

Adopt & BIRMINGHAM

Annual Report 2024-25



OFFICIAL



Executive Summary

This report discussed the work of Birmingham Children's Trust - working as Adopt Birmingham - from April 2024 to March 2025.

The adoption landscape is becoming increasingly challenging due to declining adopter numbers. At the end of 2024, national sufficiency was just 54% - there were only enough approved adopters for 54% of the children waiting for adoption. This affects our ability to find families for children and as a result we have placed fewer children this year than last. It also means the number of children waiting for adoption is higher than at the start of the year.

- At the start of the year there were 113 children waiting for adoption. At the end of the year there were 138. As a cohort, these children have been waiting for adoption longer than previous cohorts: 324 days on average.
- These figures include several children expected to have their plan of adoption reversed. In many cases, the adoption plan reversal and Placement Order revocation process is not being completed in a timely manner. The reversal process has been simplified to address this, but it remains an issue.
- The demographic profile of children waiting is like that seen nationally except that we have a higher proportion of children waiting from a global majority background. Given Birmingham's super-diversity though, children from a global majority background are under-represented in the adoption system.
- We have achieved more early permanence placements than last year: 13 compared to 6 in 23-24. On average these children moved in with their adoptive families 4 months earlier as a result. However, our EP numbers are below target at 15% of total placements made (target: 20%).
- We placed 85 children for adoption. Whilst lower than the unusually high number of placements secured last year (105), this is the same number as in 2022-23. As mentioned above, matching and placing children is ever more challenging due to the national shortage of adopters. The number of adopter profiles on LinkMaker has fallen drastically; some MTC Exchange events have been cancelled due to the low number of adopters who registered; and it is harder to secure space on adoption activity days (AAD) due to the increased number of children awaiting adoption nationally – as of March, the next available AAD slots were for September 2025.
- 9 children started the relinquishment process in this period. A concerning spike in consensual adoption which we continue to monitor. Of those 9, 5 were placed for adoption with the remaining returned to birth family following a (welcome) change of mind.
- I would also like to respectfully note that the agency found adopters for twins in this period, and that sadly one of the children passed away before he could live with his adopters. His brother, however, has been placed with his new parents and is thriving.
- One child experienced a placement disruption (1.2% vs. national average of 3.2%). Any disruption is unfortunate, but it is encouraging to note that level of disruption is much lower than seen last year, also



that this year we placed 3 children whose previous placement disrupted. A further two children who have experienced a disruption had a new match secured by the end of the administrative year.

- Timeliness at the start of the adoption process has improved, with 55% of children having their plan of adoption approved within 6 months (compared to 45% last year). The time between Placement Order and Match is on a slight upward trend though and is slightly higher than the national figure (246 days on average, 30 days above the national average).
- The average time from entering care to placement is on a downward trend. Whilst positive, it is important to interpret this holistically given that there are more children waiting and those unmatched have generally been waiting for longer. In times of adopter scarcity adoption is more polarised: younger children, often those more recently entering the adoption process are matched swiftly, but we secure fewer matches for older children, sibling groups and those with additional needs.
- The time from placement to Adoption Order is typically higher than seen nationally. This is heavily influenced by family choice and there are various reasons why there might be a delay, but we do seek to encourage timely completion. Our revised Post Order Support offer will help with this.
- The completion of Life Story Books and Later Life Letters continue to be significantly delayed for many children. We work closely with colleagues in CiC teams to facilitate this, but capacity issues in the area teams impact progress. It is hoped that our staffing realignment will give us greater capacity to support CiC workers to progress this moving forward.

In terms of adopter recruitment, our marketing activity is proving effective - we have a strong enquiry pipeline and are seeing increased diversity in the families we are working with. In contrast to the national decline in adopter numbers, we have approved more families internally this year than last.

- 60 families submitted a Registration of Interest compared to 53 last year. This is an increase of 13% compared to a national reduction of 7%.
- 53 families were approved as adopters compared to 43 last year. We are particularly pleased to see an increase in the number of families able to offer early permanence. Unfortunately, fewer families felt able to consider a sibling group, meaning that whilst 10 more families were approved this year than last, the maximum placement capacity only increased by 4.
- Other adoption agencies are now actively recruiting adopters with our city's limits – this is a change to previous years and evidences the paucity of adopters. This will make recruitment more challenging for Adopt Birmingham and will require a significant gear shift in marketing activity and effective presence.
- Thanks to targeted recruitment, we continue to see increased ethnic diversity amongst families in the adoption process. 45% of families approved were from a mixed or global majority background - last year this proportion was 37%. Whilst improved, we still need to recruit more families from the Black Caribbean community to match children with this heritage and are undertaking outreach work with community churches to facilitate this.



- Six approved adopters made the decision to withdraw during the year. Three foster carers who had been planning to adopt and three families with changed circumstances meaning adoption was no longer the right path for them.
- Nine families withdrew their application to adopt during the year. There were a variety of reasons for this, but one we particularly need to learn from as the family withdrew because they were not satisfied with the speed and responsiveness of the Trust. This is not the general experience, but not one we would wish any family to have.
- 50 Adopt Birmingham families were matched: 47 with Birmingham children and 3 with children from other areas, supporting national sufficiency. Families were typically matched 4-8 months after approval.
- The average time taken to complete stage 1 is in line with national figures – 128 days (18 weeks) on average. Medicals continue to inhibit timely completion of stage 1 for applicants, but improvements have been seen to the time taken for DBS clearance this year due to a new system the Trust is using.
- The average time taken to complete stage 2 is 170 days (6 months). This is slightly longer than in recent years and is above the national figure. This increased duration seems to mainly reflect additional workload in the assessment team across the year. The separation of the assessment and support functions in April 2025 will facilitate ever more timely completion of assessment, albeit that for some families, a longer timeline is more appropriate.

Demand for post adoption support is strong, both from families with an adopted child and adopted adults seeking access to files/ birth record counselling. We have a programme of proactive support, work directly with families in need and signpost and support others, including with applications to the Adoption Support Fund. Impending reduction in the amount available to individuals from the ASF will impact the support families can access (from £5,000 to £3,000 p.a.)

- 1,241 young people previously adopted in Birmingham and still under the age of 18 have birth family contact arrangements in place. 12% have some form of direct contact arrangement, usually with siblings rather than birth parents. It is not possible to track which direct contact arrangements are enacted and many letter exchange arrangements are not active. Across the year 2,342 letters were received, but this represents multiple contact for some children and no contact for many others. We are currently reviewing our approach to post adoption contact.
- We received 321 Post Adoption Support enquiries during the year, many from adoptees over the age of 25 requesting access to files, and a significant number from families with an adopted child requesting assessment of need. Typical waiting time for a child assessment to start is 20 weeks, and the waiting time for adult work is 26 weeks.
- We made 191 successful applications to the ASGSF (totalling £346,364) enabling families to access specialist assessments and therapies include sensory support, TheraPlay, DDP, therapeutic parenting and much more.



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Adopt Birmingham

Adopt Birmingham was established as a Regional Adoption Agency on 1st January 2022.

Our vision is for:

Adopted children grow up in secure and loving families where they thrive and reach their full potential.

Adopt Birmingham is a partnership between Birmingham Children's Trust and Adoption Focus/Family Society, combining Adopt Focus' commercial acumen as a reputable and well performing third sector VAA, the security of revenue from Birmingham Children's Trust, and the best practice excellence of both, to develop a dynamic, responsive, and nimble regional adoption agency with a dedicated focus – the best outcomes for Birmingham's children. The report specifically pertains to the performance and activity of Birmingham Children's Trust VAA (URN: RAA32/1273493).

This Executive report satisfies statutory regulations (see below) and NMS 25 - Managing effectively and efficiently and monitoring the adoption agency or adoption support agency (Adoption: National Minimum Standards, July 2014).

The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 Regulation 7 General requirements
The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003 Regulation 8 Registered provider, manager, and branch manager – general requirements
The Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 Regulation 10 Registered person general requirement

This report provides information about adoption-related activities for the **12-month period 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025**.



Our Children

Children waiting

At the start of the year there were 113 children waiting for adoption. We enter 2025-26 with 138 children waiting. This is an increase of 22%.

The table below shows the trend over recent years. As well as the number of children waiting for adoption being higher this year than last, the time children are waiting is increasing.

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Number of Children awaiting adoption	119	113	138
Adoption Plan Date to 31st March (Average Days)	287	304	324

This reflects the national picture. The most recently published national data (to the end of the third quarter of 2024-25¹) shows 2,820 children waiting, a 9% increase compared to the start of the year. The trend suggests a further increase will be seen when quarter 4 data is published. Birmingham has seen a slightly sharper increase. There are two key factors at play, firstly that we have several outstanding reversals to complete and secondly, whilst nationally the number of new Placement Orders has declined, Birmingham saw more Placement Orders granted this year than last – therefore, we have more children entering the adoption process.

The children who were waiting for adoption at the start of the year

The table below shows the current situation of children who were waiting for adoption at the start of the year:

	Number	Percentage
Adoption Order Granted	19	17%
Placed	40	35%
Matched	4	4%
Linked	6	5%
Adoption plan reversed	12	11%
Reversal expected	13	12%
Waiting	19	17%

Over half of the children have been placed, with 17% being formally adopted. A further 9% are matched or linked (booked into match panel) and so should be moving in with adoptive families within the next few months. However, 23% have had their plan of adoption reversed, or are expected to. In some cases, this is a very positive outcome, as the children have been placed with kinship carers, but in many cases the reason is that adopters could not be found, and long-term fostering is now being sought as an alternative. 17% of the children are still waiting to be adopted.

¹ All national comparisons in this document will be Q3 2024-25 data, as year-end data has not yet been published.



Children currently waiting

The table below gives further information about the children awaiting adoption at the end of the year:

	Number	Percentage
Matched	9	7%
Linked	26	19%
Reversal expected	16	12%
Waiting with a Placement Order	59	43%
Adoption Plan only	28	20%

26% of the 138 children waiting are matched or linked, 12% expected to have their plan of adoption reversed, 20% are still in proceedings, (they have a plan of adoption but currently no Placement Order). 43% are waiting with a Placement Order. This means that on 31 March we were family finding for 59 children in a position to be matched. This compares to 55 at the end of last year.

The demographic profile of the children waiting is:

- **Sex:** 41% (24 children) are girls and 59% (35 children) are boys
- **Ethnicity:** 61% (36 children) have White ethnicity; 24% (14 children) mixed ethnicity, 7% (4 children) Asian ethnicity; 7% (4 children) Black ethnicity and 1 with unknown ethnicity.
- **Age:** 64% (38 children) are 2 or under; 17% (10 children) are aged 3-4; and 18% (11 children) aged 5+
- **Disability:** 2% (1 child) has a recorded disability.
- **Sibling groups:** 46% (27 children) are waiting to be placed as part of a sibling group – one group of 4, three groups of 3 and seven groups of 2. 54% (32 children) are waiting to be placed alone.

Looking at our children in care population:

- The ratio of girls to boys in the adoption process reflects the CiC population,
- White children are significantly over-represented (48% of children in care under the age of 7 have White ethnicity compared to 61% of children waiting with a Placement Order).
- The percentage of children with a disability is in line with the CiC population (3% of children in care under the age of 7 have a recorded disability).
- Younger children – 0 to 2 - are (unsurprisingly) over-represented in adoption (the CiC population who are under 7 is evenly split across age group).

Nationally, 43% of children waiting with a Placement Order are girls, 18% are from a global majority background, 22% are 5+, 4% have a disability and 41% are waiting as a sibling group. So, other than having a higher proportion of children from a global majority background (to be expected given Birmingham's super-diversity) the profile of children waiting is akin to that seen nationally.

Taking the two comparisons together, we can see that we have a higher number of children from a global majority background waiting for adoption than seen nationally, but still somewhat lower than might be expected all other things being equal.

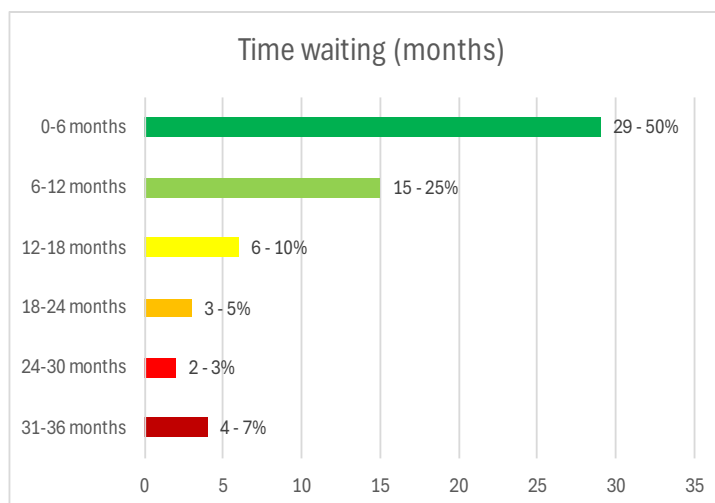


Time waiting for adoption

The amount of time waiting for adoption (from Placement Order to 31 March 25), for children waiting at the end of the year, varied from 0 to 1,092 days (c3 years), with the average (median) time waiting being 199 days (6.5 months).

The chart to the right shows the number of children waiting for different lengths of time.

Nationally, 26% of the children waiting with a Placement Order at the end of Q3 had been waiting for over 12 months and 12% had been waiting over 18 months – very similar proportions as in Birmingham (25% and 15% respectively).



The cohort who has been waiting between 1 and 2 years includes: one child who experienced a disruption, two sibling groups of 2, one sibling group of 3 and one other child. There are 7 white and 2 mixed ethnicity children, mostly aged 3+.

The cohort who has been waiting over 2 years includes: one child who experienced a disruption, a sibling group of 2 whose approved match was withdrawn, and a sibling group of 3 where there has been extended discussion about foster carer adoption. There are 3 white and 3 mixed ethnicity children, all but one aged 5+.

Children waiting for adoption are discussed at regular adoption monitoring meetings attended by the Child's Social Worker, Family Finder and chaired by the Assistant Head of Adoption. The aim is to maintain momentum and highlight further action that can be taken. The national shortage of adopters and associated high demand for adoption activity days is limiting family finding options though.

Changes to the terms of reference for this monitoring meeting in year 25 – 26 will focus more on the children waiting longer by performing only a light touch tracking of infant children in the process. It is hoped that by so doing practitioners will be encouraged and supported to redouble their efforts in matching priority children.

Adoption activity

Adoption Plans and Placement Orders

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Number of Children with Plans Approved	121	115	123
Average days from entering care to Plan Approved	290	244	233
Number of plans within 6 months of child entering care	58 (48%)	52 (45%)	68 (55%)
Number of Children with Placement Orders Granted	113	102	109



There has been a slight increase in the number of adoption plans approved compared to last year. This is somewhat unexpected as nationally the number of plans is on a downward trajectory in line with 'Family First' policies. Nationally, the number of adoption plans approved in quarters 1-3 2024-5 was 11% lower than in quarters 1-3 2023-24. In Birmingham the number of plans approved in 2024-25 was 7% higher than the previous year.

Adoption plans are typically being approved earlier than in previous years, on average 233 days (circa. 8 months) after entering care for the 123 children with a plan approved this year. This is linked to a general reduction in the duration of care proceedings commenced by the Trust. Naturally, the experiences of individual children vary, and the average figure is affected by a small number whose more complex journeys skew the picture. The median figure is 165 days (5.5 months), with 75% of children having their adoption plan approved 253 days (8.5 months) after entering care.

Most children with an adoption plan approved this year were under the age of 2 (80%) and 55% were of White British ethnicity. Proportionately somewhat fewer sibling groups had a plan of adoption approved than last year – 38% of the children who had a plan approved were part of a sibling group we sought to place together.

41% of the children whose adoption plan was approved this year have already been placed or are booked in for match panel. Children under the age of 1 when their plan was approved and those not part of a sibling group are most likely to be in this position, with older children and sibling groups more likely to be waiting to be matched.

Reversals

Financial Year	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Number of reversals	7	26	15

15 children had their plan of adoption reversed this year: on average, 20 months after being originally approved. Eight had been granted a Placement Order that has been/will need to be revoked. Four of these children had previously been placed but experienced a disruption.

7 of the 15 children have returned to live with family members or moved in with kinship carers. Seven now have a plan of long-term fostering and one young person has moved to residential care. All in the latter group are over 5 years and/or have complex health and developmental needs – both factors increasing the challenge of finding a suitable adoptive family.

The ratio of reversal to new plans is 1:8 – 1 reversal for every 8 new plans of adoption. The national ratio (Q1-3) is 1:5 meaning our level of reversal is lower than might be expected. However, a further 16 children are expected to have their adoption plan reversed, 7 of whom have a Placement Order. The main reason is that adopters cannot be found, and a care plan of long-term fostering is considered more viable. In many cases, reversal and revocation is not being completed in a timely manner. The reversal process has been simplified to address this whereby the Adoption Head of Service scrutinises and approves the reversal application, but receiving supporting documentation in a timely manner from area colleagues often remains an issue.



Early Permanence

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Early Permanence Placements initiated	14	6	13
Number of adoption placements that were previously EP	10 (11%)	14 (14%)	12 (14%)
Additional days with future adopters	164	106	128

13 Early Permanence (EP) placements were initiated, returning to the level achieved in 2022-23. One of the children ultimately returned to live with parents, but the others have transitioned to adoptive placements and on average moved in with their adopters 128 days (4 months) earlier because of EP. Most of the children placed for EP are either relinquished or children being placed with sibling adopters.

The increased volume of EP placements has been achieved due to extensive work by the adoption service seeking to influence the wider system to ensure that all stakeholders have a good understanding of EP and how to facilitate it. However, our numbers remain lower than those seen nationally: if our share of new EP placements during the 2024 calendar year was in line with our share of adoptive placements, we would have needed to secure 6 additional EP placements.

Matches

It has been a challenging year for family finding due to the national shortage of adopters. The number of adopter profiles on LinkMaker has fallen drastically; some MTC Exchange events have been cancelled due to the low number of adopters who registered; and it is harder to secure space on adoption activity days due to the increased number of children awaiting adoption nationally – as of March, the next available slots for AADs were for September 2025.

87 children had a match approved by an ADM this year, compared to 101 last year. Whilst 2024-25 was a particularly successful in terms of securing matches, the figure is also lower than that seen in 2022-23.

Year	Matches approved	Matched in 6 mths of Plan	Entering care to match (days)	Placement Order to match (days)	Age match at	Gender	Disability	Sibling Groups
2024-25	87	29%	542	246	0-2: 71 3-4: 11 5+: 5 Average: 1	F: 41 M: 46	Yes: 0 No: 97	Single: 65 Group of 2: 11 Group of 3: 0
2023-24	101	32%	547	209	0-2: 81 3-4: 13 5+: 7 Average: 1	F: 50 M: 51	Yes: 0 No: 101	Single: 73 Group of 2: 12.5 Group of 3: 1



2022-23	94	30%	638	210	0-2: 69 3-4: 17 5+: 8 Average: 2	F: 44 M: 50	Yes: 0 No: 94	Single: 67 Group of 2: 12 Group of 3: 1
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We continue to secure the most matches for younger children, and 'single' children (not part of a sibling group). However, 11 sibling groups of 2 were matched, with other children joining an older sibling already placed.

The children who were matched had been in care for a similar amount of time as those matched last year (542 days); but waited approximately a month longer from Placement Order to match – typically 246 days (circa. 8 months). As well as the shortage of adopters, an additional factor affecting matching speed is that we are no longer able to share children's profiles (and CPRs) before the Placement Order has been granted.

There is of course variation in the time taken from adoption plan to match. There is one child who waited a very long time. If their journey is excluded from analysis, the average time is 230 days, although this remains higher than the national figure of 216 days.

We naturally aspire to match children quickly but are also aware that securing a match for children whose Placement Order was granted some time ago represents a positive outcome for the child - these matches often involve children who are deemed harder to place, particularly older children.

Children under one year when their Placement Order is approved are typically matched in 212 days (7 months) reflecting the preference many adopters still have for adopting a baby.

Placements

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Number of Children placed (adoption)	85	105	85
Placed Internally	48 (56%)	67 (63%)	50 (59%)
Placed Within 12 Months of Plan	71 (84%)	88 (84%)	70 (82%)
Average days in care when placed	668	560	542

85 children were placed for adoption during the year. One child subsequently experienced a disruption (at a very early stage), and an alternative placement is being sought. Any disruption is unfortunate, but it is encouraging to note that level of disruption is much lower than seen last year, also that this year we placed 3 children whose previous placement disrupted. A further two children who have experienced a disruption had a new match secured during the year.

Internal sufficiency is slightly better than last year, with 59% of placements being with Adopt Birmingham families.



The children placed this year had been in care an average of 542² days. However, this figure is heavily influenced by successful foster carer adoption of a child who had been in care for 6 years. If this child is excluded from the statistics, the children placed had been in care an average of 521 days (approximately a year and 5 months). This reduced duration is positive to see but must be interpreted in a holistic sense, considering the increased number of children who are still waiting for adoption and that those unmatched have generally been waiting for longer.

In times of adopter scarcity adoption is more polarised: younger children, often those more recently entering the adoption process are matched swiftly, but we secure fewer matches for older children and those who have already been waiting for some time.

Adoption Orders

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Number of Children	75	93	90
% adopted from care	12%	14%	12%

The number of Adoption Orders granted is like last year, accounting for 12% of discharges from care. This remains a higher percentage than seen nationally (9%). In line with the reduced number of placements initiated, we expect the number of Adoption Orders granted to be lower in 2025-26.

Trans-cultural matching

Various factors are considered when determining a suitable match for a child. A key consideration is the child's heritage – their ethnic background, culture and religion. Where possible we seek to match children with adopters who reflect their heritage: to encourage their sense of belonging and to ensure their birth heritage continues to be an important and central part of who they are. Where such a match is not possible, we follow principles outlined in the transracial adoption framework (AfDiT) to assess how prepared potential adopters are to understand the needs and identity of a child with different heritage to their own, and to support them to do this effectively.

It can be difficult to classify placements according to whether they reflect a trans-cultural match because it is about much more than adopters being from the same ethnic category as the child. Indeed, even comparing ethnic backgrounds is not straightforward. Currently, ethnicity match is the clearest data available to demonstrate the level of trans-cultural matching.

The exact ethnicity of 6 of the 85 children placed is not recorded, as birth fathers are unknown. Of the remaining 79, 42 (59%) were placed in families where at least one adopter shares the child's ethnicity. 37 (47%) were placed in families where the adopter (if single) or neither of the adopters (if a couple) shares the child's ethnicity, although in many cases there is some degree of similarity (for example a child of White and Asian ethnicity being adopted by an Indian couple). In all cases, including an apparent cultural match, adopters are supported to consider the current and future identity needs of their adopted child.

² It is coincidental that this is the same figure as the average time from PO to match for children matched during the year. These are two interlinked but separate groups of children: 8 of the children matched this year were not placed in year and 6 of the children placed were not matched in year.



Timeliness

The key timeliness indicator pertinent to adoption performance is the time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with his/her adoption family, for children who have been adopted – this is adjusted for foster carer adoptions and is also referred to as the A10 figure.

Financial Year	A10 : 3-year average (days)	A 10 : 12m average (days)
2024-25	531	492
2023-24	563	532
2022-23	545	576

For children adopted in the 3-year period to 31 March 2025, the average A10 figure was 531 days, a decrease of 32 days from the 23/24 3-year average. For children adopted in the 12 months to 31 March 2025, the figure was 492 days. The national benchmark as at the end of quarter 3 was 485 days; our performance is broadly in line with this.

The table below shows average duration of each stage of the adoption process for children whose Adoption Orders were granted in each of the last 3 years.

Financial Year	Number of Adoption Orders	Care Entry to Adoption Plan	Adoption Plan to PO	PO to Match	Match to Placement	Placement to AOG
2024-25	90	255	104	173	21	325
2023-24	93	305	75	205	20	328
2022-23	75	280	97	231	32	325

This suggests improved timeliness but looking at stage duration based on when a child's Adoption Order was granted is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it discounts the journey of children who left the adoption process without being formally adopted. Additionally, when a child is adopted, their placement could have been nearly a year before, with their adoption plan and entry to care sometimes being two to three years ago. Instead, the table below shows the number of children who reached each stage in the adoption process during the year, and the average time taken. This is a cross sectional rather than longitudinal view of children's journey but offers more contemporary information.

Financial Year	Care Entry to Adoption Plan	Adoption Plan to PO	PO to Match	Match to Placement	Placement to AOG
National (Jan to Dec 24)	236	98	216	22	264
2024-25	233 (123)	74 (109)	246 (87)	20 (85)	325 (90)
2023-24	244 (115)	88 (102)	209 (99)	18 (103)	328 (93)
2022-23	290 (121)	96 (113)	210 (94)	25(85)	325 (75)

Blue – better than national figure, green – in line with national figure, red – worse than national figure

Our timeliness for entering care to having an adoption plan agreed and for transition from match to placement is in line with national figures, and the time from adoption plan to Placement Order is faster than seen nationally.



However, the time from placement order to match is slightly longer and the time from placement to Adoption Order is markedly longer. Timeliness from Placement Order to match is discussed under the matches section above and notes that whilst something to be aware of, as we aim to match children quickly, that matches that take longer can still reflect a positive outcome for the child, particularly those who are older, in a sibling group, or have additional needs – and reflects the aspirational approach the Trust takes toward adoption.

Timeliness from placement to Adoption Order is heavily influenced by family choice and not fully within our control - there are various reasons why this might be delayed. We have altered our approach to preparing Annex A documentation this year to ensure that Social Work input is not one of those reasons and will continue to support internal families to move efficiently toward applying for an Adoption Order on the HMCTS Portal when they are ready to do so.

The change we are introducing in April, where families will have access to support from a named Social Worker for a year Post Order will help by ensuring that concerns about a lack of support Post Order does not manifest in delaying an application to court.



Our Families

Recruitment and assessment

Marketing

We continue to take an innovative and proactive approach to marketing, especially via social media. Some of the key activity undertaken this year includes:

- Community networking across West Midlands Community Churches with a view to reaching under-represented communities and families who may become adopters for altruistic reasons and as such may be more likely to offer a home to older children, or those with additional needs.
- Social media advertising
- Attending Birmingham PRIDE festival and relationship building in the LGBTQ+ non-binary and trans communities.

We held 21 information events, 10 online and 11 in-person, attended by 134 prospective adopters.

Enquiries and applications

We received enquiries from 266 families across the year. This is slightly lower than the 300 who enquired last year³, however, the number of families submitting a Registration of Interest (ROI) – formally starting stage 1 – was significantly higher: 60 families, compared to 53 last year.

This is positive, given the national decline in adopter recruitment. Nationally, there were 2,240 ROIs submitted in Q1-3, compared to 2,410 the previous year, a 7% reduction. In Birmingham, we've seen a 13% increase on last year.

Of the 60 families submitting an ROI during the year, 7 were foster carers wanting to adopt and 13 were repeat adopters.

- 3 subsequently withdrew.
- 1 is on hold.
- 23 have been approved (of which 9 now have a child placed with them and 6 are booked into match panel).
- 15 are undergoing stage 1 checks.
- 18 are in assessment.

Assessment and support

49 families were allocated for assessment during the year – formally starting stage 2. This is slightly fewer than the 52 from last year, but the strong level of enquiry and application means we have a steady pipeline of families.

Prospective adopters continue to receive comprehensive preparation and post approval training including the sessions below. Our training provision generates positive feedback, with prospective adopters particularly

³ Both figures only count the most recent enquiry in the case of repeat enquirers.



valuing the adopter trainers who are lead facilitators across the whole training offer and bring a wealth of lived experience.

- Early Permanence
- Information evening for extended family
- FASD
- Brothers and sisters
- Building Connections - pt. 1 and pt. 2
- Therapeutic Play Techniques
- Sensory Processing
- Families Creating Siblings through Adoption
- Foundations for Attachment.
- Contact and Life Story
- Talking and Telling About Adoption.
- Power of Play

In addition to the training, we run a well-attended stay and play session for families who have a child placed with them enabling families to build their network and access peer support.

Panel activity

A report is produced every six months examining the operation of adoption panel. The key matters identified in the reports produced this year were:

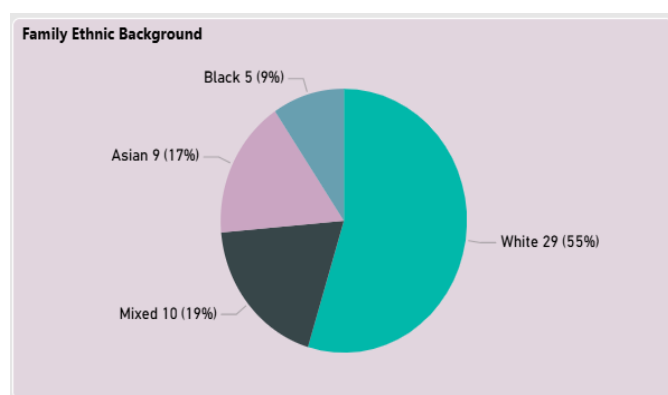
- Panel capacity was somewhat higher than needed. There is clearly a balance to strike between having enough panels and ensuring panel time is used efficiently. Data on panel utilisation across the last few years has been analysed to understand patterns and this information will be used to establish future panel provision.
- Panel attendees who completed a questionnaire felt the overall service they received was excellent and that panel was professional but warm and supportive and that processes were effective and communicated well.
- The only concerns raised related to practical matters linked to joining panel via teams and delayed start times when previous panel items have over-run. The team have taken these comments into consideration and are reviewing pre-panel communications to further enhance the experience for families.
- Panel members feel the quality of reports submitted is good and that they receive excellent support from panel advisors.
- ADM decisions are being made promptly and within statutory timescales.



Approvals

	Number of Approved Adopters	Approved For
2024-25	53 (inc. 20 Early Permanence Carers)	61 children
2023-24	43 (inc. 12 Early Permanence Carers)	57 children
2022-23	48 (inc. 18 Early Permanence Carers)	60 children

53 families were approved as adopters during the year, compared to 43 last year. This is a positive result - nationally the number of approvals Q1-3 2024-25 was 1% higher than the previous year, in Birmingham, our full year figure has increased by 23%. We are particularly pleased to see an increase in the number of families able to offer early permanence. Unfortunately, fewer families felt able to consider a sibling group, meaning that whilst 10 more families were approved this year than last, the maximum placement capacity only increased by 4.



Thanks to targeted recruitment, we continue to see increased ethnic diversity amongst families in the adoption process. 45% of families approved were from a mixed or global majority background. Last year 37% were (63% White ethnicity, 19% Mixed ethnicity, 9% Asian ethnicity and 9% Black ethnicity).

We need to recruit more families from the Black Caribbean community to help suitably match children with this heritage and are undertaking outreach work with community churches to enable this.

Most of the families were approved for one child, but 6 were approved for a sibling group of two and one for a sibling group of three. Most families expressed preference for a child under the age of 4 (68%) including 26 (49%) who expressed preference for a child aged 0-2.

Adopters continue to be supported to stretch their matching considerations throughout the assessment and matching process, but there remain fewer adopters who wish to consider older children, sibling groups and children with disabilities and/or complex health needs, meaning that these children continue to wait longer to be matched.

This continues to be a priority for the service moving forward, with targeted recruitment to increase these numbers such as using Nursing Times and Community Care Online as applicant sources. Social Workers have also been encouraged to exclusively share profiles for siblings and older children, for the first 6 weeks following approval, for adopters who are open to considering these priority children.



Matches

	Families matched	% matched in 3 months of approval	% matched in 6 months of approval
2024-25	50	30%	62%
2023-24	63	13%	57%
2022-23	42	11%	45%

50 Adopt Birmingham families were matched with a child/children during the year. Whilst lower than last year's unusually high figures, this is higher than in 2022/23. 30% of families were matched within 3 months of approval which is better than in recent years and higher than the national figure of 23%. The proportion being matched within 6 months of approval is similar to that seen last year, as is the average number days from approval to match.

Almost all matches were with Birmingham children, but 3 families were matched with children from other Local Authority areas, supporting national sufficiency.

Withdrawals

Nine families withdrew their application to adopt during the year: four during stage 1 and five during stage 2. The reasons were varied, including a pregnancy, health issues, couple separation and changes at work. There is one case to particularly learn lessons from, where the family decided to move agency because they were not satisfied with the speed and responsiveness of the Trust. Wider feedback suggests this is not the general experience, but not one we would wish any family to have.

Six approved adopters made the decision to withdraw during the year, as they no longer wished to pursue adoption. Three of these were Foster Carers who had been planning to adopt: in one case the placement disrupted, the other two progressed into long term fostering, with financial arrangements and ongoing support arrangements being key considerations. The other families cited changes in their personal circumstances which meant that adoption was no longer the right path for them.



Timeliness

	National (Jan to Dec 24)	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23
Enquiry to ROI	109 days	62 days (n=60)	83 days	85 days
Stage 1	130 days	128 days (n=37)	18 weeks	18 weeks
19 weeks		18 weeks		
% in 2 months	14%	0%	0%	5%
Stage 2	146 days	170 days (n=52)	5 months	5 months
5 months		6 months		
% in 4 months	45%	17%	56%	42%
ROI to approval	n.a.	261 days (n=52)	284 days	287 days
% in 6 months	24%	15%	12%	21%
Approval to match	251	246 (n=50)	248 days	243 days
% in 3 months	23%	30%	13%	11%

Blue – better than national figure, green – in line with national figure, red – worse than national figure

* numbers in brackets show the number of families who completed that stage of their journey in the year – dates for one approval not counted as a precautionary repeat adopter approval to enable family to adopt the sibling of a child already placed and about to be granted an adoption order.

**Fast track applicants not included in Stage 1 timeliness calculation.

n.a. figure not available

The time from enquiry to submitting a formal ROI was 62 days (2 months) – shorter than the national average of 109 days (3.5 months).

Most families have an unbroken journey from ROI to approval. However, life events mean that some need to put the process on hold for a period, extending the time from ROI to approval. As such, the time from ROI to approval ranges from 25 days (a family with a placed child about to have an Adoption Order granted fast tracked for approval to enable a sibling placement) to 627 days (1 year 8 months) a family who needed to pause their assessment after stage 1. The average time from ROI to approval for families approved this year was 261 days (8 ½ months). The median figure, 252 is very similar, suggesting this is not unduly affected by families whose journey was unusually long. A national comparator figure is not published, although the nominal target is 182 days (6 months) and our typical duration exceeds this. 15% of families were approved within the target timescale, compared to 24% of families nationally. One of these eight families was a foster carer wanting to adopt, the others were repeat adopters, so all families known to us, with experience of the various checks and comprehensive assessment.

The average time taken for stage 1 checks was 128 days, in line with the national figure of 130 days. Medicals continue to inhibit timely completion of stage 1 for applicants, as conducting potential adopter medicals is often not a priority for GPs. The recruitment team ensures that as soon as the Registration of Interest (ROI) is received, applicants are encouraged to action GP medicals as soon as possible. Issues with DBS checks experienced in the past are improving now that we have a new system in place to manage these checks.

Due to the time needed to finalise some of the stage 1 checks, some families are allocated for assessment (start stage 2) before formal completion of stage 1, to expedite the process. This works well. The stage 2 duration



reported above is the time from ROI to approval for fast-track applicants and from allocation for assessment to approval for all other applicants. The average duration is 170 days (6 months), with a median of 163, slightly longer than in recent years, and only 17% of families completed stage 2 within 4 months compared to 56% last year and 45% nationally. Whilst to some extent this reflects natural variation in the journey of individual families, it also reflects additional workload within the assessment team. The team secured almost a quarter more approvals than last year, including some assessments with elements making them more involved/representing additional work (for example, foster carer assessments where the assessment team manage matching tasks which would otherwise be undertaken by the family finding team).

Birth family support

Adopt Birmingham commission independent support for birth families through PAC-UK. 51 birth families have had contact with PAC-UK across the year, accessing a mixture of individual support, training, and support groups.

We also work closely with Belong Trust Connect (formerly known as Breaking The Cycle) - this is a Birmingham Children's Trust support service for birth parents affected by adoption. We meet as three agencies regularly to discuss referrals and plan how best to support the families we work with.

Adopt Birmingham has a part time letterbox coordinator who can provide ad hoc on the spot support to birth parents who are not ready or wanting to engage with a support service but would like support with letterbox contact. The worker has been part of the letterbox service for the last 9 years and families find this consistency and familiarity reassuring.



Post Adoption Support

Maintaining connections

Letterbox is an important aspect of post adoption support, enabling adopted children to maintain contact with their birth family. At the end of the year, 1,241 young people previously adopted in Birmingham and still under the age of 18 had contact arrangements in place, representing a total of 9,043 connections (as one young person could be connected to birth parents, siblings, and other family members). During the last year, 2,342 connections were initiated – content (mainly emailed letters) was sent to us to forward – either from the birth family to the adoptive family or vice versa.

Very few children are adopted without at least one contact arrangement being put in place, although having an arrangement does not necessarily mean that contact is happening. Letterbox activity has not been seen for 43% of the 1,241 young people across the last 2 years. In some cases, this may be because direct contact has been initiated but is likely to mean that many contact arrangements are dormant.

147 children (12% of children) have one or more direct contact arrangement in place, usually with siblings rather than birth parents. It is not possible to monitor if these arrangements are enacted.

The landscape of post adoption contact is changing, with courts looking to pursue open adoption by default where possible. Adopters are often cautious about this, and we find that those who embrace early permanence have the warmest welcome for post order contact arrangements.

We have been working closely with Belong Trust Connect (BTC) to support birth parents who previously had a child adopted. Together with PAC-UK's independent counselling services, we ensure that when adopted children or adopters want more direct contact, everyone receives the emotional support they need during what can be a sensitive and dysregulating time.

We have also been working closely with our colleagues in the Life-Long Links team who support children and young people to re-connect with important people in their lives they may have lost. Whether it is virtual or face-to-face meetings, 'one offs' or lasting arrangements, Life-Long Links helped parties reach comfortable agreements and supported those crucial first encounters. This approach has been especially helpful when young people discover birth family members online or when adopters feel the time is right to connect.

We are working with our Post Adoption Contact Online system provider to enhance the system which emulates how we communicate today: with options for sharing voice recordings, photos, and videos, enabling smaller more regular communication.

Proactive support

The Post Adoption Support (PAS) team undertake various activities to offer proactive support to adoptive families. Some of the highlights this year include:

- Introducing a Post Adoption newsletter, with three issues circulated to date, to share information and promote events and training opportunities.
- Summer activity day at Blackwell Adventure where 12 young people joined Social Workers being led in different outdoor pursuits



- Events including a poetry and creative writing group.
- Seasonal Spring and Autumn face to face groups with activities for children and opportunities for adopters to connect.
- Talking and Telling training to adopters and families, and Power of Play for under 7's which is a Thera-Play informed group program.
- CATCH memberships are offered to families where they can access thousands of resources, webinars and training by leading experts such as psychologists about a range of topics affecting adopted children. Which have also introduced a quarterly demonstration for families with one of the developers so that families can familiarise themselves with the resources available and how to navigate this.

Working in Partnership with Adoption Focus

We have worked with our VAA partner Adoption Focus to extend and share resources. Adopt Birmingham adopters have been able to access monthly twilight zoom group sessions themed on topics common in adoption e.g. anxiety, attachment and trauma, and managing Christmas. A representative from Adopt Birmingham attends to support families we are responsible for within those sessions.

Adoption Focus receive funding from the Timpson Foundation to facilitate 'Safebase' and 'Safebase Teenage Years' sessions: This is a therapeutic parenting programme designed to help adoptive parents reflect on their child(ren)'s early life experiences as well as empowering them to parent their children with confidence. Adopt Birmingham have been given access to this program.

Adolescent Identity Formation: This workshop aims to help adopters understand the changes taking place in the brain of teenagers and to explore the possible impact of trauma and Covid on children's development and consider how to support adopted adolescents in forming a healthy and integrated identity.

Non-Violent Resistance (NVR): Our Non-Violent Resistance programme is based on principles of both NVR and therapeutic parenting. The programme considers parental presence, relational gestures, self-care, de-escalation, prioritising behaviours and support networks as well as weaving sibling to sibling violence throughout the course content.

Education

Education can be a challenge for the adoptive families we work with. We completed an education temperature check of children open to the Post Adoption Support Team in 2024. Staff reported on 144 children:

- 93 children (65%) have education difficulties that take up social work time, such as support to attend school meetings or family distress due to educational difficulties.
- 20 children (14%) had an exclusion in the last 12 months.
- 24 children (17%) have had a school move in the last 12 months.
- 14 (10%) were not in suitable education provision and did not have timescale of when they will have a place, with others approaching this situation, being homeschooled or on temporary timetables.
- Collectively, the PAS staff who completed a questionnaire had completed EHCP (social care staff element) reports for 40 families in the last 12 months.



We now work jointly with the Virtual School providing a parent drop-in session to give parents the opportunity speak directly key partners such as SENAR, Educational Psychologists, CATS and the exclusion team. We have also shared access to this with our VAA partner's education consultant who has offered two staff consultations.

Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP)

Adopt Birmingham employs DDP practice and remains part of the Relationships in Good Hands Trial (RIGHT), a study led by the University of Glasgow. The trial seeks to understand the effectiveness of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) for abused and neglected young people with maltreatment-associated problems and their parents. It seeks to find out which services work best and whether services are worth the costs and the effort families put in to receive these services.

Reactive support

We received 321 PAS enquiries during the year, many from adoptees over the age of 25 requesting access to files, but also a significant number from families with an adopted child requesting an assessment of need.

Assessment of Need

As we close the administrative year, we are providing social work support to 93 adopted children allocated to a social worker due the family experiencing significant complex needs. As well as direct Social Work, we have a Senior Social Care Assistant supporting children who are socially isolated, out of school or where relations are very complex and difficult at home. We have also helped the families of 54 other children (where intensive social work support is not needed) to access therapeutic funded through the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund and commissioned a therapeutic package for 19 interagency families (pre and post order) to support the placements of children with more complex needs.

Our typical waiting time for a child assessment is 20 weeks for a social worker to start an assessment of need.

Access to Files

As we close the year, we are providing social work support for Birth Records Counselling or Access to File summaries to 36 adopted adults and our typical waiting time for adult work is 26 weeks. We are working hard to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our younger cohort of adopted adults whose adoptions were granted post-commencement.

Following reports such as 'The Violation of Family Life: Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949–1976' [JCHR], we have made links with intermediaries who have been utilising the government fund that enables free intermediary support for prescribed family members wishing to trace if their Adoption Order was granted pre-1976. Prior to this fund intermediary services have been very costly for families and a barrier to them being able to trace long lost relatives. It is unclear how much longer this fund will be available.



ASGSF Applications

During the year we have made 191 successful applications to the ASGSF (Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund) accessing Specialist Assessments and therapies include Sensory support, TheraPlay, DDP, therapeutic parenting and much more.

Whilst good news that the Government will continue to fund the ASGSF for another year, the decision to reduce the Fair Access Limit (FAL) – the amount an individual child can access - from £5,000 to £3,000; with specialist assessment costs now included within this limit will affect our families access to therapeutic support.

The continuation of the funding was not announced until 1 April 2025, which caused some anxiety amongst families, partners and staff about whether children currently accessing therapy would be able to continue.

Fortunately, we were able to make full use of the Transitional Fund set up by the DfE to enable split funded applications across 2025/26. We made 42 applications at the end of March, ensuring that as many children as possible could access more than £5,000 of therapy/ £2,500 for Specialist Assessment that will not come out of their Fair Access Limit.



Quality Assurance

Our quality assurance measures include:

- Management oversight of reports.
- Regular adoption monitoring meetings to guard against drift and delay.
- Monthly Director Performance meetings comprising team updates each quarter, with thematic sessions on intervening months.
- Bi-monthly reporting to the Trust Performance and Quality Assurance group.
- Quarterly performance reports to the RAA Board.
- Six monthly review of panel operation, including feedback from panel members.
- Learning from complaints and feedback.
- Disruption meetings.

Feedback survey

We invite families to complete a feedback questionnaire at various points in their adoption journey. As the response rate is typically low, we are in the process of reviewing our approach. We have recently developed more specific feedback mechanisms for families accessing post adoption support, including ways to capture children's views; and a feedback form specifically for adopted adults following birth record counselling. We will review our approach to collecting feedback about other matters next year.

The 30 families who completed a feedback form this year expressed positive views of Adopt Birmingham, with 97% saying they would recommend Adopt Birmingham to others.

What families think is good about the service

- **Enquiries** are responded to well.
 - *Everyone we spoke to was always helpful, friendly and understanding.*
- **Panel** is seen to be efficient. They said panel members were warm, put them at ease and made them feel listened to. Families feel things were explained well, helping them feel prepared.
 - *Our social worker has been amazing throughout the whole process, and we were fully prepared for our panel session and felt it went well.*
 - *Panel were all really lovely explained everything that was going to happen, quick efficient and just genuinely nice people*
 - *Had feeling everyone listened closely to what we said and were well understood*
- **Matching** - Families praised the friendly, professional approach of staff, saying staff were readily available, responsive, communicated well and were supportive.
 - *Very professional while being warm, welcoming and understanding*



- *Family Finder has been amazing from day one. Always at the end of an email with a quick response, answered any questions we had throughout process and always done with a smile. It was lovely that we met her so many times both in person, on teams and also as part of our introductions.*
- **Post adoption support** was described as life changing, professional and empathetic. Families said they received excellent support, and that staff really took the time to get to know the family and their needs.
 - *Our social worker had time for us and really got to know us and our needs.*
 - *Our support worker was very proactive in seeking out ways to help us, and very responsive whenever we made contact with her, always very supportive, positive and reassuring, and good at giving us hope again at times when we were struggling most.*

What families think could have been done differently or improved

Three families reported issues receiving the Teams link to access their panel slot and two mentioned Panel timeliness, saying they had to wait *"quite a long time after the time we were given before being admitted (maybe 30 minutes)"*; something which occasionally cannot be avoided. The Panel team have reviewed these comments and checked the communication issued prior to panel to ensure that the process for accessing panel is clear to families.

Other comments were that:

- We should *"write a more positive cover email when sending the outcome letter"*.
- *"A change in social worker was not ideal a couple of weeks before panel"*.
- The annual ASGSF funding cycle is not very helpful because it leads to *"gaps when one set of funding had run out and the next had not yet been approved and gaps sometimes meant momentum was lost in the work with our children"*.

We will review our outcome letter and fully agree with the other two points, although these are unfortunately outside of our control.

Why families chose Adopt Birmingham

We also asked families why they had chosen to adopt through Adopt Birmingham. A variety of reasons were given, including:

- Previous use of the service
- Proximity
- Preferring a Local Authority agency to a private/charitable one
- Positive impression made at enquiry stage
- Reputation and/or recommendation



In Conclusion

This report highlights the significant strides made in our mission to enhance the lives of children and families in Birmingham. Over the past year, we have successfully implemented numerous programs and initiatives that have positively impacted the community. Our dedicated team has worked tirelessly to ensure that 85 children found a loving and supportive home, and our efforts have been met with remarkable success.

Whilst I anticipate that the national shortage of adopters will worsen, Trust leadership increasing our marketing budget will result in Adopt Birmingham continuing to buck national trends and perform well against several of the key performance indicators. Without this commitment, we would not be able to challenge the ingress of private adoption agencies into our city.

Our outreach programs have expanded, reaching more families and providing them with the resources and support they need – keeping them together by putting families first. Additionally, our partnerships with local organisations and stakeholders have strengthened, allowing us to leverage collective efforts for greater impact.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to our vision of a Birmingham where every child can thrive in a nurturing environment. We will continue to innovate and adapt our strategies to meet the evolving needs of the community.

Our focus will remain on providing comprehensive support to adoptive families, advocating for the rights of children, and fostering a culture of compassion, equality, diversity and inclusivity.

I extend my gratitude to colleagues across the Trust, our supporters, volunteers, and partners who have made this year's achievements possible. Together, we will continue to make a difference in the lives of children and families in Birmingham.

Andy Logie,
Responsible Manager,
Adopt Birmingham, July 2025.