



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Cabinet
November 2021

<u>Item</u>
<u>Public</u>

## **Shropshire Council Annual Adoption Report 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 and Together 4 Children Annual Adoption Report 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021**

**Responsible  
Officer**

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### **1. Synopsis**

This report provides an overview of the activity, data and performance of Shropshire Adoption activity as part of our Regional Adoption Agency Together 4 Children (T4C) from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. This report is for information and no decisions are required.

### **2. Executive Summary**

Adoption is a regulated activity provided by either a Local Authority or a Voluntary Adoption Agency. The service is regulated under The Children Act 1989 & 2004; The Adoption and Children act 2014 and Adoption Agency Regulations 2005.

All Local Authorities are legally required to work under the auspices of a Regional Adoption Agency. T4C Regional Adoption Agency went live on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020. T4C is a partnership between Shropshire Council, Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Telford & Wrekin Council. We are working together to improve outcomes for those children who enter care and are not able to return to their birth parents.

The vision of the partnership is to ensure that our children achieve emotional, physical, and legal permanence; growing up in loving homes with adults who provide them with a strong sense of security, continuity, commitment, and identity.

Covid 19 has impacted on the delivery of statutory adoption functions. Although this is reflected in some of the performance data for 2020-2021, the impact of this is most likely to be felt in the reporting period 2021-2022 given the impact Covid has had on those children in the adoption process at that time. Those children in the cohort of 2020-2021, will have already been through several statutory processes' pre-pandemic and it may only

be the latter part of their adoption journey that has experienced some delay.

The flexibilities contained in 'The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) Amendment Regulations 2020' have been fully utilised to ensure the continuation of statutory services.

Whilst there have been some challenges in the first year of operation, the partnership has worked hard on embedding key practice initiatives, aligning statutory requirements and working together successfully with the challenges of Covid and virtual working. There is clearly a lot more work to be undertaken with a clear focus on driving performance in all areas and incorporating the wider permanency agenda in the future.

### **3. Recommendations**

3.1 Cabinet is requested to consider the information in this report and confirm its support for the work of T4C Regional Adoption Agency as set out in the Annual Report in fulfilling the Council's statutory and regulatory requirements.

## **REPORT**

### **4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

#### 4.1 Risk Management

When a decision is made that a child is unable to be safely cared for in their birth and the plan is for adoption, it is the responsibility of the Local Authority to achieve this without delay. It is imperative there is sufficient focus on the development of statutory adoption services and for this to be as part of a Regional Adoption Agency. There is a risk of Shropshire not being statutory compliant if we were not part of a Regional Adoption Agency.

#### 4.2 Human Rights

Children have a right to be safe and to feel safe. If this can't be achieved within their birth family and there is a care plan of adoption, as a local authority and statutory body, we need to ensure we safeguard children through the provision of high-quality adoption placements.

#### 4.3 Equalities

Those applying to adopt should expect to receive a high-quality inclusive service. It is imperative the partnership offers all prospective adopters, including Shropshire residents a fair and equitable service; it is the responsibility of all partners to monitor service delivery.

#### 4.4 Community

Children with a plan of adoption should have the opportunity to remain within a community setting, whilst it is possible to place Shropshire children with adopters living in Shropshire, having access to a wider pool of adopters enables us to place children further afield in partner community settings.

#### 4.5 Consultation

T4C consults with adopters through an adopter advisory group facilitated by Adoption UK. This enables us to consult on new approaches to service delivery. In addition to this, adopter feedback is sought at every point of the adoption process.

### **5. Financial Implications**

There are no new financial considerations contained in the report. T4C has a pooled budget which is closely monitored by service leads and finance business partner.

### **6. Climate Change Appraisal**

Not applicable

### **7. Background**

#### 7.1 Remit of Together 4 Children (T4C)

T4C is responsible for the delivery of statutory adoption functions on behalf of the four member authorities as a delegated responsibility through a hub and spoke approach. There is a robust governance structure in place with one Head of Service post responsible for overall delivery. The statutory decision making for children remains the responsibility of the individual Local Authority.

T4C central hub has responsibility for adopter recruitment, training and assessment, management of adoption panels and family finding for children. The provision of adoption support currently remains in the locality hub, although joint activity does happen and there is movement towards a pooling of these resources.

#### 7.2 Service Growth and key performance data

There has been a significant increase this year in the number of Shropshire children referred to the adoption service, 61 compared to 29 the previous year. From this number, 26 children have had an Agency Decision to confirm their plan of adoption compared to 23 the previous year. 13 Shropshire children have been placed for adoption, one of whom was an early permanence placement and 8 children have been adopted.

The service is currently family finding for 12 Shropshire children.

Adoption performance is measured through key performance indicators from the Department of Education. They are measured over a 3-year period. Covid has impacted on performance with some delays for children being placed, some delays in care proceedings and some delays in the completion of adoption cases in the court.

A10 measures number of days from entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. National average is 376 days, Shropshire has performed well in this year with the average number of days being 319. However, we are likely to see a dip in next years data as the 2020-21 figures are alongside good timeliness figures for 2017-2020.

A2 measures time between Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and the decision for a match with an identified family. National average is 178 days. Shropshire performed at 116 days, which is lower than the national average. However, current data is indicating we are currently performing at 175 days, this is due to the impact of Covid and the very complex needs of some children which impacts on the overall average.

The service has sadly had one adoption disruption this year.

The service has approved 33 adopter households, which is an increase of 6 on last years data.

### 7.3 Future Service Developments

Whilst the recruitment of adopters has proved successful, there is a need to support adopters to consider a wider pool of children and in particular our priority children. There is also a need to support more adopters to consider early permanence placements.

There has been some growth in the capacity for adoption panels, this was needed so that children's matches with adopters could be given equal priority to adoption applications. This needs to remain under review to ensure there is sufficient capacity.

Further work is needed on our alignment of adoption support and how we can utilise the skills within the wider geographical footprint to support more families.

Further work is needed on joining up services to address the wider permanency agenda and to extend Together 4 Children to include Special Guardianship Support.

## **8. Additional Information**

There is no additional information to be considered.

## 9. Conclusions

- 9.1. No decision is required from Cabinet, but it is requested that the information is noted

<p><b>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</b></p>
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<p>N/A</p>
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<p><b>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</b></p>
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<p>Kirstie Hurst-Knight</p>
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<p><b>Local Member</b></p>
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<p>All members</p>
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<p><b>Appendices</b></p>
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<p>[Please list the titles of Appendices and provide a link to the Sharepoint site where the document is located]</p>
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. T4C Annual Adoption Report 2020-21</li><li>2. Shropshire Annual Report 2020-2021</li><li>3. T4C Annual Report Performance Briefing June 2021</li></ol> |
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