

## Together4Children Annual Report 2020-2021 - Performance Summary Briefing

### Performance against Key Indicators (A2 & A10)

1. During 2020-2021 the Covid 19 pandemic has had a significant impact on children's services and other critical areas (e.g. Family Courts). This, in turn, has contributed to some significant performance challenges for Adoption Services, which from 28 September 2020 were fully delivered through the Together4Children Partnership.
2. There have been widely reported challenges and impacts on the children's system throughout the year, which will have created delay for some of the children for whom we have been working to achieve permanency. These factors include:
  - Significant delay in Care Proceedings for children caused by capacity issues in the Family Courts.
  - Delays in Care Planning for children created by, for example, extended timescale for specialist assessments due to lockdown restrictions.
  - Delays in being able to place children in their new families due to restrictions and practice issues – especially during the initial national lockdown period.
  - Impacts on the children's workforce (increased sickness absence and practical barriers to undertaking work) and the need to prioritise activity (especially during the initial phases of the pandemic).
3. These factors combined will have had some impact on the 2 key National Performance Indicators which are reported by adoption Services across England. However, because these indicators only report against children for whom an Adoption Order was granted in 2020-21, it mainly represents activity from the preceding year and early part of 2020 (this is the reason why adoption activity tends to be measured across a 3 year average).
4. It is likely that further impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic will be seen in the performance returns for 2021-2022, given that the journeys of children who are adopted from April 2021 will have been impacted by the factors in 2. above.
5. **A10:** This is a national performance indicator which measures the average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (adjusted for foster carer adoptions). A10 is a measure of 'children's system' activity including the time taken for care proceedings to conclude as well as activity undertaken once the court has given authority for a child to be placed for adoption.

All partner councils have experienced a drop in performance against A10 during 2020-2021 and it is likely that factors above will have impacted on the timeliness for some children.

6. **A2:** Measures the average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child (Placement Order) and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family.

3 of 4 Partner Council's have experienced a drop in performance against A2. This will reflect some impacts from the early stages of the Covid 19 pandemic, such as:

- Disruption to Adoption Panels in the earlier part of 2020
  - General practice issues for social work practitioners created by lockdown restrictions.
  - The loss of key activities which support family finding such as national activity days and exchange events during the year.
7. A further significant factor which will have impacted on A2 performance (and therefore A10 performance) relates to the characteristics of the 103 children who were adopted in the reporting period.

Of these children:

- 23 were aged 5+
- 11 were from ethnic minorities
- 28 were in sibling groups placed together

We know from national data that children with these characteristics wait the longest, because it is harder for us to find the right families to meet their needs.

In all, 47% of all the children adopted in the reporting period had what has been referred to as 'harder to place' characteristics. Whilst we are concerned about the time it has taken to find families for some of our children, achieving adoption for these children is a very positive outcome.

8. We are awaiting publication of national data for 2020-2021 to compare and benchmark the impact that we have experienced with the adoption sector nationally.

### **Actions to Improve Performance**

9. Family finding activity was regionalised within Together4Children from October 2020. Since this time a range of actions have been undertaken to improve the timeliness of matching and placing children with their adoptive families.
10. During 2020-21 we have recruited, assessed, and approved significantly more prospective adopters (102) than in previous years. Our approved adopters are available for any child across the region meaning that we have a better chance of finding families who meet the needs of our children quickly, within our own region.
11. We are promoting Early Permanence (EP) with prospective adopters and increasing the numbers of households able to offer early permanence to a child. We are working across the system in partner Council's to promote increased consideration and use of EP.
12. We are reallocating resources and developing regional practice to ensure that we focus on achieving permanence for those children who have waited, or are likely to wait, the longest.
13. We are embedding the 'LinkMaker' tool within regional and pan-regional

family finding practice. This enables our practitioners to access information about all our children waiting and our approved adopters, as well as approved adopters from other Midland's Regional Adoption Agencies and Voluntary Adoption Agencies – improving the likelihood of finding families for our children.

14. We are identifying children earlier where we may not have a potential family within region who are able to meet their needs and taking swift action to gain approval for widening our family finding activity to consider inter-agency adopters.

**Together4Children Senior Leadership Team**  
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