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**Adoption Agency Annual Report 2022-2023**

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# Adopt Birmingham – The City’s Adoption Agency

The Trust contracted with Adoption Focus/Family Society in a collaborative partnership to co-design and co-deliver our Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) which went live on the 1st of January 2022. This approach has the support of the Department for Education.

**The Vision for Adopt Birmingham**

***Adopted children grow up in secure and loving families***

***where they thrive and reach their potential.***

This will be achieved through our partnership with Adoption Focus by combining their commercial acumen as a reputable and top 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.

This report pertains to the Birmingham Children’s Trust Adoption Agency only (URN: 1273493) satisfying 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

# VAA Statutory Report (22-23) Introduction

It has been a year of continued growth for Birmingham Children’s Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency and the first full year in partnership with Adoption Focus to make the newest English RAA: Adopt Birmingham. The challenge of COVID fading, but we still felt the hangover in the courts and health service. Performance has improved year on year and the overdue visit from Ofsted elicited a welcome outcome. The dedication of all staff involved in the child’s adoption journey is clear to see and continues apace. This extends from the Trust Board and the Executive down to the most junior colleague representing vulnerable children in this space. How else do you achieve the best adoption performance of any public authority area adoption agency in Britain for the second year in a row?

This report provides data pertaining to adoption-related activities for the **12-month period 1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023.**

# Executive Summary

*What is working well?*

1. Adopt Birmingham completed the year one workplan in full. Workplan 2.0 for 23-24 is already underway and has a bold focus on business partnerships and efficiencies.
2. Inspected as a VAA in Oct/Nov 2022, Ofsted found us to be **GOOD** with **OUTSTANDING** leadership and management.
3. The adopter recruitment drive which focusses on quality, not quantity delivered more of the right adopters for our children than ever before.
4. We placed 2 more children with their new families this year than last but matched 10 more than the previous year – this after revolutionising panel efficiency from September 2022.
5. We have increased the number of Early Permanence placements year on year (from 8 to 12 children) and now embark on a campaign of increasing this again in 23/24 by promoting EP internally and via Workplan 2.0 in partnership with Adoption Focus.
6. Our management team is fully staffed with experienced permanent team managers.
7. Likewise, our use of locum Social Workers in the agency is below 3% which is simply to allow for crossovers in recruitment onboarding.
8. As the Trust continues to be ambitious for children, on average 57% of children placed for adoption are in the priority (hard to place) group, this is 5% higher than in the previous year.
9. We have reduced our dependence on external adopters by 4% in year 2022-23. Better for children, better for taxpayers.
10. We achieved DDP Partner Accreditation in this year. One of only two statutory adoption agencies in this world-renowned therapeutic collaboration benefitting vulnerable and traumatised children.
11. Post Adoption Support has continued to benefit from a new local commissioning framework (West Midlands) and the government’s commitment to the Adoption Support Fund until 2025, such that avoidable delays to the provision of support are minimal. The Agency drew down £275K from central government in this period for the sole benefit of Birmingham’s children and their families.

*What positive impact are we having on the lives of children and young people?*

1. The focus on Early Permanence means eligible children have fewer placement moves and find their adoptive carers at the earliest appropriate point in their care experience. Research tells us that the sooner children know and feel that their home is a permanent one the sooner they can get on with the business of enjoying life, learning, growing, and loving.
2. In the last year we designed and delivered a specific compulsory training session (which takes place in Stage 2 of assessment) to encourage prospective adopters to think about parenting brothers and sisters. Creative plans to support families either with practical or financial help are subsequently considered and have, where appropriate, been agreed. This has resulted in 25% more approvals (year on year) of sibling adopters, and therefore, more sibling placements made in house.
3. Post adoption support in the agency has continued to develop its stand-alone capabilities. This means that, whilst we utilise the Adoption Support Fund appropriately, we are mindful that this cannot be relied on indefinitely – so our PAS practitioners receive support and training which allows them to do direct work with children and families – not merely commission and oversee this work from elsewhere.
4. The ongoing proactive consultation that takes place with adopters at different stages of assessment, matching, and post-placement support is routinely fed back into practice to make positive changes to the service which in turn enables said learning and development to ensure the best outcomes for children are achieved consistently.
5. The Trust’s priorities for reforming services for children in care are to ensure that children who need to enter care do so promptly and that the care they then receive does a much better job of helping them overcome the harm and disruption they have experienced earlier in their lives. Ensuring a sufficient supply of good permanent carers – whether adopters or foster carers – who can meet the needs of children in care is one of the most acute challenges we face. Our Adopt Birmingham Adopter Recruitment Strategy meets this objective by approving the adopters Birmingham’s children need particularly in the priority category. This is a ‘child first’ approach which complies with the Government’s original aim in 2013 to move adoption agencies away from being adult centric.
6. As a direct result of this we will be able to increase our ability to place more children in adoptive placements in year 23-24 and beyond.

# Approvals and Adoptions

## Suitability to Adopt Recommendation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Financial Year** | **Number of Approved Adopters** | **Approved For** |
| 2020-21 | 47 (inc.13 Early Permanence Carers) | 51 children |
| 2021-22 | 52 (inc.19 Early Permanence Carers) | 63 children |
| 2022-23 | 48 (inc.18 Early Permanence Carers) | 60 children |

During the financial year 2022-23, 45 prospective households were recommended for approval at panel (a decrease of 8 compared to 2021-22). 3 further households were approved by the ADM in this period who had been recommended for approval in March 2022. 2 adopters who were approved in 21-22 transferred to BCT in 22-23 from St Francis’s Children’s Society following the agency entering administration. 1 adopter was approved at panel twice during 22-23 as they were subsequently recommended for early permanence to facilitate the younger sibling of the first child placed with them to be placed for EP. This was not counted twice in the total approvals figure.

3 approved adopters made the decision to withdraw during the year. The reasons can be categorised as follows:

* Placement disruption
* Unexpected pregnancy
* No longer wishing to pursue adoption

Adopter approvals had been increasing year-on-year since 2019-20 meaning 2022-23’s total is the first decrease in 3 years; however, 9 families withdrew from stage 2 in the year which impacted being able to exceed the 2021-22 total, with reasons including changes in circumstances and focussing on birth children.

We continue to sustain a strong proportion of adopters approved who are recommended for early permanence (38% in 22-23).

Additionally, 22-23 was the first full year in which all eligible children entering care are tracked by Family Finding Teams to increase the adoption ‘footprint’ and promote effective permanence planning from day one of their care experience. As a result, BCT had the highest number of early permanence placements to-date: 13 in the year (an increase of 63% on last year) with an additional 1 OLA child placed for EP with a BCT approved adopter. We have approved more adopters for 2 children than the previous two years, which highlights the effectiveness of the introduction of sibling group training to prospective applicants. This is further evidenced by 5 out of 11 sibling groups of 2 placed in 2022-23 were with internal adopters (compared to 4 out of 13 in 2021-22 and 1 out of 7 in 2020-21) as well as a sibling group of 3 placed with a single BCT approved adopter compared to no sibling groups of 3 placed internally in the previous two years.

Our goal is to continue to increase adopter approvals in 2023-2024 to achieve a higher number of children placed with BCT approved adopters, the majority of which live in this great city. In 2022-23, 56% of children were placed with internal adopters which was an increase of 4% compared to the previous year.

We trust and believe in our BCT approved adopters and aim to keep Birmingham’s children in their city wherever possible.



***Adopter Recruitment Timeliness (Application to Approval for the 48 families approved in 2022-23):***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Average length of time to complete stage** | | | **% within timescales** | | |
| **Stage** | ***2020-21*** | ***2021-22*** | ***2022-23*** | ***2020-21*** | ***2021-22*** | ***2022-23*** |
| 1 (8-week target) | 16 weeks | 17 weeks\* | 18 weeks\*\* | 9% | 12%\* | 5%\*\* |
| 2 (4-month target) | 5 months | 5 months | 5 months | 36% | 33% | 42% |
| 1+2 (6-month target) | 8 months | 9 months | 9 months | 32% | 25% | 21% |

\*3 families (all repeat adopters) without a Stage 1 end date; therefore, not included in Stage 1 timeliness calculation.

\*\*7 families (4 repeat adopters and 3 foster carers wanting to adopt) were fast-tracked; therefore, not included in Stage 1 timeliness calculation.

The table above shows that the average time to complete stage 1 for the 48 adopters approved in 2022-23 was 18 weeks: an increase on both 2020-21 and 2021-22 average timeliness. Medicals and DBS checks continue to inhibit timely completion of stage 1 for applicants. 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.

DBS signatory and verification processes are now available within the Trust HR department meaning timeliness will improve significantly.

The average timeliness of stage 2 completion remains consistent at 5 months over the last three years; however, 42% of approved adopters were within the 4-month target for stage 2 which is improved performance compared to the previous two years. It is generally stage 1 timeliness that determines whether an approved adopter meets the 6-month target from application to approval. For approved adopters in 2022-23, 21% met the 6-month target compared to 25% in 2021-22 and 32% in 2020-21. This is almost on par with the 23% of adoptive families approved across all local authorities, regional adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies in England who were approved within 6 months of registration, from the most recently published ASG statistics for Q3 2022-23.

## Matches

93 recommendations for matches were presented to panel in 22-23 (an increase of 8 compared to last year), of which 91 were approved by the ADM in 22-23, 2 were approved by the ADM in April 2023 and there were 3 additional matches recommended to panel in March 2022 that were approved by the ADM in 22-23, bringing the total to 94 matches in the year.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Financial Year** | **Matches Approved** | **% Matched Within 6 Months of Plan** | **LAC date to Match Date (average days)** | **Age at Match** | **Gender** | **Disability** | **Sibling Groups** |
| **2020-21** | 74 | 24% | 610 | 0-2 years – 58  3-4 years – 6  5+ years – 10  **Average** – 2 years old | Female – 33  Male – 41 | Yes – 2  No – 72 | Single – 60  Group of 2 –7  Group of 3 - 0 |
| **2021-22** | 84 | 30% | 560 | 0-2 years – 68  3-4 years – 12  5+ years – 4  **Average** – 2 years old | Female – 48  Male – 36 | Yes – 1  No – 83 | Single – 58  Group of 2 –13  Group of 3 - 0 |
| **2022-23** | 94 | 30% | 638 | 0-2 years – 69  3-4 years – 17  5+ years – 8  **Average** – 2 years old | Female – 44  Male – 50 | Yes – 0  No – 94 | Single – 67  Group of 2 – 12  Group of 3 – 1 |

The number of matches approved has increased by 10 in this period. The percentage of children matched within 6 months of their adoption plans has improved from 24% in 20-21 to 30% in both 2021-22 and 2022-23. This is an indicator heavily influenced by the time taken between adoption plan approval and a placement order being granted: the average for matches in 2022-23 was 96 days (3 months). BCT is also aware that panel availability can, at times, cause delays in hearing matches in a timely manner. This is being addressed with additional panels each month.

BCT is wholly ambitious for children. 57% of children matched in 2022-23 can be defined as harder to place (priority groups) compared to 64% in 21-22 and 45% in 20-21. The average number of days between children entering care and being matched for adoption has increased from 21-22 and is also higher compared with performance in 2020-21. The average timeliness from children entering care to adoption plan approval is continuing to increase, predominantly because of lengthy parenting assessments and viability assessments of family members, which will be impacting the average timeliness from entering care to match.

With regards to the demographics of children matched, a noticeable difference is the number of children matched aged 3-4 years and 5 years and over across the three years. In 2022-23, 25 children were aged 3 and over (27%) compared to 16 (19%) in 2021-22 and 16 (22%) in 2020-21. 13 of the 25 children in ‘2022-23 were part of sibling groups in addition to 3 children being matched to their foster carers. A higher proportion of older children matched in 2022-23 does correlate with 33% of children with adoption plans approved in 2021-22 were aged 2 and over. There has been an increase of 14 males matched from 2021-22 to 2022-23 which again correlates with more males with plans approved in 2021-22 and 2022-23.

## Plans for the Adoption of Children

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Financial Year** | **2020-21** | **2021-22** | **2022-23** |
| **Number of Children with Plans Approved** | **89\*** | **115\*\*** | **118** |
| Average days from LAC to Plan Approved | 335 | 334 | 297 |
| Number of plans within 6 weeks of LAC Review | 39 (44%) | 44 (39%) | 81 (67%) |
| Average weeks from LAC Review to Plan Approved | 9 | 12 | 6 |

\*1 child without a LAC Review recorded due to adoption plan approval before coming into care.

\*\*1 child without a LAC Review recorded due to transferring from the care of Wolverhampton LA to Birmingham Children’s Trust at the point of placement order.

We know from national data that the number of adoption plans approved is decreasing whereas this is not the trend in Birmingham. 118 plans for adoption (SHOBPA) were approved in 22-23. Whilst the increase from 2020-21 to 2021-22 was a result of the backlog of cases delayed in courts due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is interesting to see the sustained adoption plan activity into 2022-23. There was 1 relinquished child with an adoption plan approved in the year. One of BCT’s continued objectives is to increase the number of children in care living in family and friend placements or to seek alternative family-based care if living with birth parents is not a safe option. This may result in fewer children having adoption as their permanence plan going forward.

The average timeliness of plans approved following entry to care has decreased compared to performance in the previous two years. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the early alerts tracker family finders use for children entering care. 27 out of 118 children (23%) waited over a year in care before their adoption plans were approved which compares to 30% in 2021-22. 17 out of 27 children who waited over a year can be defined as priority (‘harder to place’) children.

The average weeks between LAC review and adoption plan approval has significantly improved in 2022-23 where we have met the 6-week target. Furthermore, the proportion of children with plans approved within the 6-week target has increased significantly from 39% in 2021-22 to 67% in 2022-23.

## Continued Suitability of Adopters

There were no adoptive families in the year recommended to panel as no longer suitable to adopt.

3 approved adopters made the decision to withdraw during the year. The reasons can be categorised as follows:

* Placement disruption
* Unexpected pregnancy
* No longer wish to pursue adoption

## Disruptions

A sibling group of 2 experienced a placement disruption in 22-23. The children had unfortunately experienced disruption in a fostering placement shortly before moving to their adoptive placement involving several emergency foster carer moves, coupled with their early experiences of trauma. Significant support was provided by family finding but the adopters felt they could not manage the complex needs of the older child. The disruption was subject to a detailed disruption meeting, chaired by an independent expert and has been used as the basis for extensive learning and practice improvements. Family finding has resumed for the children.

# A note about Adoption Panel

Birmingham Children’s Trust disaggregated adoption and fostering panels in January 2022. The central list, including panel members and panel chair remained the same. Most panel members have experience across both fostering and adoption which provides the Agency access to over 20 panel members. Demand in the last year supports the increase in frequency of Adoption panels and so the agency moved to 3 panels per month in September 2022.

We recruited three new permanent panel chairs across fostering and adoption thereby refreshing our existing cohort. One is full time Adoption Chair, one full time Fostering chair, and one ‘floating’ across both panels.

Booking forms and respective diary spreadsheets enable cancellations and effective use of spaces on panel to promote effective use of panel resources. These have also recently been updated to ensure that information is more efficiently available and cancellations/panel availability is clear.

# The Function of Panel

Panels make adoption recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) in respect of:

* Whether prospective carers should be recommended as suitable to adopt,
* Whether children should be matched with specific adopters, where their permanency plan is for adoption,
* Whether a relinquished child should be placed for adoption,
* Whether an approved adopter continues to be suitable to adopt where a match has not been made in the 12 months post approval or where there is a significant change in their circumstances (annual review).

# IRM

When a Qualifying Determination (QD) is made by the ADM following a negative recommendation from Panel, the applicants have the following options:

* To accept the QD;
* To appeal to the ADM with additional information; or
* To appeal to the IRM to hear their application.

In this period there have been no negative recommendations or cases where Panel had to consider that approved adopters are no longer suitable to adopt and therefore no applicants have made an application to the IRM (Independent Reviewing Mechanism).

# Quality Assurance

**External**

The Agency was subject to a full Ofsted inspection under the Social Care Inspection Framework (SCIF) across October and November 2022. The agency was judged to be overall **GOOD**, with outstanding leadership and management.

The full report can be accessed here: [50206868 (ofsted.gov.uk)](https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50206868) and in summary some points of note at listed below:

* Leaders and managers prioritise the safety and well-being of children. There are clear policies and procedures that underpin staff and adoptive parent training. This ensures that children feel protected and are protected from harm. Adoptive parents and staff feel listened to and that their concerns are taken seriously and responded to appropriately.
* Managers and staff respond quickly and appropriately to child protection concerns.
* Adoptive parents feel the response from the agency at the point of enquiry is timely. They feel welcomed and are provided with clear information about the assessment and adoption process. This results in them recommending the agency to other prospective adoptive parents.
* The agency’s management team is innovative and inspirational. There is a strong focus on the development of the service, improving the quality of staff practice, increasing the number of adoptive parents, and meeting the assessed needs of children.
* The management team has a clear understanding of the benefits of effective partnership work on improving outcomes for children. For example, the adoption agency is taking an active role in influencing early permanence planning for children in Birmingham.
* The adoption panel provides an effective quality assurance function, while being welcoming but appropriately challenging to the applicants attending panel. Panel members have a range of experience and professional backgrounds.
* The agency’s managers have ensured that the two recommendations from the previous inspection have been met.

One recommendation was made by the inspection team regarding the agency’s Statement of Purpose – this has been accepted, actioned, and approved. The regulator has been informed.

Furthermore, the Agency was re-inspected as part of the Trust ILACS inspection in February/March 2023 and received mention in the full report which can be accessed here: [50214110 (ofsted.gov.uk)](https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50214110).

**Internal**

Routine audit, feedback, and sampling activity feed into the Trust audit reports and the quarterly and annual Adoption Service Surveys led by the Research and Quality Assurance Specialist from our Practice Hub.

Director’s Performance and Challenge meetings are held monthly on a theme, and quarterly on overall performance to date.

Disruption meetings are chaired independently, and learning is discussed by managers and service wide (e.g., in monthly lunchtime seminars) used to inform and develop practice in an appreciative way.

Summarising: in all areas of internal quality assurance activity the agency continues to deliver high quality most of the time. Where performance falls below expectations, swift remedy is applied to rectify practice and ensure children do not experience poor service.

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# Training & Development

The Agency achieved DDP Accredited Partner status in March 2023 and is now one of two governmental adoption agencies with such a prestigious affiliation. Adoption staff are trained to level 1 in Dyadic Development Psychotherapy (DDP) which is a requirement of Partner status.

Routine Inclusion, Equality, and Diversity training continues as a core offer to staff, and the Agency has been selected to join a DfE funded research programme which aims to improve and encourage the uptake and availability of trans racial placements (AfDiT - Anti-racist Framework for Decision-making and Transitioning Children from Minoritised Racial and Ethnic Groups into Transracial Adoptive Families).

A panel member mandatory training plan is in action to ensure that panel members have regular safeguarding training as a minimum and additional development opportunities for panel members including a wellbeing workshop, professional curiosity training and, meeting the needs of cross-cultural placements.

The staff training offer at Birmingham Children’s Trust is extensive and comprehensive. Led by the Practice Hub, the hybrid offer consists of both mandatory and voluntary training courses which are easily accessible to staff at point of need. All mandatory training for year 22-23 was completed by Agency staff.

In addition, as a member of the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA) staff have regular access to newsletter updates (weekly) and a monthly training offer pertaining to adoption specific matters.

Prospective adopters continue to receive comprehensive preparation and post approval training (which was highly commended in the recent inspection). A non-exhaustive list of the offer below:

* 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 about Telling About Adoption.



# Adoption Agency Performance

## Number of Children Awaiting Adoptive Placement

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Financial Year** | **2020-21** | **2021-22** | **2022-23** |
| Number of Children Awaiting Placement | 96 | 96 | 119 |
| Number of Children Awaiting Placement with PO | 44 | 53 | 78 |
| Plan Date to 31st March (Average Days) | 329 | 233 | 287 |

The number of children awaiting placement as of 31st March 2023 has increased by 24% from 20-21 and 21-22. Unfortunately, this figure is being skewed by 14 children we are aware of who are due a reversal of their adoption plans. The increase in the number of adoption plans approved from 20-21 to 21-22 and 22-23 will also have contributed to higher figure of children waiting. Furthermore, of the 119 children waiting, 12 were matched awaiting their adoptive placement move, owing to the 18 matches approved in March 2023.

The average number of days from the date of the adoption plan to 31st March has increased by 54 days in 22-23 from 21-22. Again, this will be skewed by the aforementioned reversals due (the average is 240 days when these are removed). 31 out of 119 children (26%) have been waiting over a year since their adoption plans, of which 9 are awaiting reversals of adoption plans, 4 are matched and 6 have matches booked into panel.

In direct response to this ongoing issue, the completion of reversals is now the responsibility of the Adoption Head of Service and as such will not skew timeliness figures from year 23-24 onward.

## Number of Children Matched and Placed

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Financial Year** | **2020-21** | **2021-22** | **2022-23** |
| **Number of Children Matched** | **75** | **84** | **94** |
| **Number of Children Placed** | **75** | **83** | **85** |
| Placed Internally | 33 (44%) | 43 (52%) | 48 (56%) |
| Placed Within 12 Months of Plan | 47 (63%) | 70 (84%) | 71 (84%) |
| Average A1 Timeliness (Days) | 672 | 575 | 668 |
| % over DfE LAC to Placed Threshold of 426 days | 61 (81%) | 62 (75%) | 57 (67%) |

The number of children matched to their adopters in a 12-month period increased by 12% this year and children placed by 2.5%. This is a direct consequence of increased adoption panel frequency and therefore process capacity and will filter through into ‘number of children placed’ figures for year 23-24. For example, in Q1 22-23, 12 children were placed with their adopters, whereas in Q1 of this year the figure is 23 children.

The number of children placed for adoption has increased year-on-year since 20-21, coupled with improved performance in the number and proportion of children placed internally year-on-year which is welcome progress. The timeliness of placements in terms of both the proportion placed within 12 months of their plans and children placed within the DfE’s LAC to placed threshold (A1) of 426 days compares well to the previous two years. 84% of children were placed within 12 months of their plan which is on par with last year and exceeds performance in 20-21 whilst 33% of children were placed within 426 days of coming into care which compares to 25% in 21-22 and 19% in 20-21.

However, the average A1 timeliness for the cohort of children placed in 22-23 has increased by 93 days from 21-22. This is due to 13 children placed who waited over 1000 days from entering care. Furthermore, 3 children are being adopted by their foster carers who spent over 2000 days waiting to be placed. As a result, the need for timelier assessments of foster carers wanting to adopt has been identified as an area for improvement. Six children were part of sibling groups of 2 and the remaining 4 children waited an average of 662 days in care before their adoption plans were approved, accounting for a significant proportion of their A1 timeliness.

**Better for children, better for taxpayers**

New analysis has revealed that at least £4.2 billion in value was generated across England, Wales, and Scotland in 2021 when 3,359 children were adopted – including savings of £3.6 billion to local authorities, £541 million to the economy, and £34 million to the NHS. The modelling, which compared the outcomes of children who were adopted with those in other permanent placements found that the value created for adopted children, families and society is at least £1.3million for every child adopted.

Diagram

Description automatically generated

The analysis by Sonnet Advisory & Impact, shows that this value is created through two key channels: the improved outcomes adoption offers relative to staying in care or living in special guardianship placements, and the lower financial cost to local authorities of adoption compared to foster and residential homes.

According to the available evidence, adopted children and young people have enhanced outcomes across health, education and future employment compared to other placements, decreasing reliance on publicly funded services and support in childhood and later life. Additionally, most adoptive parents do not receive financial support from the state, in contrast to foster and residential carers, which adds to the value adoption can bring – when it is in the best interests of the child.

Applying this research to our performance in year 22-23 indicates a suggested saving to the council taxpayer of:

85 x £1,073,022 = £91,206,870 in savings

thereby evidencing the excellent return on investment adoption offers. Pls note: the figures are not definitive but do provide an indication of value.

## Number of Adoption Orders

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Financial Year** | **2020-21** | **2021-22** | **2022-23** |
| **Number of Children** | **70** | **74** | **75** |
| % adopted from care | 12% | 12% | 12% |
| Internal Adoptions | 34 (49%) | 38 (52%) | 40 (53%) |
| Priority Children (‘Harder to Place’) | 38 (54%) | 38 (52%) | 46 (61%) |
| Average A1 Timeliness (Days) | 524 | 627 | 633 |
| % over DfE LAC to Placed Threshold of 426 days | 40 (57%) | 56 (76%) | 58 (77%) |

BCT had the highest number of adoption orders granted nationally in 20-21 as well as the second highest in 21-22.

There were 75 adoption orders granted in 22-23 which means a small year-on-year increase has occurred since 20-21. There were 4 foster carer adoptions and 6 children who had been placed for EP prior to their adoptive placements in 22-23. As of 31st March 2023, there were 84 children in an adoptive placement awaiting an adoption order; therefore, it is expected that the number of adoptions orders granted across the last three years will be sustained in 23-24.

The proportion of internal adoptions has increased year-on-year since 20-21 which is encouraging. Eight more priority children were adopted in year 22-23 compared to the previous two years, evidencing our continued ambitions for placing children with so called harder to place characteristics (34 children had 1 characteristic, 10 children had 2 characteristics and 2 children had 3 characteristics).

The average A1 days from entering care to being placed for adoption for children adopted has increased year-on-year since 20-21. As previously discussed in this report, timeliness within care proceedings is often impacted by exploration of a child’s wider family network via connected persons assessments or myriad assessments of birth parents before a single-track plan of adoption is agreed.

The Agency Head of Service and the Head of BCT Legal are contributing to national level discussions and consultations with DfE and the Family Court President’s office which seeks to shorten care proceedings through legislative and regulatory change.

## Reversals of Adoption Plans

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Financial Year** | **Number of Reversals** |
| 2020-21 | 26 |
| 2021-22 | 28 |
| 2022-23 | 7 |

There were 7 reversal decisions of adoption plans in 22-23 which is a significant decrease from the previous two years; however, a project was undertaken to expedite legacy reversals in 20-21 and 21-22.

The table below displays the average months a child was in care with a plan of adoption before it was reversed (split by reversal reason for the 7 reversals in the period).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Reversal Reason** | **No. of Reversals** | **Average months with an adoption plan before reversal** |
| RD1 – Child’s needs changed subsequently to the plan | 1 | 5 months |
| RD2 - The court did not make a placement order | - | - |
| RD3 - Prospective adopters could not be found | 3 | 41 months |
| RD4 - Any other reason | 3 | 3 months |

The subsequent care plans for the 7 children following the reversal can be split as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Reversal Reason** | **Type of Plan** | **Number of Children** |
| RD1 | Long-Term Fostering | 1 |
| RD3 | Long-Term Fostering | 3 (including 1 sibling group of 2) |
| RD4 | Returned to Birth Parents | 3 (including 1 sibling group of 2) |

## Adoption Scorecard

There are 3 main timeliness indicators pertinent to adoption performance:

**(A10) Average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with his/her adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted.**

*National 3-year average: 367 days*

*Statistical neighbour 3-year average: 383 days*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Financial Year** | **A10 3-year average (days)** |
| 20-21 | 453 |
| 21-22 | 508 |
| 22-23 | 542 |

For children adopted during 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2023, the average number of days between entering care and being placed, adjusted for foster carer adoptions was 542 days, an increase of 34 days from the 21-22 3-year average. The following table displays the average days spent at each stage of the adoption journey between entering care and placement for the adoption order cohorts in the last three years:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Financial Year** | **Number of Adoption Orders** | **Av. Days Care Entry to Adoption Plan** | **AV. Days Adoption Plan to PO** | **Av. Days PO to Match** | **Av. Days Match to Placement** |
| 20-21 | 70 | 243 | 66 | 196 | 29 |
| 21-22 | 74 | 246 | 79 | 279 | 30 |
| 22-23 | 75 | 280 | 97 | 231 | 32 |

The table clearly evidences the increased time children are spending in proceedings before their adoption plans are approved and placement orders are granted; thus, negatively impacting the A10 average.

There were 15 foster carer adoptions in the 3-year period up to 31st March 2023 (6 in 20-21, 5 in 21-22 and 4 in 22-23), of which 6 moved in with their foster carers within a week of entering care. An additional 10 children were adopted in the three-year period following early permanence placements.

**(A2) Average time (in days) between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family.**

*National 3-year average: 175 days*

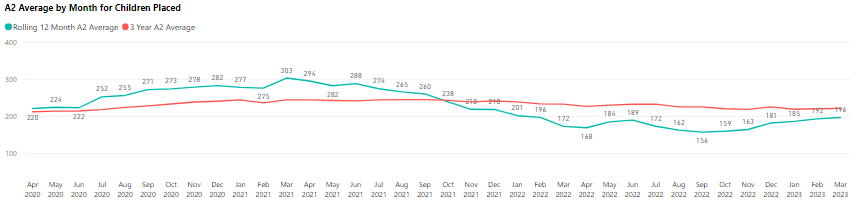
*Statistical neighbour 3-year average: 202 days*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Financial Year** | **A2 3-year average (days)** |
| 20-21 | 199 |
| 21-22 | 232 |
| 22-23 | 237 |

For children adopted during 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2023, the average number of days between a placement order and being matched for adoption was 237 days, an increase of 5 days from 21-22 and 33 days from 20-21. 46 out of 75 children (61%) adopted in 22-23 have been priority cases and therefore tend to have longer waits for matches and an A2 average of 285 days compared to an average of 142 days for the 29 children with no ‘hard to place’ characteristics.

The rolling 12-month average (in year) comparison shows movement in the right direction as of 31st March 2023 was 231 days compared to 279 days as of 31st March 2022 – a decrease of 48 days or nearly 7 weeks. Extra adoption matching panels continuing into 23-24 will further reduce waiting times for children.

Here is displayed the A2 performance for all placements since April 2020. There was a month-on-month decrease in the rolling 12-month A2 average for children placed between June 2021 and April 2022. Additionally, 24 children currently in an adoptive placement who were placed between July 2022 and September 2022, have an A2 average of 107 days; therefore, they will positively contribute to the rolling 12-month and 3-year averages once they have been adopted.



**(A20) Average time (in days) between a child entering care and a local authority receiving court authority to place a child, for children who have been adopted.**

*National 3-year average: 256 days*

*Statistical neighbour 3-year average: 303 days*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Financial Year** | **A20 3-year average (days)** |
| 20-21 | 304 |
| 21-22 | 308 |
| 22-23 | 344 |

In the 3-year period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2023 the average number of days between a child entering care and the court granting a placement order was 344 days which is a year-on-year increase since 20-21. This metric has been adversely impacted by court delays because of Covid-19 and the average length of care proceedings stretching beyond 45 weeks.

***Andy Logie,***

***RAA Lead Officer and Head of Service,***

***June 2023.***



**Appendices as embedded documents:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Appendix Number** | **Appendix Description** | **Embedded Document** |
|  |  |  |
| **1** | Adopter Approval Data |  |
| **2** | Children Matched Data |  |
| **3** | Adoption Plans Data |  |
| **4** | Panel Report |  |
| **5** | Children Waiting Data |  |
| **6** | Children Placed Data |  |
| **7** | Adoption Orders Data |  |
| **8** | Reversal of Adoption Plans Data |  |