

**Together4Children Annual Adoption Report
Part 2 – Partner LA Additional Annual Report Information.**

Name of Local Authority Partner: Shropshire Council

This section of the report sets out the activity and performance of the adoption agency in relation to Shropshire Council's children who had a plan of adoption during 2021-2022 and those who were adopted within the longer-term Adoption Scorecard Indicators (2019-2022).

Children	19/20	20/21	21/22
No. of Children for whom an ADM Decision (Plan of Adoption) was made	21	26	28
No. of children Placed for Adoption	12	13	20
No. of Children for whom an Adoption Order was granted	7	8	12

The numbers of Shropshire children in need of adoption have been rising over the last three reporting years as can be seen in the data. This year there have been significantly higher numbers of Shropshire children placed for adoption.

Out of the **20** children that were placed for adoption during this year **16** were placed with a sibling. Of these children there have been:

6 sibling groups of **2** children

1 sibling group of **3** children

1 child placed for adoption has had his younger sister placed with the same adopters under early permanence.

The other **4** children have been placed in solo placements

This year has seen higher numbers of Shropshire children with an adoption order granted in the year. There continues to be some impact of the covid pandemic on the courts as timescales for adoption orders are taking longer than previously while the courts catch up with the backlog of adoption orders that did not go ahead during the pandemic when the courts were closed. There are still 19 Shropshire children placed and waiting for adoption orders.

2.1 Children Placed and Timescales

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 stresses the importance of permanency planning, reducing delay in decision making, and securing better outcomes for children through the timely planning of a permanent placement secured by a legal order.

The below table shows Shropshire Council's performance for children's timescales in 2021 - 2022 compared to the previous 3 years outturns (where comparative data is available).

Children with Adoption Order Granted (Score Card Indicators)	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
A10. Average days from entering care to adoptive placement (adjusted for children adopted by their foster family)	273	253	410	406
A2. Average days from placement order to matching	41	107	156	199

A10 shows the timeliness where the time for children who are adopted by their foster family are stopped at the date the child moved in with the foster family.

A2 shows the average length of time between the local authority obtaining the legal order to place a child for adoption (Placement Order) and formally deciding on a match with an adoptive family for that child.

The Adoption Scorecard and ASGLB quarterly return uses performance data to evidence how swiftly Local Authorities implement adoption plans for children. It compares Shropshire Council with our statistical neighbours and England as a whole and is best looked at over a year three-year rolling average. The annual figures above show us that there has been an improvement in timeliness for Shropshire children in the A10 figure for the last 12 months. The 3 year rolling average figure for 2019-2022 is 345 days. The England average figure is not yet available.

The annual A2 figure in the table above shows that there has been a significant increase during the last 2 years in the average time it takes to place a child for adoption once we have the legal order in place to do so. The figure over the 3 year rolling period of 2019-2022 is 145 days. The England average figure is not yet available.

The reasons for there being a longer time to place a child with their adopters are an indication of the higher numbers of children in need of an adoptive family than previously and indicates the ambitions of Shropshire Council to make adoption a viable permanency option for more children. There were some children last year who had waited for significant periods of time for an adoptive family to be identified for them. These children were deemed 'harder to place' because of being in large sibling groups, their ages and/ or having complex needs. These children have, during this year, either been moved to adoptive placements or had their plans changed. One child has been waiting for a significant period he is a child with very complex needs.

Two children have experienced a delay in being formally placed for adoption as their foster carers came forward to adopt them after the placement order had been granted, they were initially going to apply for Special Guardianship Orders for the children but later decided to adopt them. This then required the foster carers to be assessed and approved as adopters and then matched at panel. The date that the Agency Decision Maker decides that the match is suitable then becomes the adoption placement date. Although these children's journey to adoption has been extended and this is reflected in the A2 data there are numerous benefits for children

who remain with their foster carer as their adopter because there will be less moves for these children who already have an attachment to their primary carers. Foster carers have a legal right to apply to adopt a child if they have been in their care continuously for 12 months.

There is also a longer time to wait to get a match onto panel than in previous years this is currently on average around 4 months and waiting for the ADM decision now takes longer than previously due to the complexities of being part of a Regionalised adoption agency.

2.2 Children Waiting for Adoption

There were 13 Shropshire children at the end of Q4 2021/22 with a placement order who had not yet moved into a prospective adoptive home.

2.2a Children with PO not yet Placed	
Children matched awaiting move	1
Children Linked (not FC or sibling's adopter)	7
Linked to Foster Carer	4
Linked to sibling's adopters	0
Active Family Finding – Regional Family Finding	0
Active Family Finding – National Family Finding	1

2.2b Children for whom we are actively Family Finding	
No. of single children	9
No. of children who are part of a sibling group	0
Total	9

2.2c Children for whom we are actively Family Finding	
No. of white British children	8
No. of children from ethnic minority backgrounds	1
Total	9

As can be seen from the data at the end of March 2022, of the 13 children who had a Placement Order (consent of the court to place for adoption) there was only 1 child who had not yet been either formally matched to an adoptive family or linked. This child has complex needs and we have been family finding for him for about 18 months using both local resources and national. We now have much faster processes when identifying children who may not be able to be placed with T4C approved adopters and at starting to seek adoptive families who have been approved outside of the Together4Children area.

Family finding for children commences as soon as the Suitable for Adoption decision has been made by the Agency Decision Maker (known as the ADM decision) Not all

of these children will receive a Placement Order and their plans will no longer be for adoption and family finding activity will then cease for these children. For the children who do have a Placement Order granted, the majority will usually be linked with a suitable adoptive family by the time a placement order is granted. This however will not be the case for children for whom we must look for an inter-agency adoptive family as these searches cannot happen until a placement order has been obtained unless the court gives consent to family find earlier.

The children who we were actively family finding for at the end of March 2022 were all single children. Most of these children were of white British ethnicity with only 1 child being from an ethnically diverse background.

2.3 Placement Disruptions

It is important to note that placing children who are deemed `harder to place` for adoption comes with a degree of risk. Therefore, it is important to warn against expectations that placement disruptions will never occur. Together4Children are ambitious for our children and will seek to find homes for children with `harder to place` characteristics wherever possible.

Placing older children for adoption, for example, presents a range of challenges which research and experience tells us increases the potential risks of placement disruption.

Fortunately, Shropshire children have not experienced any adoption disruptions this year.

2.4 Children where Plans Changed Away from Adoption.

Plans changed away from adoption (following the Agency Decision) for a total of 15 children in the year 2020-21.

The reasons for the changes in the plans were:

1. Courts did not grant a placement order and so children's plans had to change to long term fostering
2. Some children either stayed with their parents or went to live with birth family members or other connected people
3. Some children will remain with their foster carers under Special Guardianship Order arrangements
4. There was a sibling group of 3 older children who we were not able to find an adoptive family for within the timescale set by the court and their plans had to change to long-term fostering

2.5 Locality Hub Overview & Conclusion

The data over the last 12 months indicates that this has been a busy year for the Joint Shropshire and Telford Locality Permanency hub in which the Assessment and Support Team has continued to strive to find the best placements to meet the needs of Shropshire children in need of adoption. We have undertaken five assessments of prospective adopters that have not been successfully approved. Two of these were foster carer households. Although they haven't been approved, they have still gone through most of the assessment process. Four of these families withdrew in stage 2 and the other family were taken to panel with a recommendation that they were not suitable to be approved as adopters. Panel and the Agency Decision Maker agreed with our recommendation. Our adopter approval rate has been lower this year compared to last year as a result.

There have been challenges in the latter part of the year with staff sickness which have caused delays to some adopter assessments which will have an impact on next year's scorecard data. We also have a member of staff preparing to go off on maternity leave which means restrictions on work that can be allocated.

We have continued to work closely with the permanence coordinator to have a collective understanding of the children in need of adoption and so she understands the profiles of adopters coming through.

The numbers of children that are referred to the service has continued to increase as has the number of Shropshire children placed for adoption and ultimately had adoption orders granted. We have continued to evidence some good work in placing children with prospective adopters the majority of which have been sibling groups which indicates our effectiveness as a team in ensuring that sibling groups are, where they can be, placed together. As Shropshire's children's teams have become more ambitious for adoption for children with more complex needs, we are aware that this is likely to continue to have an impact upon the scorecard data. Each child behind the data has a story and we are aware of each child's story and journey and of the reasons why decisions have been made for each child.

We have maintained our focus on placing children for early permanence and have continued to successfully place children into Fostering for Adoption placements. As a result, there have been 7 Shropshire children placed under early permanence arrangements this year. Placing children with their adopters earlier by placing them under an early permanence arrangement has many benefits for children, it enables attachments to their adopters to form earlier and for some children this can mean less moves and therefore less disrupted attachments. It enables adopters to be part of children's early milestones. Children show a natural curiosity to know about their early milestones and this enables them to have details about them from their adopters which increases children's attachments and sense of belonging.

We have continued to assess foster carers who wish to adopt the children they are already looking after and 4 Shropshire children (2 sibling groups of 2) have been placed for adoption with their foster carers this year. This enables their positive relationships to continue without additional disruptions to children's attachments.

Shropshire Council had an Ofsted inspection in February and the Team had the opportunity to show case the good work that we have done with Shropshire children this year. We have maintained our judgement as good.