</p>	<p>Head of Service Corporate Parenting and Practice Quality and Improvement</p> <p>March 2024</p>	
Influence and Involvement	o. Language that Cares		<p>An agreed language that cares action plan agreed with children in care and care experienced young people is embedded in our practice processes and recording (the words we use). (Documentation)</p>	<p>Heads of Service Practice Quality/ Improvement &</p>	

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
				Corporate Parenting	
	p. Children and young people will be kept up to date with key information including a calendar of events.	Development of calendar of events	Evidence of use of Social media, Website, News Letters and other events.		1.
	q. How well is the current website used by our young people	Undertake a baseline survey to identify what proportion Children and young people know where to go to access information.	Increase the proportion of children and young people who tell us that they know where to go to access information and that the information available is helpful (target to be set following baseline survey)		
	r. Children in Care Council (CICC) so that it is able to represent the voice of all children in care and is able to hold the Corporate Parenting Board to account	Increase numbers and range of children and young people involved in the CICC.	Children and young people consistently involved in staff interview panels Increase participation of children and care experienced young people engage with CICC and CPB		
		Ensure CICC is enabled to engage fully with the work of the Corporate Parenting Board as agreed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people's priorities for issues to be considered by 	Review our approach to so it enables children and care experienced young people engage with CICC and CPB.		

Our priorities	What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of Success (performance indicators)	Who will do it /when	Progress Update
		<p>the Board will be sought via an engagement sessions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Parenting Board reports are shared with the appropriate children’s participation forum in a child friendly way, incorporating any feedback for our children and young people • A schedule of informal meetings would be held with the Corporate Parenting Board being “called in” by Children in Care Council, Care Leavers forum and the Childrens home forums. 			
		<p>Develop, recruit and appoint 1 new participation apprenticeship.</p>			

Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-2023
--

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 This report summarises the activity of the Fostering Service from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023.
- 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 a child in care, it is preferable that they are placed within a family setting. It is the aim of the council that wherever possible this will be with foster carer/s home approved by Walsall rather than through commissioning an external home. 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 living within fostering homes are well cared for and achieve good outcomes.
- 1.4 Fostering homes are referred to as either Mainstream or Connected Persons. Connected persons fostering refers to those households who 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 Foster Carers can be approved to care for between 1 and 3 children at a time and can care for children of different ages.
- 1.5 Walsall Fostering Service is located within the Children's Services Directorate of Walsall Council. The aim of the Fostering Service is to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of registered foster carers who can meet the needs of children. Fostering and family-based care are our first-choice option for the Children in Care of Walsall.
- 1.6 The Fostering Service is managed by the Group Manager for Provider Services, and they report to the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting & Provider Services. The primary objectives for role of Group Manager are:
- Responsible for the service planning and management of all local authority Fostering Services
 - Line Manager for the Residential Services Manager who has responsibility for the Local Authority children's homes
 - Line Manager for the Home Finding Team who are responsibility for finding external homes for Children in Care.

1.7 During this reporting period, the Fostering Service received investment to create the following posts:

- Training & Development Officer (part time)
- Senior Practitioner for the SGO Support Hub
- Social Worker (part time) for the SGO Support Hub
- 2 Child & Family Support Worker posts for the SGO Support Hub

2. Overview of Achievements in 2022/23:

- Sustained workforce stability and reduced reliance on agency workers in the Fostering Service
- Launched the Foster Carer Telephone Support Line
- Increased the Fostering Fee Payment between 7.5% and 20%
- Increased weekly fostering allowances by 12.4%
- Increased additional allowances by 5%
- Increased the mileage rate for foster carers to 45p per mile
- Secured agreement that from April 2023, Walsall Foster Carers living in Walsall will be exempt from the Council Tax Charge
- Held Foster Carer Celebration Event
- Held Children's Party
- Collaborated with other LAs to produce the film 'Childhood'
- Supported Walsall Council to achieve Fostering Friendly Employer accreditation
- Recruited, assessed and approved 7 Mainstream Fostering Households
- Recruited, assessed and approved 16 Connected Fostering Households
- Foster Panel rated 82% of work to be Good or Outstanding
- Case File Auditing rated 90% of work to be Good or Outstanding
- Continued our partnership working with Kinship
- Improved securing permanence for children through SGO
- Improved quality & timeliness of connected person assessments
- Introduced Fostering Panel Feedback Loop
- All employees completed level 1 training in Dyadic Development Practice
- Continued our journey for Foster Carers to access Foundation to Attachment Training before progressing to Nurture & Attachment Training
- Continued to produce regular newsletters to both Foster Carers and SGO Carers

3. Children Living with Foster Carers

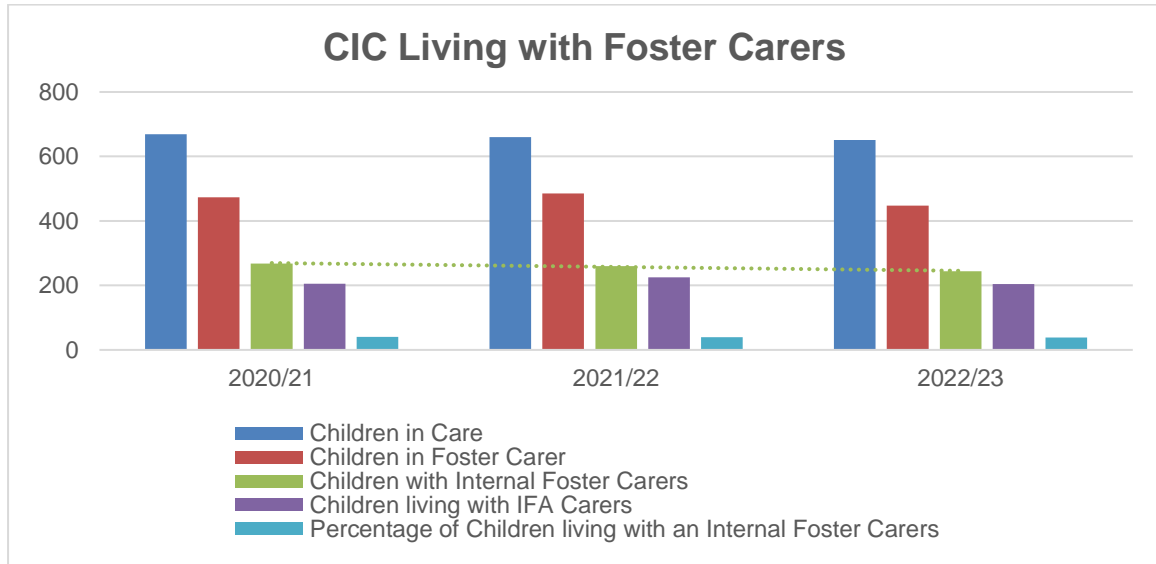
3.1 At the end of March 2023, of the **650** Children in Care, **448 (69%)** were living with Foster Carers of which **244 (37%)** were living with Walsall Foster Carers compared with **260 (39%)** at the end of March 2022.

3.2 As for Children in Care living with an IFA Foster Carer, on 31/3/23, there were **204** children living with an independent fostering agency (IFA) Foster Carer. This is a decrease from **250** in 2021/22.

3.3 On 31st March 2023, there were **177** approved internal fostering households (figure includes both mainstream & connected carers).

3.4 The breakdown of these households per category was:

- Mainstream Carers: 103
- Connected Carers: 72
- Foster for Adoption: 2
- Total – 177



3.5 In terms of the demographics for our Primary Foster Carers, as of 20/10/23, **83%** identify as female and **79%** report their ethnicity as White British. The age cohorts for these Foster Carers are recorded as follows :

- 20 - 29 = 5
- 30 - 39 = 33
- 40 - 49 = 46
- 50 - 59 = 55
- 60+ = 48

4. Foster Carer Recruitment & Retention – National & Local Picture:

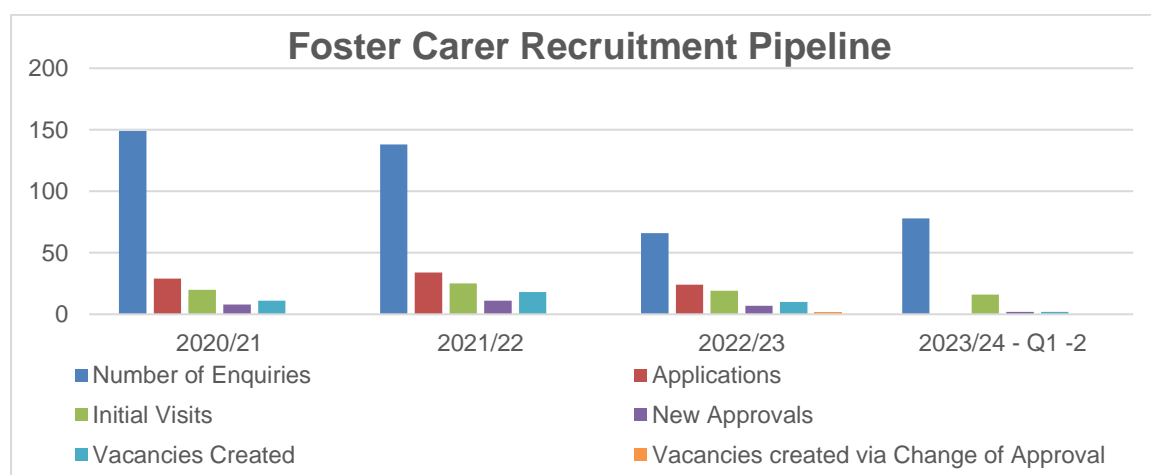
4.1 Walsall’s Fostering Service is operating in a highly competitive marketplace and the recruitment & retention of foster carers continues to be a significant challenge, both nationally and locally. In 2023 the Fostering Network published a report on Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention in England (Key Research Findings and Recommendations).

4.2 For both local authorities and independent fostering agencies, applications are at their lowest level in several years. Nationally, Local Authority applications have decreased by **22%** since 2018, and IFA applications have dropped by **21%** over the same period.

4.3 The recent report by Ofsted (2022) on fostering notes that the number of available fostering places in England has fallen by almost a quarter in four years.

In addition, the number of approved foster carers also dropped as more foster carers have left the sector.

- 4.4 There were 8,280 applications to become a foster carer – the lowest number in several years and down 21% from 2017-18 and more Mainstream Fostering Households deregistered than were approved (5,435 versus 4,035), leading to a decrease in fostering capacity nationally.
- 4.5 A further challenge to the sufficiency of internal Foster Care Homes is when our Foster Carers go on to secure a Special Guardianship Order for a child(ren) who they have cared for as a Foster Carer. Albeit a positive outcome for our Children in Care, this impacts on the number of available homes/ vacancies for children.
- 4.6 The table below sets out the Foster Carer Recruitment Pipeline. Whilst the total number of enquiries was higher in years 2020/21 and 2021/22, conversion to approval for those years was **5%** and **8%** respectively.



- 4.7 However, whilst enquiries in 2022/23 were lower than in previous years, the conversion rate to approval was close to **11%**. In 2022/23, **14** prospective fostering households withdrew from the assessment process. Of the **14** withdrawn applications, **9** were withdrawn by the applicant and **5** were withdrawn by the service. Although the numbers used for this dataset are significantly lower, the percentage split on withdrawals is similar to that reported by Ofsted (2022).

5. Occupancy in Fostering Homes

- 5.1 Each year Ofsted asks local authority fostering services and independent fostering agencies for data about the children they provide homes for and the foster carers that look after them. This is the only national data collection that provides an overview of the national fostering landscape. All 151 local authority fostering agencies and around 280 independent fostering agencies (IFAs) are asked to provide data on:

- households that foster children for their agency
- data on complaints, allegations and recruitment

5.2 On 31st March 2023, there were 304 approved fostering places. Whilst this is lower than both outturns for 2020/21 and 2021/22, it is higher than our Statistical Neighbour and West Midlands average.

5.3 Of the 304 approved fostering places, 18 were vacant with further 42 not being available for a variety of reasons. These reasons are known and are now coded accordingly against the Ofsted criteria for this activity. Some examples of unavailable places are:

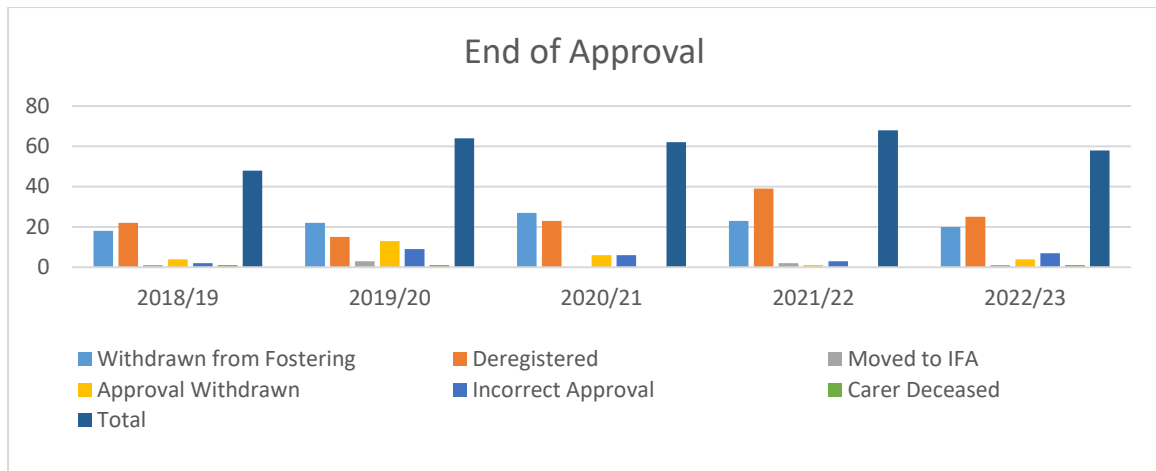
- Mockingbird Hub Carer (Linked to Approval Status – total 10)
- Only available if sibling group placed (Linked to Approval Status)
- Used by CYP Staying Put after turning 18
- Needs of child currently in placement
- Carer(s) taking a break/pending resignation
- Carer(s) under investigation
- Reserved for pending placement

5.4 The role of Home Finding Social Worker was created in April 2019 to support the efficient matching of in house foster carers to children requiring a foster home. The post holder has a close working relationship with the Home Finding Team and Foster Carers. This role has supported the service to maximise occupancy rates of in-house fostering households.

6. End of Foster Carer Approval:

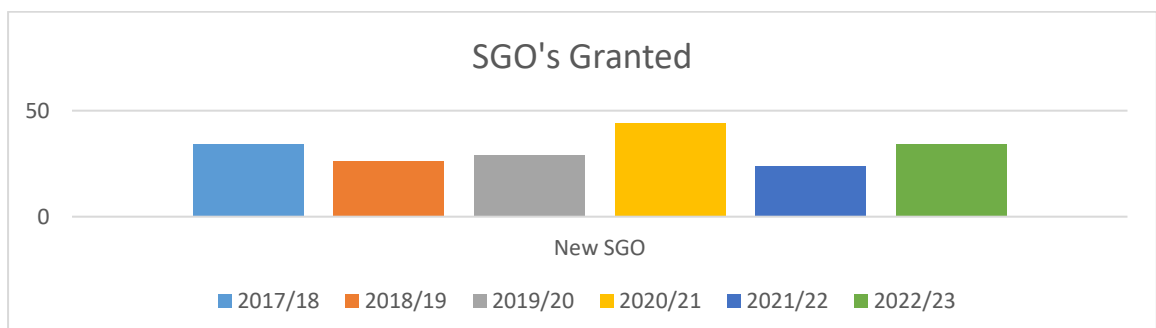
6.1 There are wide range of reasons as to why a Foster Carer's approval ends. These can range from their fostering career naturally coming to end, a change to family circumstances, concerns about the ongoing suitability, moving to become a Special Guardian and of course transferring to an IFA. The table below covers all of these scenarios and captures data for both Mainstream and Connected Foster Carers.

6.2 In terms of the retention of Mainstream Foster Carers, a previous area of concern was the number transferring to an independent fostering agency. Based on the table below, in the previous **5** years, **7** Foster Carers have opted to transfer. The Foster Carer who opted to transfer in 2022/23 did so for financial reasons. They initiated the process in May 2022, and they transferred in November 2022.



7. Connected Foster Care and Special Guardianship

- 7.1 In 202/23, **16** Connected Person Households were approved at Fostering Panel. This is a slight decrease on the **23** in 2021/22 but an increase from 2020/21 (**12**)
- 7.2 Connected Persons arrangements are often very complex situations with families struggling to come to terms with the reasons why children have become children in care. Connected Foster Carers receive the same level of supervision as mainstream carers, and they have access to Skills to Foster training which has been tailored specifically for Connected Persons carers.
- 7.3 Many Connected Foster Carers are assessed and approved on the basis that they will go on to apply to be the child's Special Guardian. Unless the Connected Foster Carer or Mainstream Foster Carer are also caring for another Connected Child in Care, On the making of an SGO, they will be deregistered as a Foster Carer; this is a positive as Children's Services actively promoting legal permanence through Special Guardianship for children for whom this is the preferred outcome.
- 7.4 On 31st March 2023, there were **346** children supported by their Special Guardians. This represents a **41%** increase to that of 31st March 2019. The total number of children is continuing to rise in 2023/24 (**358** as at 01/10/23). All Special Guardianship Assessments are completed by the Fostering Service.



8. Supervision, Support, Training & Development

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 To establish a consistent approach to practice that is rooted in nurture, attachment, and recognises the impact of trauma, in 2021/22, the Fostering Service began the ambitious journey for the whole workforce to complete Dyadic Development Practice Training (DDP). DDP is 'a therapy, parenting approach and model for practice that uses what we know about attachment and developmental trauma to help children and families with their relationships.'
- 8.3 The whole workforce has completed DDP1, and a smaller cohort have completed DDP2. This smaller cohort have also completed the 'train the trainer' sessions for Foundation to Attachment and they now deliver Foundation to Attachment Training to Foster Carers. By 31st March 2023, The Fostering Service had supported 60 Foster Carers to complete the Foundations to Attachment Training.
- 8.4 Preparation and training groups (Skills to Foster Training) have been held for all prospective mainstream foster carers. This training is also offered separately to Connected Person Foster Carers. Further Foster Carer Training is provided through the Council's 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.
- 8.5 The Mockingbird Family Model continues to be a popular with Foster Carers. As of 31st March 2023, there were 5 live Mockingbird Constellations. The 6th Hub Carer has been appointed and the plan is to launch this constellation in Autumn 2023. The team also received recognition for their work going above and beyond from the wider council staff awards , being runners up in Proud to be One Team category.
- 8.6 The Fostering Service continue to produce and share regular, separate newsletters with Foster Carers and SGO Carers, and in early 2022/23, the Fostering Service moved the Monthly Support Groups from online to face to face events at Ryecroft Community Hub. In addition to this, all foster carers approved by Walsall Council are provided with membership of the Fostering Network.

9. Marketing & Promotional Activity

- 9.1 Without attracting additional Foster Carers and retaining existing ones, Walsall will not have a sufficient number of homes for existing Children in Care with locally based Foster Carers. Aligned to the strategy to have the right children living with right people at the right time, the aim of the Fostering Service's Transformation Plans is to have more children living with Walsall Foster Carers.

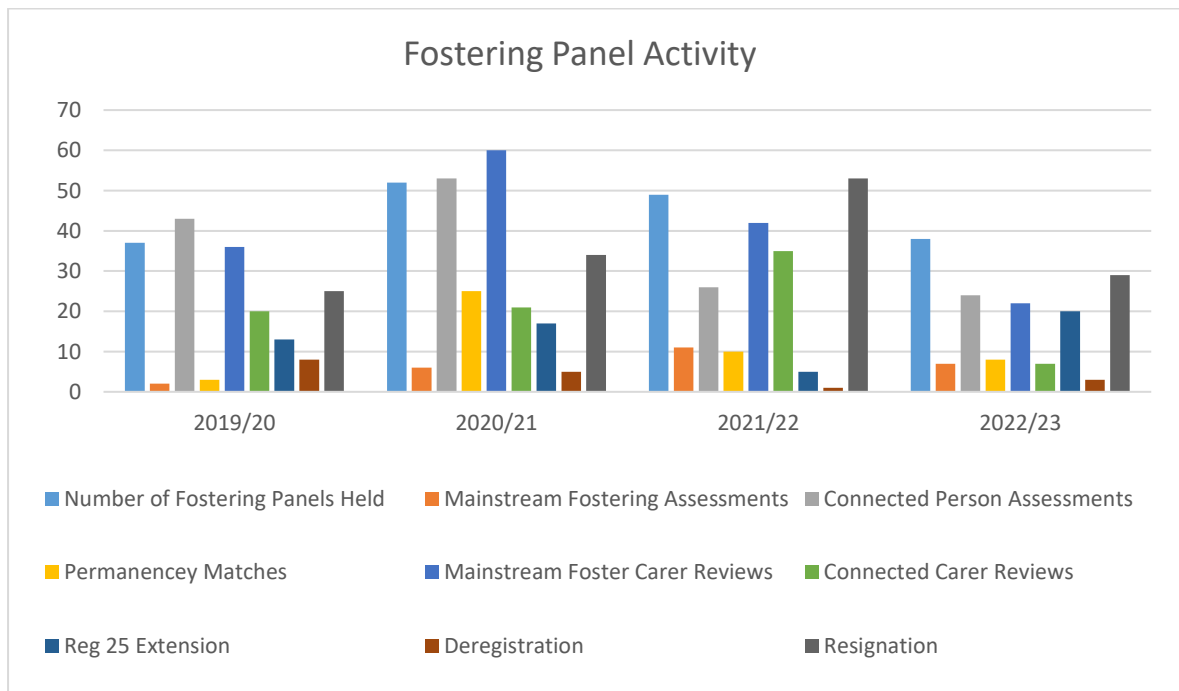
9.2 In 2022, the Fostering Service started to work with the Head of Service for Marketing and Communications Service to ensure our marketing and Communication Plan is focused. We have reviewed best practice and updated the Marketing & Communication Plan for 2023/24 and this is used to inform our targeted marketing activities.

10. Fostering Panel

10.1 Lisa Cawthorn has continued in her role as Chair of Fostering Panel and the Vice Chair is Sue Partoon.

10.2 Fostering Panel activity continues to be busy with the Panel meeting on 38 occasions. Panel was quorate on each occasion. The table below outlines the range of work discussed at Fostering Panel.

10.3 In 2022, as part of the Practice Improvement Framework, the Fostering Service introduced the Foster Panel Feedback Loop. This involves the Fostering Panel providing feedback on the quality of reports that are presented to Panel. Panel members are asked to comment on strengths and areas of development for the social worker. They then rate the overall quality of the reports using an OFSTED style rating system (Requires Improvement, Good or Outstanding). In 2022/23, **82%** of items presented to panel were rated as Good or Outstanding - with **30%** being rated as Outstanding.



11. Service Priorities and Improvements – 2023/24 (Update)

11.1 As the Annual Report is only produced after the Ofsted Dataset is returned in June of the following financial year, by the time the report is completed and ready to be shared, it can be making use of and commenting on activity approaching 12-18

months old; as such, the next section is an attempt to outline the range of work that has taken place or is planned to take place in 2023/24, this includes:

- Walsall Foster Carers living in Walsall to be exempt from Council Tax Charge
- Ran and will rerun Foster Carer Recruitment Campaign on local radio
- Held a Foster Carer Celebration Event
- Introduced the use of Talking Circles for foster carers and staff
- Launched the New Horizons Fostering Scheme
- Launch 6th Mockingbird Hub
- Include Total Respect Training in Skills to Foster Training
- Recruited a Care Experienced individual to the Fostering Panel
- Mail shot to 4000 home addresses about Fostering for Walsall
- Ran promotional campaign in bus stops and on the rear of buses
- Installed 25 new promotional lamppost banners
- Update the Financial Policy for Permanence Arrangements
- Held Thank You Event for Special Guardians
- Launched the SGO Support Hub
- Marketing and recruitment activity is kept under review to ensure that impact of digital, social media and face to face recruitment is evaluated.
- Maximise the capacity of internal foster carers and increase the children placed internally.
- Strengthen the training and development offer to foster carers.

Author

Mark Burrows

Group Manager

mark.burrows@walsall.gov.uk



Adoption Service Report

1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023

Report for Walsall Council

Date of report 8 June 2023

Produced by Lisa Preston
Head of Service

Service Adoption@Heart

Appendix 1a

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report:

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

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

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

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

2. Aims and Objectives:

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

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

The objectives of Adoption@Heart are to:

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

3. National Context:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Regional Context:

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

The key aims are to:

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

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

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

Adoption Service Report FINAL
1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023
Report for Walsall Council

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

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

5. Recruitment of Adopters:

5.1 New Enquiries

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

This is in comparison to 609 enquiries received last year.

5.2 Information Events

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

6. Marketing Overview:

Marketing figures for this period are:

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

6.1 Marketing brief

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

In September and October, Adoption@Heart launched its own recruitment campaign, which ran alongside National Adoption Week. The campaign aimed to increase awareness of Adoption@Heart and encourage anyone thinking about adoption to contact their Regional Adoption Agency – Adoption@Heart. Artwork and messaging focused on the brand and the

strength of the three Local Authority and Children's Trust brand. Imagery focused on a single parent and toddler, both of Black heritage. The advert recorded for the radio campaign featured the voice of a Black female actor, with the message focused on the Adoption@Heart brand, myth busting and information about the children that wait longer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The face-to-face events are held in different community venues within the Black Country, ensuring that locations rotate around the region. The event format is similar, but with the opportunity to speak to the team at the end of the event over refreshments. This also allows attendees to complete an expression of interest (EOI) form on the spot which increases the conversion from attendance to EOI from levels achieved at a virtual event. It is planned to continue to offer a mixture of virtual and face to face events to meet differing preferences of enquirers.

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

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

7. Adopter recruitment statistics:

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

- 15 (36.6%) were approved within six months of application.
- 26 (63.4%) were approved at least six months from application.
- This year we approved 17 less adopter households, compared to last year's figure of 57.
- There has been some decline in timeliness for completion of assessments. The average number of days across the 40 approvals in stage two is 141. The fewest number of days was 79 and the longest 465.
- 43 households completed stage one throughout 2022/23. The average number of days in stage one was 160. The fewest number of days was 26 and the longest 559 days.

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

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

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

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

Adoption@Heart is focused on ensuring recruitment activity is robust and visible and is clear in its messaging that finance is not a barrier to adoption. However, for those who were in assessment during 2021-22, it is clear finance was an issue for many families with some deciding to withdraw from the process and others having to take a break to address their debt. In addition to finance issues, during the year, we have seen a high number of complex assessments with some adopters having to take a considerable amount of time to come to terms with their personal histories including, loss and grief, poor mental health, and adverse childhood experiences.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The average days waiting for a placement was 322, (10 months). One family had been waiting 1401 (46 months). (a child has been linked in April 2023) The shortest amount of time was less than a month for a family that had been approved in March 2023. At this point in time, adopter approvals are looking much more positive, since the beginning of April 2023 there have been 13 approvals:

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

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

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

8. Complaints:

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

9. Staffing:

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

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

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

10. Panels:

During the year 2022-2023 adoption panels continued to be virtual. Consideration has been given to panels using a hybrid approach by consulting with members and seeking feedback from adopters. Feedback continues to show that applicants feel more relaxed joining panels

virtually via Microsoft Teams from their home. Social Workers report that working in this way allows them to work effectively and efficiently, whilst managing their workloads, it is also time and cost efficient.

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

The research made the following recommendations:

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

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

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

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

10.1 Panel membership

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

The central list offers a good representation of members who have either been adopted or have adopted and this is seen as very positive in terms of the different perspectives they bring. There has been a change in the membership and activity to recruit new members with the aim of increasing the diversity and representation at panel in terms of gender, race, disability and

lived experiences. However, it is acknowledged that more needs to be done to recruit males, same sex couples and single adopters. Work in this area is therefore ongoing.

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

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

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

10.2 Panel training

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

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

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

10.3 Panel business

Panel met on 45 occasions during 2022-2023, there are 50 panels a year for adoption matters to be heard. There is also flexibility within the panel system allowing for extra and special panels to be arranged to enable additional cases and emergency matters to be heard, as and when directed by the courts. This means that children do not wait, and matters are dealt with in a timely manner.

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

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

10.4 Approvals

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

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

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

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

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

Quotes from adopters include:

- *“Panel Members were all welcoming and friendly – calmed our nerves.”*
“We were treated well at panel and were kept informed of everything that was happening and would like to thank everyone involved.”
- *“I was a lot more relaxed than I thought I would have been, and I think that was because of how warm and friendly the panel were.”*
- *“We found panel to be a positive experience. We were made to feel welcome and had time to express our feelings.”*
“Very well organised, friendly, and made to feel at ease when questions were asked.”

- *Notifications and calls before panel, e-mails when panel had commenced and links to join panel were all done professionally and efficiently.”*
- *“I was informed before the meeting ended how the decision would be made and the time frame. I understand everything and was happy with what was said to me.”*
- *“Very good conversation with all members in the panel,”*

Quotes from Social Workers include:

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

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

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

12. Disruptions:

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

The learning identified was as follows:

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

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

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

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

13. Inspections:

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

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

14. Accountability:

Management board

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

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

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

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

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

15. Service Development

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

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

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

Appendix 1b

Child level Information for Walsall Council children:**16. Number, type and age of children waiting for adoption and length of time waiting:**

On 31st of March 2023:

There were 22* children subject to placement orders, but not yet placed for adoption. 7 of these are linked but not yet formally matched, 4 are awaiting a review of their care plan and the remaining 11 have an active family finding plan.

The timescales for the 22* children waiting since the granting of their Placement Orders is as follows:

Less than 2 months:	5
Between 2 and 4 months:	7
Between 4 and 6 months:	0
Between 6 and 12 months:	2
Children waiting over 1 years:	7

*The remaining child is in a foster to adopt placement. The 22 children comprise 5 sibling groups of two, 1 sibling group of three, the remainder are single children.

17. Children Made Subject to Placement Orders:

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
11	5	5	14	35

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

Nine

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

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
13	6	8	7	34

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

9

20. Number of Children Placed for Adoption during the period:

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
10	8	8	15	41

For those children placed, 24 were two years or younger, 10 were aged five and under and on a positive note, seven were aged six plus.

There were 21 boys and 20 girls placed. 31 children were White British, one child is Indian, the remainder were mixed white and Black African or Caribbean and other mixed ethnic background.

Walsall's percentage of children leaving care via adoption is 14% which is higher than the national average of 10%. This year's figure is also significantly than is the previous four years.

Children Placed in Previous Years

Financial Year:	19/20	20/21	20/22
Children Placed	14	31	19

21. Number of Children Adopted:

The number of children legally adopted by their adoptive parents in the 12-month period to 31 March 2023 was 24. In addition to these 24 children, three children were adopted by their foster carers (non-agency), therefore, in total 27 children were adopted. Whilst this is slightly lower than last years figure of 28, it is still higher than other previous years. The high number of children placed this year will result in a high number of adoptions next year.

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

Financial Year:	19/20	20/21	21/22
Children Adopted	16	19	28

22. Adoption timeliness:

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

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

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

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

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

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

- A2 time from placement order to matching decision **124 days**
- A10 time from entry to care to placement for adoption **445 days**

A10 is lower than the national average, which is evidence of good case tracking and less delays for children.

However, the rolling 12-month average for A10 for current children placed has increased over the last two years, this is likely to impact on A10 for next year.

A2 is significantly less than the national average, again this is evidence of timely decision making for children.

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

23. Early Permanency:

There were 11 Walsall children placed in early permanence placements via Foster for Adopt, the majority of whom were placed with internal adopters. Walsall placed significantly more children via Foster for Adopt than any other partner.

24. Children's Family Finding Activity:

The tables below contain the total numbers of children placed by the service during the year 2022/23.

Children placed 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

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

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

Whilst this is positive, the lower number of adopter approvals has meant there were less adopters available for placements in Q4 and more inter-agency placements were made in Q4 than any other quarter. To try and reduce the use of inter-agency placements, we are exploring potential matches for children waiting with families in assessment. However, the current trajectory is for there to be an increase in the use of inter-agency placements for 2023-24 to ensure that we can continue to place children in a timely way with approved adopters.

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

Children Placed Foster for Adopt

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

Analysis – Children Placed

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

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

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

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

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

25. Adoption Support:

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

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

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

Dudley	79
Sandwell	45
Walsall	63
Wolverhampton	60
Total	247

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

ASF Applications completed in the year

Sandwell	35
Walsall	54
Dudley	70
Wolverhampton	75
Total	234

Access to Records

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

Dudley	19
Sandwell	12
Walsall	16
Wolverhampton	17
Total	64

Birth Parent Support

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

Dudley	2
Sandwell	9
Walsall	10
Wolverhampton	3
Total	24

Keep in Touch

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

Committee Meeting	Agenda item
4 September 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Placement sufficiency strategy 2. Quarterly performance report 3. Future Governance of Corporate Parenting Board
13 November 2023 Engagement session at TLC with Young People	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annual adoption report 2. Annual Fostering service report 3. Update on Action Plan of actions identified by Young People 4. CPB strategy and action plan
9 January 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2. CAMHs Report 3. Health Annual Report 4. Independent Visitor Annual Report 5. Quarterly performance report
12 February 2024 Engagement session at TLC with Young People	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Care leavers 2. Housing options for care leavers 3. Local Offer 4. Leisure and Housing WHG 5. Website and ease of access
3 April 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CPB annual report 2. Quarterly Performance Report 3. Virtual school annual report 4. Placement Sufficiency Strategy