

# AGENDA

**Meeting:** Children's Select Committee  
**Place:** Council Chamber - County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN  
**Date:** Thursday 5 September 2024  
**Time:** 10.30 am

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Please direct any enquiries on this Agenda to [max.hirst@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:max.hirst@wiltshire.gov.uk) of Democratic Services, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, direct line 01225718215 or email [max.hirst@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:max.hirst@wiltshire.gov.uk)

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## Membership:

Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman)	Cllr Kelvin Nash
Cllr Jacqui Lay (Vice-Chairman)	Cllr Antonio Piazza
Cllr Helen Belcher OBE	Cllr Mike Sankey
Cllr Mary Champion	Cllr Jo Trigg
Cllr Caroline Corbin	Cllr Mark Verbinnen
Cllr Carole King	Cllr Bridget Wayman
Cllr Kathryn MacDermid	

## Substitutes:

Cllr Trevor Carbin	Cllr Sam Pearce-Kearney
Cllr Daniel Cave	Cllr Ricky Rogers
Cllr Adrian Foster	Cllr Martin Smith
Cllr Johnny Kidney	Cllr Iain Wallis
Cllr Jack Oatley	

## Non-Elected Voting Members:

Dr Mike Thompson	Clifton Diocesan RC Representative
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## Non-Elected Non-Voting Members:

Nikki Barnett	Further Education Representative
John Hawkins	School Teacher Representative

Maisy Humphrey  
Declan Kiely

Children & Young People's Representative  
Children & Young People's Representative -  
Substitute

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## **Public Participation**

Please see the agenda list on following pages for details of deadlines for submission of questions and statements for this meeting.

For extended details on meeting procedure, submission and scope of questions and other matters, please consult [Part 4 of the council's constitution](#).

The full constitution can be found at [this link](#).

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# AGENDA

## PART I

### Items to be considered while the meeting is open to the public

#### Overview and Scrutiny Standard Questions (Pages 9 - 10)

1 **Apologies**

To receive any apologies or substitutions for the meeting.

2 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting (Pages 11 - 18)**

To approve and sign the minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 July 2024.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

To receive any declarations of disclosable interests or dispensations granted by the Standards Committee.

4 **Chairman's Announcements**

To receive any announcements through the Chairman.

5 **Public Participation**

The Council welcomes contributions from members of the public.

#### Statements

If you would like to make a statement at this meeting on any item on this agenda, please register to do so at least 10 minutes prior to the meeting. Up to 3 speakers are permitted to speak for up to 3 minutes each on any agenda item. Please contact the officer named on the front of the agenda for any further clarification.

#### Questions

To receive any questions from members of the public or members of the Council received in accordance with the constitution.

Those wishing to ask questions are required to give notice of any such questions in writing to the officer named on the front of this agenda no later than 5pm on **(4 clear working days, e.g. Wednesday of week before a Wednesday meeting)** in order to be guaranteed of a written response. In order to receive a verbal response questions must be submitted no later than 5pm on **(2 clear working days, eg Friday of week before a Wednesday meeting)**. Please contact the officer named on the front of this agenda for further advice. Questions may be asked without notice if the Chairman decides that the matter is urgent.

Details of any questions received will be circulated to Committee members prior to the meeting and made available at the meeting and on the Council's website.

6 **Alternate Provision (AP) and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2024-2029** (Pages 19 - 36)

The committee are to receive a report on the development of the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy 2024-2029, "Meeting needs together, ambitious for all" and the draft strategy. The strategy will be going to Cabinet on 17 September 2024.

7 **Support for Young Carers** (Pages 37 - 42)

The committee are to consider the attached report providing a briefing on contracted services to support young carers as resolved at Children's Select Committee on 18 July 2024 when the committee received an update on Wiltshire Young Carers.

8 **Children and Young People's Mental Health Support** (Pages 43 - 48)

The committee are to receive an update on the current provision of services for children and young people with mental health needs in Wiltshire and plans for future service design.

9 **Adoption Report** (Pages 49 - 110)

The committee will receive the annual report from Wiltshire Council's Adoption Service which provides a year-end report to the Council in relation to a child's journey to adoption. The annual report is going to Cabinet on 8 October 2024. Attached for information is the Adoption West Annual Report 2023-24, reviewed by the Adoption West Scrutiny Panel on 9 July 2024 and the Scrutiny Panel's own Annual Report, 2022-2024.

10 **Regular updates**

Updates on information valuable for the committee, but unlikely to require a decision.

Members of the committee are therefore invited to indicate in advance of the meeting if they would like further information or have questions on these regular updates, so that relevant officers can be invited to attend the meeting.

10a **Update from Wiltshire Youth Voice Representative** (Pages 111 - 126)

An update including a summary of recent activities of the Wiltshire Youth Union (WYU) and Children in Care Council (CiCC).

10b **DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education** (Pages 127 - 128)

An update on developments relating to children's services arising from the Department for Education.

10c **Safety Valve update**

To receive regular updates from officers on the development of the Safety Valve project, as well as input from the overview and scrutiny representative.

*Report to follow*

10d **Directors' update**

To receive a verbal update from Directors highlighting any key issues (current or emerging), successes or milestones in their respective areas since the last meeting of the committee, which may not require a full agenda item and are not covered elsewhere on this agenda.

This is also an opportunity for matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

10e **Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holders' update**

To receive a verbal update from the Cabinet Member and / or Portfolio Holders highlighting any news, successes or milestones in their respective areas since the last meeting of the committee, which may not require a full agenda item and are not covered elsewhere on this agenda.

This is also an opportunity for matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

10f **Chair's update**

To receive a verbal update from the chair on any work undertaken or news since the last meeting that would not require a full agenda item and would not be suitable under Chairman's Announcements (where no debate is allowed).

This is also an opportunity for matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

10g **Overview and Scrutiny Activities Updates**

The committee will receive updates from active Task Groups, Rapid Scrutiny exercises and the committee's board representatives.

The Adoption West Scrutiny Panel met on 9 July 2024. Their activities are detailed in their annual report (attached with the other adoption reports).

11 **Forward Work Programme** (*Pages 129 - 138*)

The Committee is asked to note the attached documents showing the relevant items from the overview and scrutiny forward work programme and the latest version of the strategy list for the Children, Education and Skills directorate.

A new rapid scrutiny to review the impact of out of county education is being proposed for the committee's consideration.

12 **Date of Next Meeting**

To note that the next scheduled meeting is due to be held on 26 November 2024.

13 **Urgent Items**

Any other items of business which the Chairman agrees to consider as a matter of urgency.

14 **Glossary**

**PART II**

**Items during whose consideration it is recommended that the public should be excluded because of the likelihood that exempt information would be disclosed**

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## Sample Scrutiny Questions

Below are some sample questions for scrutineers to use as a reference and adapt according to the issue or proposal under scrutiny.

Area of Enquiry	Sample Scrutiny Questions
<b>Customers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who will benefit? Is there a demographic breakdown of those eligible for the service?</li> <li>• Has the proposal's impact on different groups been considered?</li> <li>• How has customer experience informed the proposal?</li> <li>• How can service users give feedback or get involved in designing or reviewing the service?</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What evidence of need is there for the actions proposed?</li> <li>• How has the need been identified?</li> </ul>
<b>Link with wider objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the proposal support the delivery of the council's Business Plan or other relevant strategies?</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What assurances can you give that the proposal can be delivered on time / within budget?</li> <li>• Is there a clear action plan for delivery?</li> <li>• What resources are in place to meet the identified need?</li> </ul>
<b>Workforce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What staff development will be needed and how will this be achieved?</li> <li>• How will the staff be recruited and retained?</li> </ul>
<b>Performance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What system is in place to monitor performance?</li> <li>• What are the key performance indicators (KPIs)?</li> <li>• How will performance indicators be used to inform planning and decision-making?</li> </ul>

Area of Enquiry	Sample Scrutiny Questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent is the service meeting the needs of Wiltshire residents?</li> <li>• Is performance improving or dipping?</li> </ul>
<b>Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the expected outcomes of the proposal?</li> <li>• What would success look like?</li> <li>• What would failure look like?</li> <li>• How will you measure the difference the service/change will make?</li> </ul>
<b>Risk Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a framework in place for risk management?</li> <li>• What are the key risks and what actions will mitigate/reduce these risks?</li> <li>• At what point would the risk be unmanageable? Is there an exit strategy?</li> </ul>
<b>Efficiency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will efficiency be measured?</li> <li>• How will processes be reviewed and improvements identified?</li> </ul>
<b>Compliance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will you ensure compliance with regulatory standards?</li> <li>• Do the service standards meet external standards?</li> </ul>
<b>Public awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will you raise awareness of the service/changes proposed?</li> </ul>
<b>Benchmarking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How well does the council perform compared to comparator authorities?</li> <li>• How well do service users do in comparison to those in other areas?</li> </ul>

## Children's Select Committee

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**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 JULY 2024 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.**

**Present:**

Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Mary Champion, Cllr Bridget Wayman, Cllr Caroline Corbin, Cllr Helen Belcher OBE, Cllr Kathryn MacDermid, Dr Mike Thompson, John Hawkins

**Also Present:**

Cllr Laura Mayes, Cllr Iain Blair-Pilling

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61 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from:

Cllr Kelvin Nash  
Cllr Mike Sankey

62 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Cllr Helen Belcher OBE raised that her apologies had not been listed in the previous minutes.

**Resolved**

**To include Cllr Helen Belcher OBE's apologies and approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 6 June 2024, as a true and correct record.**

63 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

64 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chair Announcements.

65 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

66 **Youth Justice Services Inspection Outcome**

The committee received a report which summarises the findings, recommendation and planned actions arising from an inspection from HM Inspectorate of Probation in February 2024.

Kat McJannet introduced and summarised the report which is attached to the agenda.

The following points of clarification were offered from councillor questions:

- The action plan was created soon after the inspection and actions include external training, peer reviewing, and an audit framework being put in place.
- Court disposals, as opposed to an out-of-court disposal, were described as where a crime committed is of a serious enough nature that the court becomes involved and could remain on the young person's record. Court disposals require intervention whereas out-of-court disposals are voluntary.
- It is uncommon for young people who enter the youth justice system to receive a custodial sentence.

## **Resolved**

### **To note the report**

### **To receive a briefing on the work of the Youth Justice Team**

## **67 NHS Dentistry Access and Oral Health Improvement for Children and Young People**

The committee had received a pre-meeting briefing on this item before the meeting and therefore officer provided a short overview of the current provision of NHS dentistry and plans for oral health improvement for children and young people.

The following points of clarification were offered from councillor questions:

- NHS Dentistry workforce figures could be provided in a future meeting.
- NHS England commissioned the toothbrushing scheme and provided guidelines across the country for two years. There are plans to potentially continue the programme afterwards.
- Councillors raised concern at capacity numbers not being readily available. Figures regarding the number of dental practices that are taking new patients would need to be investigated as to whether the data exists to separate places for adults and children, but capacity data would be sought and provided at a future meeting.

- Paragraph 10 – The annual funding for health promotion (£67,000) is secured base funding.
- Paragraph 23 – The £300K underspend will be utilised in the near future.

The importance of providing dental services for children looked after was emphasised by councillors.

**Resolved**

**To note the report.**

**To receive further information on availability of NHS dentistry in Wiltshire to forward to members after the meeting.**

**To receive an update on progress to improve NHS dentistry access and oral health improvements to include the service for looked after children in Jan 2025.**

**To consider whether further scrutiny would add value in building the evidence base to secure further funding in 25/26.**

68 **Wiltshire Young Carers Annual Update**

The committee received an annual update on the Young Carers Service and how the aims of the carers strategy are being delivered.

Netty Lee briefly introduced and summarised the report, strategy and service specifications which were included in the agenda supplement.

The following points of clarification were offered from councillor questions:

- Providing data on educational attainment outcomes would be taken away and considered, as Councillors were keen to understand how being a young carer affects prospects for higher education.
- A timescale for assessment and performance indication to be carried out had been applied.
- A briefing for the Chair and Vice-Chair was urgently requested on the KPIs within an area of the report which showed significant service failures in order to receive clarification.

**Resolved**

**To note the update**

**To receive a Chair's briefing on the commissioned side of the service to include performance data.**

69 **Voice and Participation Service Annual report 2023-2024**

The committee received an annual report outlining the activities, achievements and challenges of the Voice and Participation Service over the past 12 months.

Joe Sutton introduced the report which was attached to the agenda.

The Committee gave its congratulations for the national recognition received and thanked the team for all their hard work.

Councillors commented that it would be beneficial to see how the involvement of young people impacts future action.

**Resolved**

**To note the content of the report and congratulate the team on their work.**

**To request that the impact of the involvement of young people be included in future reports.**

**For the Chair and Vice-Chair to agree with officers how the work of the youth council will link to the select committee's Forward Work Programme.**

70 **Children and Young People Health and Wellbeing Survey**

The committee received a brief verbal update with plans for the survey in the upcoming year.

As part of the verbal update, a PowerPoint slide was shared with the Committee that was attached to the minutes.

**Resolved**

**To note the verbal update**

**To request officers consider including children living in Wiltshire but attending school out of county.**

71 **Regular updates**

**71a School Ofsted Judgements**

The committee received an update including information regarding the most recent Ofsted Inspection reports.

The written report was noted.

**71b DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education**

The committee received an update on developments relating to children's services arising from the Department for Education.

The written report was noted.

72 **Working together to improve school attendance**

The DfE published new non-statutory guidance in May 2022 to help schools, trusts, governing bodies and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance. The guidance applied from September 2022.

This regular update was an opportunity for the committee to be aware of the latest requirements, as set out in the guidance.

The written report was noted.

73 **Schools Forum**

The committee received a very brief update highlighting key items from the last meeting of Schools Forum, to enable the Children's Select Committee to be informed in a timely manner of the work undertaken by the Schools Forum through the year.

Full agendas and minutes for the Schools Forum can be accessed here [Schools Forum | Wiltshire Council](#)

The written update was noted.

**73a Corporate Parenting Panel**

The committee received a very brief update highlighting key items from the last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel, to enable the Children's Select Committee members, as Corporate Parents, to be informed in a timely manner of the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Panel through the year.

The written update was noted.

**73b Safety Valve update**

As agreed by the committee at its extraordinary meeting on 7 December 2023, the committee received a regular update from officers on the development of the Safety Valve project, as well as input from the overview and scrutiny representative.

The Committee raised concerns that the data potentially paints a more positive picture than is actually the case.

The written report was noted.

74 **Directors' update**

Kathryn Davis, Director for Education and Skills, mentioned that the opening of Melksham House had taken place with a community event which had been well attended.

75 **Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holders' update**

Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader of the Council, stated that she had attended the celebration of Wiltshire's first Mockingbird "Constellation", which brings foster carers together to share experiences and advice. Foster parents are also able to assist each other, and the foster children can make friends with each other.

Cllr Mayes also discussed attending a Five to Thrive training session in Devizes.

76 **Chair's update**

The Chair briefly updated the committee on his work with the LGA.

76a **Overview and Scrutiny Activities Updates**

The committee received updates from active Task Groups, Rapid Scrutiny exercises and the committee's board representatives. A report by the Senior Scrutiny Officers which provided an update on Task Group activity since the last meeting is attached.

The Chair notified the committee that the standing task group had met to review the annual Corporate Parenting Plan and a summary of their comments and recommendations including actions taken in response to the suggestions from the task group.

The written update was noted.

77 **Forward Work Programme**

The committee was asked to note the attached documents showing the relevant items from the overview and scrutiny forward work programme.

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

78 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be on 5 September 2024.

79 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

80 **Glossary**



(Duration of meeting: 10.30am – 13.30pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Max Hirst of Democratic Services,  
direct line 01225718215, e-mail [max.hirst@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:max.hirst@wiltshire.gov.uk)

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[communications@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:communications@wiltshire.gov.uk)

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**Wiltshire Council**  
**Children's Select Committee**  
**Date: 05 September 2024**

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## **Development of the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy 2024-2029 Report**

### **Purpose of Report**

1. This report is to provide information on the development of the new co-produced local area SEND and AP Strategy which will form the basis for our approach to working with families and children with additional needs.
2. The report includes details on the coproduction process and the agreed priorities and timelines for the implementation of the strategy
3. The report should be read in conjunction with the new SEND and AP Strategy 2024-2029, 'Meeting Need Together - Ambitious for All'.

### **Updates – SEND Strategy 2024-2029**

1. The SEND Code of Practice states that local authorities must place children, young people and families at the centre of their planning, and work with them to develop co-ordinated approaches to securing better outcomes.
2. Following the end of the 2020-2024 SEND and Inclusion Strategy the local area has been working to develop a new strategy to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our communities.
3. The new strategy is a fully co-produced local area approach to supporting families and children with additional needs. Face to face events, online discussions and surveys were carried out with a wide range of stakeholders including parents and carers, children and young people, health professionals, and schools to ensure that the strategy addressed the needs of our local communities.
4. This strategy has been produced in partnership and the consultation process has taken a year to complete.
5. The work represents a marked shift in our local area, as it has been built upon the current lived experience and expertise of our children, young people and their parents/carers as the driving force for change.
6. The strategy sets out an ambitious goal for making sure that SEND becomes 'everybody's business' through pro-active inclusion from the outset. The strategy was produced together with key partners and draws upon feedback from children, young people and their parents/carers, professionals and front-line workers, education settings and the voluntary sector.

7. The strategy sets out a comprehensive response to the views, comments and issues raised by stakeholders right through the consultation process. This strategy represents a core document with high levels of engagement which sits amongst a range of strategic responses to the scope of the issues that the local area partnership wants to develop and address. There are separate plans either in place or in development which create the detail behind each of the priorities identified in the strategy.
8. The new strategy, entitled 'Meeting Needs Together - Ambitious for All' sets out our joint vision and the priorities we will focus on as a partnership over the next five years. Our aim is to be ambitious for all our children and young people and to work together to deliver cohesive, holistic support, having the child or young person's aspirations and needs at the centre of our work. We believe that meeting the needs of every child and young person with SEND or in AP in Wiltshire, is the responsibility of everyone.
9. Over the last year we have worked together in consultation with our parent-carers at face-to-face events across the county and through a range of online discussion groups. We have listened and gained the voice of children and young people with lived experience of SEND, including those who may be educated other than at school or from other harder to reach groups. We have worked with our schools and settings via partnership forums and networks, via surveys and polls. Our workforce from across all services and teams have actively engaged in meetings and surveys as part of this consultation work and have given their views and experiences as practitioners and officers.
10. As a result, the vision created with stakeholders through consultation is:
  - 'To create a future where every young person in Wiltshire has the tools and support needed to thrive and achieve their dreams. We want to support children and young people to be aspirational and hopeful, to increase their confidence, to have the resources to live the futures they want to live and to foster a culture of empowerment and inclusion.'
11. In adhering to true coproduction principles, we ensured that the voice of the local area has fully informed the priorities identified and shaped our collective vision. We have pledged to embed coproduction principles in everything we do and as a result of conversations and a joint working group with families, have written a 'Working Together Agreement', which is our commitment to deliver this. This agreement can be seen towards the beginning of the strategy document.
12. This vision will be delivered through six priority areas:
  - Priority 1: Children and young people and their families will be at the centre of planning, their views and aspirations heard and acted upon, as true partners.

- Priority 2: Getting the right support at the right time, identifying and acting on our children’s needs at the earliest opportunity and through promotion of inclusive approaches and practice across the local area.
  - Priority 3: Provide opportunities for timely planning, reflective of the views of the child or young person and parent carers’ current needs, that have clear outcomes.
  - Priority 4: Ensure good quality communication and information, for families to have a positive experience when navigating services, with information that is easy to access and use.
  - Priority 5: Professionals and officers across the SEND system will have the skills, knowledge and training to enable effective collaboration across services, joint assessments and sharing of good practice.
  - Priority 6: Children and young people will be prepared for adulthood and experience timely transitions, leading to increased skills, greater independence, and a greater range of opportunities in life.
13. The stakeholders agreed that we would work to these priorities through a joint implementation plan that will set our actions and outcomes framework, to monitor the effective delivery of strategy.
  14. Following Cabinet approval on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and Health and Wellbeing Board on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2024, the implementation plan will be finalised and overseen by the SEND and AP Partnership Board with the development of a bespoke dashboard to highlight performance against agreed measures.
  15. We have also committed to publishing regular reports on the Wiltshire SEND Local Offer website. We will ask ourselves the question ‘what difference has this made?’ at each point of delivery and will work with children and young people with lived experience of SEND and AP so they can tell us how we are doing.

## **Conclusion**

16. A new strategy to build on the work of the previous plan is essential to deliver further incremental improvements and meet the current needs of families and children
17. The new strategy has been developed through a robust co-production process that has ensured that the voice and families and children, practitioners and voluntary groups is at the heart of the plan.
18. The strategy implementation plan will have success measures that are reviewed by the local area SEND and AP Partnership Board to ensure delivery for our communities.

**Kai Muxlow**

## Head of Families and Children Commissioning

# Meeting needs together, ambitious for all

Our plan for children and young people with  
SEND or in Alternative Provision in Wiltshire  
2024 – 2029

DRAFT



## Meeting Needs Together, Ambitious for All – Our Plan for Children and Young People with SEND or in Alternative Provision in Wiltshire

### Welcome to the Wiltshire SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy 2024-29

Wiltshire's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2023-32) sets out the vision that 'People in Wiltshire are empowered to live full, healthy and enriched lives.'

Our ambition to achieve this vision rests on ensuring that children and young people get a good start in life, build resilience and get the very best from their education. Offering support to all children, young people and their families, as well as focusing on those who need the help the most, reduces inequalities and improves outcomes.

We are committed to improving our services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) and their families. We believe that SEND is everybody's business and are focused on providing excellent educational opportunities including alternative provision (AP) for those who need it. We are determined to do everything we can to provide better experiences and outcomes for all our children and young people with SEND in educational settings as well as for those that attend Alternative Provision.

A key to achieving this is placing children, young people and their families at the centre of our work, by ensuring joint working is at the heart of our services. Partners across the local area of Wiltshire are committed to working together with the Wiltshire Parent Carer Council as well as children, young people, parent carers and partner organisations. We know that this approach will mean improved support for children and young people with SEND, so that they have full, healthy and enriched lives.

'Meeting Needs Together, Ambitious for All' sets out our vision, the priorities we will focus on as a partnership and how we will do this work over the next five years. Our aim is to work together to deliver cohesive, holistic support to our children and families and to have the child or young person's aspirations and needs at the centre of our work.

We are developing our plan to reflect the priorities in this strategy. As we implement and measure our progress against each of the priorities, we will provide regular reports to the [SEND and AP Partnership Board](#) on the delivery of this strategy. We will regularly publish the outcomes of our actions on the [SEND Local Offer](#) website, and through an annual report, so that children and young people with SEND, their families and the wider public are fully informed on our progress.





Councillor Laura Mayes – Lead Member for  
Children and Young People and Deputy Leader,  
Wiltshire Council



Councillor Jane Davies – Cabinet Member for SEND,  
Wiltshire Council



Lucy Townsend – Corporate Director of People Services,  
Wiltshire Council



Strategic Director, Wiltshire Parent Carer Council



Gill May – Director of Nursing & Quality, B&NES, Swindon & Wiltshire Integrated Care Board



Kathryn Davis  
Director of Education and Skills,  
Wiltshire Council

## How we produced our strategy, its scope and purpose

We worked jointly on this strategy with the [Wiltshire Parent Carer Council \(WPCC\)](#), our children and young people with lived experience of SEND and AP, our Young Pioneers group, our early years settings, schools and colleges, practitioners, the voluntary and community sector and the [Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire NHS Integrated Care Board](#).

Over the past year, we have worked together with our families at face-to-face events, through online discussion groups, surveys to our schools and settings, and with children and young people through polls and group discussions. In doing so, we have ensured that the voice of our local area has fully informed the priorities identified and shaped our collective vision.

We are dedicated to working together for better outcomes, through embedding the priorities in this strategy into a delivery plan. We understand that for us to deliver cohesive, holistic support to our children and families we must work together to keep aspirations and needs at the centre of what we do.

A child and young person guide can be found in easy read on the [Wiltshire Local Offer](#) webpages.

## Our Working Together Agreement

The 'Meeting Needs Together, Ambitious for All' Strategy has been developed by working together with parents, carers, children, young people, services and teams within Wiltshire Council, health partners, schools and settings. The title of our strategy was chosen by parent carers and young people, to reflect the commitment to working together. The priorities and actions within the strategy have been formed as a direct result of the work we have carried out together in partnership.

We have written a 'Working Together Agreement', coproduced with families in Wiltshire to reflect the commitment to joint working at the heart of everything we do.

We talked together about what true partnership working looked like and this is our commitment:

### Working in partnership

#### We will all:

- Agree what each partner will contribute
- Listen and accept that people have different views and perspectives
- Ensure that everyone's contribution is heard and valued equally
- Ensure partners are involved and agree outcomes together
- Do what we say we will do and be accountable

## **Communicating well**

### **We will all:**

- Be honest, transparent and clear
- Show active listening
- Let everyone have a voice that is heard
- Be open and respectful
- Share information promptly and clearly and keep everyone informed when things change

## **Feeling valued and included**

### **We will all:**

- Celebrate strengths, successes, differences
- Have a whole-system holistic understanding
- Recognise and care about lived experiences
- Empower everyone to express their voice so that children, young people and their families feel 'heard'
- Include families in decision making, in the shaping of services and in all planning

## **Feeling welcomed and cared for**

### **We will all:**

- Invest time and sufficient resources
- Be open and welcoming to all
- Treat parents as true partners
- Show empathy, understanding and emotional intelligence
- Give continuous feedback – 'you said, we did'

## Our shared vision

Our shared vision and priorities have been built with young people, parent carers and professionals from across the local area.

**‘To create a future where every young person in Wiltshire has the tools and support needed to thrive and achieve their dreams. We want to support children and young people to be aspirational and hopeful, to increase their confidence, to have the resources to live the futures they want to live and to foster a culture of empowerment and inclusion.’**

Meeting the needs of every child and young person with SEND in Wiltshire is the responsibility of everyone.

- We aim to change culture by embedding our shared vision and values into the practice of everyone who works with children, young people and families, ensuring good communication and a system that makes sense.
- We aim to identify and respond to needs at the earliest opportunity, in ways that value lived experience and expertise, offering personalised care and support.
- We will strive to deliver our services and support in the right place at the right time, ensuring good provision is provided locally and there is an inclusive approach across Wiltshire SEND system, making the best use of resources and ensuring best value for money.
- We will implement this integrated strategy, delivering quality and timely support for those who need it.

### **Our vision will be delivered through six priority areas:**

**Priority 1:** Children and young people and their families will be at the centre of planning, their views and aspirations heard and acted upon, as true partners.

**Priority 2:** Getting the right support at the right time, identifying and acting on our children’s needs at the earliest opportunity and through promotion of inclusive approaches and practice across the local area.

**Priority 3:** Provide opportunities for timely planning, reflective of the views of the child or young people and parent carers’ current needs, that have clear outcomes.

**Priority 4:** Ensure good quality communication and information, for families to have a positive experience when navigating services, with information that is easy to access and use.

**Priority 5:** Professionals and officers across the SEND system will have the skills, knowledge and training to enable effective collaboration across services, joint assessments and sharing of good practice.

**Priority 6:** Children and young people will be prepared for adulthood and experience timely transitions, leading to increased skills, greater independence and a greater range of opportunities in life.

## **Priority 1:**

**Children and young people and their families will be at the centre of planning, views and aspirations heard and acted upon, as true partners.**

### **What have children and young people and their families told us about this priority area?**

“Help me plan for my future...I want to decide how to share my skills, needs and interests”

*Young Pioneers feedback 2023*

“Make decisions with us, not to us”

*Parent Partnership event 2024*

### **Why is it a priority?**

We must value the lived experience and expertise of children, young people, and their families when we plan together and make decisions about individual needs and support.

We want all children in Wiltshire to be aspirational and hopeful and we know we need to build a culture of empowerment.

We want all children and young people with SEND (Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities) to feel valued and welcome and in their communities. We know that by giving families a greater voice and by listening and acting upon those views, we can build trust so that parents have more confidence in the services and support they receive.

### **What children and young people and their families will see as a result:**

- They will feel heard within the local area and be able to access help, where required, to express views, wishes and choices.
- Planning and reviews will be person-centred, with the voice of the child, young person and family integral to all planning.
- They will talk confidently about the future and the chosen pathway to adulthood, from school or alternative provision and feel like true partners in the decisions made.
- Opportunities to design new services will be available for all.

## Priority 2:

**Getting the right support at the right time, identifying and acting on our children's needs at the earliest opportunity and through promotion of inclusive approaches and practice across the local area.**

### **What have children and young people and their families told us about this priority area?**

"I want to have my options listened to and I want to get support when I need it"

*Young person's questionnaire 2024*

"The key to all this is prevention... to identify issues and solutions early"

*Parent Partnership Event 2024*

### **Why is it a priority?**

We know that if we work together with families to identify needs, difficulties and challenges early, we can be proactive in putting timely and appropriate action in place to improve a child's life chances.

By continuing to develop a co-ordinated approach to prevention and early intervention, we know we can enable children, young people with SEND and their families to access the right help and support in the right place at the right time.

### **What will children and young people and their families see as a result?**

- An integrated system of early support and intervention with holistic support available across education, health and social care.
- High quality SEN Support will be available in all education settings for those with needs that do not require an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- More families and children with SEND will be able to find and engage with services, advice and guidance through our SEND Local Offer website.
- Families will see their community is growing a better network of coordinated local help, that enables them to feel strong, safe, happy and healthy.
- Fewer children and young people with mental health or emotional wellbeing concerns will be escalated to specialist services, as support will be accessed at the point of need.

### **Priority 3:**

**Provide opportunities for timely planning, reflective of the views of the child or young person and parent-carers' current needs, that have clear outcomes.**

**What have children and young people and their families told us about this priority area?**

“Know my interests.... let me share my goals for the future”

*Young Pioneers Group 2023*

“Forward planning for the family – describe what other key things will happen and when, during the year.”

*Parent/Carer Discussion Group 2024*

#### **Why is it a priority?**

We recognise that holistic and timely planning across education, health and care leads to stronger individual outcomes.

We know that when we work together, we are more joined up, efficient and timely in our work, and produce a better experience for our children and young people and their families.

The local area must continue to develop provision in response to emerging demand.

#### **What children and young people and their families will see as a result:**

- Children and young people and their families will tell us that their experience is improving and that our plans to support them are timely, person centred, meet their needs, and are jointly produced with them.
- Review meetings that are timely, ensure the child or young person is central to the process, with parent/carers confident in what is planned for their child.
- The local area partnership will use robust evidence to inform the commissioning of provision and services for our children with SEND, including the use of Alternative Provision.

## Priority 4:

**Ensuring excellent quality communication and information, for families to have a positive experience when navigating services, with information that is easy to access and use.**

### **What have children and young people and their families told us about this priority area?**

'Know how to communicate with me'

*Young Pioneers Group 2024*

"Take time to talk to us"

*Parent Carer Discussion Groups 2024*

### **Why is it a priority?**

Families have told us how important it is to have good and easy access to information including for families of children who have an emerging need or are new to our processes.

They have told us that they would like to be able to contact the right person or service quickly, at the point of needing advice.

We must also demonstrate that when we receive feedback, we communicate back how we have listened and improved services as a result.

We want to be better at communicating with children and young people with SEND using their preferred way and by giving them a range of ways to express their needs.

### **What children and young people and their families will see as a result:**

- They will tell us that we have a clear system of consistent and easy to access support services across education, health and care.
- Families will tell us that we are more transparent and open in our approach and that they feel respected and valued as partners.
- We will receive positive feedback from families regarding our advice and guidance in terms of accessibility and quality of information.
- Children, young people and their families will see evidence of planning and provision that reflects their views.
- Parents will feel more confident and less dependent on professionals and services.



## Priority 5:

**Professionals and officers across the SEND system will have the skills, knowledge, and training to enable effective collaboration across services, joint assessments and sharing of good practice.**

### **What have children and young people and their families told us about this priority area?**

“I wish all the adults who work with me understood my needs”

*Young Person’s Questionnaire comments 2024*

“We need for families and professionals to jointly access and share information”

*Feedback from parents at SEND Engagement Event 2023*

### **Why is it a priority?**

We want everyone working with and for children and young people to be knowledgeable about SEND and Alternative Provision and to have the appropriate knowledge, training and skills to be confident in their role.

We need more opportunities for professionals and families to work and learn together, to share skills, knowledge and experience.

We want parent/carers to feel more confident in the support offered in the mainstream school or setting.

We recognise that parent/carers should be seen and treated as ‘experts by experience.’

### **What children and young people and their families will see as a result:**

- Improved parental confidence in the inclusive practices within our Wiltshire schools and educational settings.
- A reduction in number of suspensions and permanent exclusions for children and young people with SEND enabling children and young people to be included in their settings.
- Alternative provision used in a planned way to support children and young people to be successful.
- A confident, skilled and knowledgeable workforce.
- Practitioners reflective in understanding the strengths we already have in our partnership, to seek out best practice elsewhere and evidence regarding what works, bringing these elements together to create the best possible arrangements for our local context.

## Priority 6:

**Children and young people will be prepared for adulthood and experience timely transitions, leading to increased skills, greater independence, and a greater range of opportunities in life.**

### **What have children and young people and their families told us about this priority area?**

“People need to understand my needs and help me plan for my future”

*Young People consultation groups 2024*

“There should be clear pathways for young people when preparing for adulthood”

*Parent carer discussion groups 2024*

### **Why is it a priority?**

For all young people with SEND, preparation for adulthood should be well planned. We want to ensure that every young person has the support and encouragement they need to get ready for the challenges, so that they can experience increased independence in preparation for adult life. This will need to be at a pace that is right for them and their family.

We want to ensure that there is breadth in our SEND and Alternative Provision Post-16 offer so that young people can work towards their personal goals and aspirations. As they grow up, we want them to feel accepted and valued in their local communities.

We aim for all our children and young people to achieve optimal health in adulthood, including their mental health, and we recognise that collaboration as partners is essential to achieving this goal.

### **What will children and young people and their families see as a result?**

- Young people and their families will see a greater choice of local options, including alternative provision, communicated in a clear and accessible way.
- More young people will meet their outcomes and achieve their aspirations and goals.
- A joined-up approach to employability so that young people can see clear pathways into jobs and careers that are in demand in the local economy.
- More young people will have the confidence and independence to successfully transition to the next stage of their journey to adulthood.

## How we will deliver our strategy, priorities and outcomes and monitor our progress

Professionals in Wiltshire with representative groups and local voluntary organisations understand that we must work together in partnership across education, health and social care, to deliver our strategy.

The priorities identified in our strategy will be included in the [Wiltshire SEND Needs Assessment](#).

We will produce a joint delivery plan that will set out our actions and an outcomes framework to monitor the effective delivery of our action plan.

Our joint strategy will also steer our [SEND Transformation Programme](#) and associated budget recovery plan. The plan links to the strategic priorities and supports improvements in quality.

Our SEND and AP action plan will be overseen by the [SEND and AP Partnership Board](#) with regular reporting on progress against each priority. This group meets on a monthly basis and is attended by professionals across education, health, social care and commissioned services, alongside parent carer representation and youth voice. The Local Area Partnership has set up a new integrated dashboard that will tell us if we are achieving our vision linked to each of the priority areas.

We will also publish regular reports on the Wiltshire SEND Local Offer website at [www.localoffer.wiltshire.gov.uk/](http://www.localoffer.wiltshire.gov.uk/). We will continue to consult with children and young people with lived experience of SEND and AP so that they can tell us how we are doing.



**Wiltshire Council**  
**Children's Select Committee**  
**Date: 05 September 2024**

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## **Young Carers Report update**

### **Purpose of Report**

1. This report is an update on the Young Carers contracted service and Wiltshire Council's commitment to ensuring Young Carers are supported throughout Wiltshire.
2. The work includes information on the primary reasons that the contract was retendered, continuous work between organisations and an update on young carer assessments and support planning.

### **Updates**

3. Following engagement with Young Carers throughout 2023 concerns were raised regarding the support that Young Carers received. It was clear from discussions that the current service was not meeting their needs.
4. Rosetta Life Arts Organisation were commissioned to provide a report with recommendations on what Young Carers wanted from the service. This included the following:
  - Developing the confidence of the group to reach a point where they feel skilled in working with artists to share their stories and raise awareness where they feel no one is listening – particularly school and wider society. Including Photography and music clubs/programmes. **Response:** Now that the independent Young Carers charity Community First/Youth Action Wiltshire which supported this work has been successful in the bid for Young Carers support, they have detailed how their approach will support with giving Young Carers the confidence to share their voices and continue to be involved in arts. Wiltshire Council have also committed to recruiting in house Young Carers school's worker, Young Carers advocacy worker and a Young Carers voice worker to create even more support which will work in partnership with the carers contracted provider.
  - Work with Rosetta Life and the Wiltshire cultural teams to design an offer/programme that is structured, well-staffed, engaging and held in warm, clean, inspiring arts spaces/venues. **Response:** Rosetta Life have since started working with the Kingston Young Carers to apply for national funding to design a Young Carers arts programme, this is to bring together Young Carers across England to make it a peer-peer exchange.
  - Specialist, highly experienced staff supporting who offer clear structure, inspiration and understanding of complex health and safeguarding needs. Counsellors and trained therapists needed to support sessions.

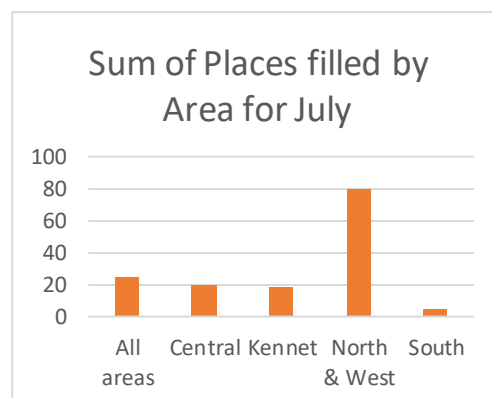
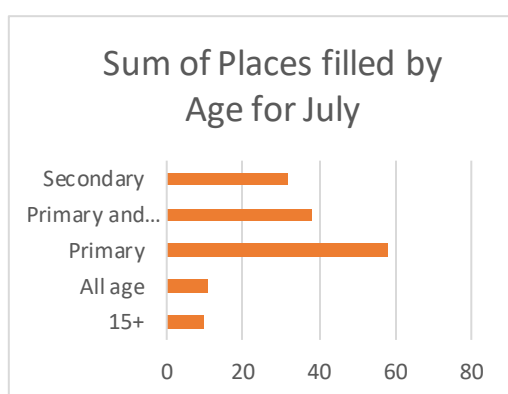
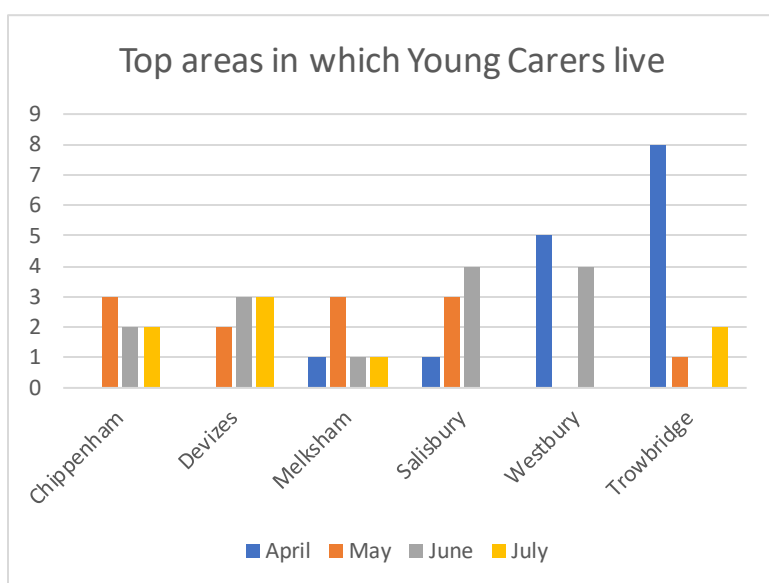
**Response:** From this recommendation the decision was made to split the unpaid carers contract into different lots with different elements of support, lot 1 is specifically to support Young Carers and young adult carers- this provider (Youth Action Wiltshire/Community First) has over 25 years of experience delivering Young Carers services and consistently raises £200,000 yearly, with the provider delivering:

- Support planning.
- 1:1 coaching and mentoring.
- Individual development and self-help activity.
- Respite and targeted workshops.
- Internally funded 'talking therapy' counselling.

### **Since the contract award of April 1<sup>st</sup> 2024**

5. Youth Action Wiltshire, Wiltshire Council IFD assessments team, Wiltshire Parent Carer Council and the Wiltshire Council Voice team have met monthly to discuss operational issues and resolutions as well as implement a performance outcomes group (POG) to present data.
6. Coproduction and engagement have been conducted with Young Carers over the summer holidays on:
  - How Wiltshire Council can support with education attainment data, understanding how Young Carers and their families would like to learn with commitment from the Wiltshire Council Community Learning team to tailor to this.
  - Understand what Young Carers know about dementia and how we can support Young Carers who care for people with the diagnosis, with commitment from the Wiltshire Council Commissioner responsible for the Dementia Strategy.
  - Engagement with Young Carers about their understanding and use of the CAMHS service, with commitment from the Wiltshire Council Commissioner responsible for the contract to shape the contracts future.
7. Young Adult Carer and Parent carer workers have been employed by the contracted service.
8. Young Carers stakeholder meetings have commenced including Public Health, ICB, Hospitals, GP's and Wiltshire Council colleagues to act as a regular update meeting.
9. The Young Carers schools award has been redesigned to include a certificate signed by Councillor Laura Mayes
10. The Digital contracted provider, Forward Carers and the Young Carers provider working together over the summer holidays to encourage more Young Carers to apply for an ID card and shape the website to include a Young Carers dedicated environment.

11. Youth Action Wiltshire have worked closely with WC IFD team to ensure data tidy ups have been conducted including contacting all Young Carers that were transferred over from the old contract to the new contracted providers to ensure all Young Carers are receiving the information and support that they need still and closing and/or opening new Young Carers cases after engagement with them.
12. 128 Young Carers have been referred to the service since April 2024 which brings the number of supported Young Carers to over 1,000.



13. The charts detailed show the areas where the majority of our Young Carers are assessed between April-July and the age and areas in which activities, respite and breaks were attended.
14. The Commissioner and Young Adult Carers worker are developing an engagement plan to understand what will help engage Young Carers aged 15 onwards and support them with breaks attendance.
15. As part of our one council approach to supporting Young Carers, the Voice and Participation Service accompanied 10 members of the Young Carers Council to the annual Young Carers Festival to foster connections within the

- group. The group gave their views on the national conversation around what they expect from a new government and also took over the young carers radio for part of the weekend. The young participants described the weekend as fantastic and are looking forward to attending again next year.
16. The Young Carers Council has met once since the festival, the meeting looked at what they would like to be called as a group and also prepared them to be part of the interview process for the new Young Carers Workers due to join the team
  17. Reporting on Key Performance Indicators details:
    - 100% Young Carers are contacted within 2 days of referral to Youth Action Wiltshire. KPI is 80%.
    - 74% of support plans are completed within 28 days. KPI is 80%
    - Respite and activities are presenting at an 84% attendance rate with transport provided by Youth Action Wiltshire. KPI is to have a range of activities and respite across the county.

## **Conclusion**

18. The detail above shows that feedback from young carers highlighted that the previous contract was not fit for purpose
19. The new commissioned service alongside the offer from in-house services was developed following focused engagement with Young Carers to ensure that it meets their needs.
20. To further develop the new offer engagement and coproduction is key. Using the summer holidays as a time to capture Young Carers voices enables Wiltshire Council to develop a comprehensive work plan for the next year. Commitments already detailed are:
  - Supporting Young Carers to achieve their educational attainment expectations.
  - Develop Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire ICB commitments to Young Carers future careers.
  - Develop lived experience Carers training programme for Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire ICB staff working with Carers.
  - Redesign the use of Direct Payments and Individual Service Funds to support Young Carers to achieve their own goals to support them in their caring role.
  - Create a Young Carers Council in the Youth Voice Team to provide a continuous feed of Young Carers voices to Wiltshire Council.
  - Creation of assessments pack to leave with families, to understand more about the assessments process.
  - Continuous roll out for free training to Carers developed with the Wiltshire Council Learning Team currently providing: First aid, Manual handling, Support for wellbeing and understanding mental capacity
  - Support for 18 months after the caring role has ended
  - Transitions to start with Young Carers from the age of 16.



21. Wiltshire Council and partners will continue to engage on a regular basis to have a joint approach when supporting Young Carers and with the addition of the Young Carer dedicated roles at Wiltshire Council supporting our communities including schools, hospitals and GP surgeries to identify, understand and support Young Carers.

**Kai Muxlow**

**Head of Families and Children Commissioning**

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**Wiltshire Council**  
**Children's Select Committee**  
**Date: 05 September 2024**

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## **Children and Young Peoples Mental Health Services**

### **Purpose of Report**

1. This report is to provide information on the current provision of services for children and young people with mental health needs and plans for future service design.

### **National Context**

2. NHS England survey Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023, Wave 4, which was a follow up to the survey in 2017, found that rates of probable mental health disorders for 8 to 25 years was about 1 in 5. This was 20.3% of 8 to 16 yr olds, 23.3% of 17 to 19 yr olds and 21.7% of 20 to 25 yr olds.
3. These rates remained stable in all age groups following a rise in prevalence between 2017 and 2020. In correlation to this, referrals to Children's and Young People's Mental Health services have risen to their highest rates.
4. It is widely accepted and recognised that half of all mental health conditions are established before the age of fourteen and that early intervention can prevent problems escalating and therefore bring individual and societal benefits. This is evidenced by organizations such as, Foundations: What works for Centre for Children and Families (formerly known as Early Intervention Foundation).
5. There are national mandated standards for accessing mental health support for children and young people which vary dependent on the presenting need or condition.

### **Local Context**

6. The draft BSW ICB Mental Health Strategy 2024-2029 highlights that there has been an increase in mental ill health, including anxiety and self-harm, amongst children and young people since the pandemic.
7. This manifests across our system in high rates of attendance at emergency departments of children who have self-harmed, long lengths of stay in paediatric wards for children and young people who have co-presenting physical and mental health needs, and increasing referrals to children and young people's mental health services.
8. A cyber-attack affected Oxford Health's computer systems in 2022 which impacted their performance reporting ability. This includes mental health statistical data set reporting (MH SDS) and localised aggregate reporting. Repairs to their systems have been ongoing.

9. As of July 2024, data reporting has begun to be shared with the Integrated Care Board, and commissioners are currently working with the provider to improve data sharing and reporting further.
10. However, from the data provided we note the high level of need: between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 Wiltshire's Child and Adolescent Mental Health service received 11,115 referrals. The cyber-attack impacts on comparative data, but the levels are above pre pandemic numbers in line with national increases.
11. To support with a more coherent approach to management of children's mental health services, from February 2024 Children and Young Peoples Mental Health Services (CYPMH) commissioning returned to Families and Children Commissioning to develop and enhance synergies across families and children's services

### **CYPMH Current Model**

12. In Wiltshire the iThrive framework is used to develop a robust universal offer that ensures prevention and early intervention, as well as a timely response when children and young people require specialist intervention.
13. The THRIVE Framework is an integrated, person centred and needs led approach to delivering mental health services for children, young people and families which conceptualises need in five categories; Thriving; Getting Advice and Signposting; Getting Help; Getting More Help; Getting Risk Support.
14. In addition to this the Five to Thrive approach in Wiltshire is used to ensure families are supported via Health Visiting, Family Hubs, Family Help, and Early Years settings to develop positive mental health and reduce the risk of childhood trauma.
15. Children can access mental health support in schools and/or via online platforms. Oxford Health operate a single point of access that supports children and families to navigate the system.
16. A range of interventions are in place to support children and young people and ensure they can access services within the community. This includes:
  - DSR (Dynamic Support Register) and Mental Health Support Workers
  - PINS (Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools)
  - Development Trauma Informed Practice supported by education settings
  - Children Looked After Pilot
  - Parenting Courses
  - HCRG Community Counselling Services
  - Primary Mentoring
  - Mental Health First Aid training for schools
  - School MHSTs

### **Commissioned Services**

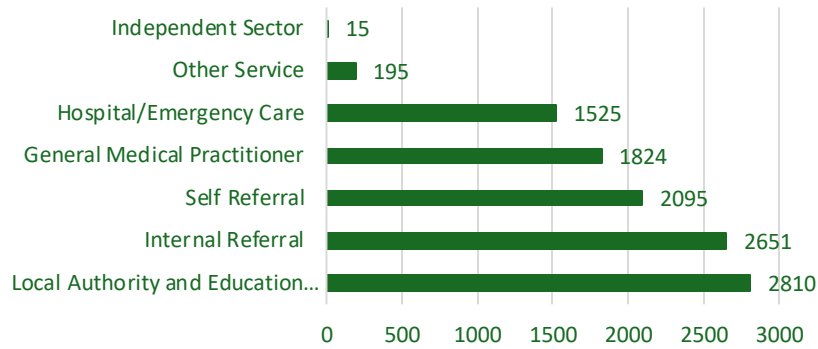
17. The BSW ICB fund a range of services which are commissioned through Wiltshire Council to support our local communities.
18. The ICB provide £515,000 of funding for these services.

19. These services are primarily aimed at early intervention and supporting early help and include Community Counselling Services.
20. The Children and Young People Emotional Wellbeing service has clear referral pathways, access to a professional on a daily duty system, and better involvement of children and young people (CYP) from the start of their care and referral to the service. CYP as well as their parents/carers are involved from the outset, allowing them to feel more in control of their support options.
21. These pathways support service users to access the right intervention at the right time, with early signposting and risk assessment in place. Feedback from school nurses who have interacted with parents and children/young people (CYP) who have received support from the Emotional Wellbeing (EWB) service has been overwhelmingly positive. They particularly commented on the gratitude expressed for quick initial contact and the support offered during the first interaction and assessment (often referred to as the 'front door' of the service) even when there was a wait for intervention, this supports "waiting well"
22. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS in Wiltshire are jointly commissioned between Wiltshire Council, Bath and Northeast Somerset Council and the Bath and Northeast Somerset, Swindon, and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board (BSW ICB) and are provided by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust (OHFT).
23. The service started in April 2018 with a contract duration of 7-years, meaning it is due to end in March 2025.
24. Wiltshire Council's contribution accounted for 2.8% or £518,000 of the total financial package with Bath and North Somerset Council contributing 1.7% or £316,725. The remaining 95.5% or £18,341,991 was funded by the Integrated Care Board.
25. CAMHS Prioritise referrals coming in to ensure those with the highest risks are seen quickest.
26. Wiltshire Single Point of Access (SPA) contacts all routine referrals in Wiltshire within 28 days (as of June 24), if the referral is more urgent, they will make contact on the same day, if it is a priority within 7-10 days.
27. All referrals receive a response from the SPA whether this be a letter or direct contact via phone or virtual meeting.
28. SPA share details of how to access more urgent help if a young person's mental health deteriorates whilst they are waiting for an initial assessment.

### **CYPMH – Current Performance**

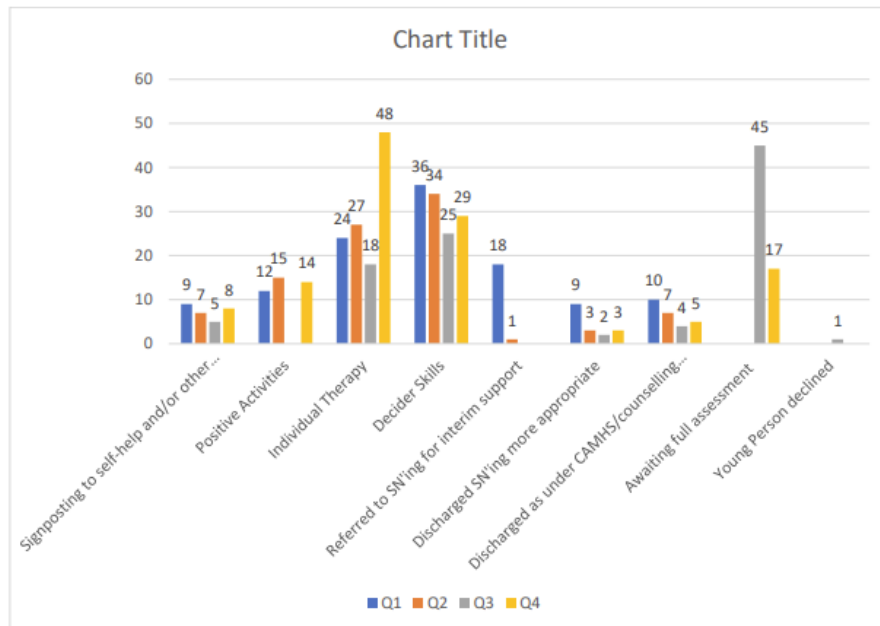
29. As noted above referrals into CAMHS have been at record high levels and come from a range of referrers. The below table shows the source of referrals:

## Referral Source for the Period 1st April 2023 - 30th June 2024



30. Oxford Health are working hard to try and reduce waits by reviewing the demand and capacity within each of teams, improving recruitment and thinking about alternative offers such as our new partnership with Barnardos, funded by Oxford Health, in Wiltshire to bring link workers who will offer social prescribing to young people coming through CAMHS assessment clinics.
31. The performance of our Emotional Wellbeing Service is also closely monitored and is seeing increased demand which is being managed with increased levels of effectiveness following recent recruitment to fill vacant positions.
32. The Emotional Wellbeing Service has seen increased use of individual therapies (see below table) over the first year of the service in line with need, and is reducing the numbers awaiting full assessment.

### Details of new referrals and outcome of assessments:



### Stakeholder Feedback

33. Where children and young people, parents and carers are able to access services, the feedback is very positive, as has been evidenced through surveys by providers and Wiltshire Council:
- “You have really helped. Someone to be there and listen. Become a trusted person to confide in”. (CAMHS)
  - “Thank you so much for today hearing your voice and advice was fantastic, me as a parent of a young adult with autism with mental health issues at the moment you were a breath of fresh air, you really helped today and it meant so much” (HCRG)
34. However, further engagement activity with parents and carers, children and young people highlighted:
- Families not being aware of range services
  - Thresholds for access to services to high
  - Long wait times
  - Sense of a lack of parental support

### **Commissioner Activity**

35. In response to stakeholder feedback, increased levels of demand and the commitment of the local area to support children and young people with early help a range of activity has been undertaken to develop a broader understanding of need including:
- Deep-dive reviews of all commissioned services
  - Ensuring clarity of offer – how Wiltshire and ICB define their responsibilities
  - Assessing universal offer
  - Building wider engagement with the third sector
  - More engagement activities with parents and carers, children and young people
  - Promoting the range of services more widely
  - Ensuring clarity of information and data
36. This work has informed the development targeted activity focused on meeting need, supported by the SEND Transformation programme. Areas currently being explored include:
- Coordinating response to right service first time - look at website based approach. but would require input for ‘navigation’ type role for MH
  - Single point of access service with navigator role that crosses all services for EHWP (voluntary, HCRG/CAMHS) to ensure CYP were assessed once but well (while recognising EHWP are dynamic)
  - Increased Psychoeducation for colleagues (i.e. teachers) and parent/carers to recognise the spectrum of ‘normal’ within all child development including emotional health.
  - Engagement of the voluntary sector/charity sector in an Asset Based Community - Development approach to support the work of mental health services.

- Greater engagement of and reaching those vulnerable groups who we know are more likely to develop a MH need in the future

### **Next Steps**

37. Following on from this work an options appraisal has been developed for review in September to support commissioning intentions
38. There will be further development of SEND Transformation workstream to support mental health early intervention.
39. As the current contracts for children and young peoples mental health services come to an end the focus will be on the alignment of services to deliver our early help and early intervention model

### **Conclusion**

40. Local authority Children and Young Peoples Mental Health services work in tandem with Health provision to ensure a fully aligned offer.
41. Increasing levels of demand, which is part of a national picture, have created challenges for all services and a review of the local area approach has been undertaken.
42. As the current contracts for children and young peoples mental health services come to an end the focus will be on the alignment of services to deliver our early help and early intervention model.

**Kai Muxlow**

**Head of Families and Children Commissioning**



DRAFT REPORT

**Wiltshire Council**

**Children's Select Committee**

**5 September**

**Cabinet**

**8 October 2024**

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**Subject:** **Wiltshire Council Annual Adoption Service: 2023-2024 Year End Report**

**Cabinet Member:** **Councillor Laura Mayes - Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, and Skills**

**Key Decision:** **Non-Key**

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## **Executive Summary**

It is a statutory requirement that Wiltshire Council's Adoption Service provides a year-end report to the Council in relation to the child's journey to adoption. It describes the management arrangements, outcomes, priorities, and finances for the period 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

The Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adoption West (AW), is commissioned to provide defined adoption services, and has responsibility for recruiting, assessing and approving adopters for our children. Adoption West is registered with Ofsted and has a separate inspection.

In this reporting period, 59 adopters were approved, this is a reduction on the previous year where 80 adopters were approved and reflects a comparable picture nationally where fewer people came forward to adopt. An increased level of assessment activity in the second half of 2023/24, converting to approvals is forecast to reach 40 approvals for the six months January-June 2024 and if the level of activity is maintained, approval rates should return to around 80-80+ in 2024/25.

Nationally over the last ten years there has been a gradual decline in adoption being the outcome for children leaving care. In Wiltshire, the rate has remained relatively stable, ranging between 11-14%. Where adoption is the right permanence plan for a child, this is pursued by the Council and predominantly endorsed by the Court.

Comparative performance for local authorities was previously available via the National Adoption Scorecard however this has not been published since July 2021 and the DfE indicated in February 2024 that it will no longer be publishing this data in future. Instead, comparator data is now available from the quarterly Adoption & Special Guardianship Leadership Board data collection, overseen by Coram-i. Historically score card indicators were based over a 3-year period,

whereas Coram-i is based on the latest years data. Coram-i data below is provisional as they are yet to publish 2023/24 Quarter 4 data.

The three key scorecard measures each local authority Adoption Agency uses to measure timeliness are as follows:

- **A10: the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family:**

The estimated figure for 2023-24 is 326 days, an improvement on 2022-23 when the same figure was 491 days. The target is 300-380 days. National, regional, statistical neighbour and other Adoption West LA performance (provisional) is 485, 418, 399 and 358 days respectively.

Wiltshire performs better than all comparators and has improved performance significantly on last year.

- **A2: the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family:**

The estimated figure for 2023-24 is 155 days, less than the 162 days it was in 2022-23. The target is 140-160 days. National, regional, statistical neighbour and other Adoption West LA performance (provisional) is 196, 203, 204 and 210 days respectively.

Wiltshire performs better than all comparators and has improved performance on last year.

- **A20: the average time between a child entering care and a local authority receiving court authority to place a child:**

The estimated figure for 2023-24 is 245 days, less than the 283 days it was in 2022-23. The target is 210-230 days. National, regional, statistical neighbour and other Adoption West LA performance (provisional) is 361, 291, 291 and 290 days respectively.

This data reflects an improvement on how we performed in 2022-23 and is particularly strong when compared to the performance of other local authorities. The children outside of target continue to be regularly reviewed to ensure the reason for delays are reasonable, and to determine whether there are practice improvements required to increase timeliness.

For all children outside of targets, all delays were purposeful and, in the child's best interests, or outside of the Local Authorities control. Where improvements could be made via the performance of courts, these are highlighted at the Wiltshire Family Justice Board. Nine children representing 40% of the total cohort, which included 3 sibling groups, older children and a child with significant health needs, were outside of timescale for reasons relating to their best interests; and five children representing 22% of the total cohort were outside for reasons not within the Local Authority's control.

Wiltshire continues to perform well nationally and has robust quality assurance mechanisms in place to analyse practice outside of target ranges. Adoption performance remains strong, as evidenced within the data and quality review of individual children's experiences through routine audit. Annual target setting takes place to ensure targets remain appropriate.

Adoption performance is reported quarterly to the Director of Families and Children's Services and to the Performance and Outcomes Board, chaired by the Corporate Director for People (DCS) and attended by the Cabinet Member.

### **Proposal**

It is requested that this report is approved and the contents of it are considered against the Corporate Parenting Strategic Priorities for children in care to have a loving home, good relationships, and be respected.

### **Reason for Proposal**

Wiltshire Council is an Adoption Agency registered with Ofsted. The 2014 Adoption Minimum Standards (25.6) and 2013 Statutory Guidance (3.93 and 5.39) describe the information that is required to be reported to the executive side of the local authority, on a six-monthly basis, to provide assurance that the adoption agency is complying with the conditions of registration whilst being effective and achieving good outcomes for children. A report to Cabinet is prepared annually.

Adoption West is subject to separate scrutiny arrangements through its own Scrutiny Board.

**Lucy Townsend**  
**Chief Executive**

**Wiltshire Council**

**Children's Select Committee**

**5 September**

**Cabinet**

**8 October 2024**

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**Subject: Wiltshire Council Annual Adoption Service: 2023-2024  
Year End Report**

**Cabinet Member: Councillor Laura Mayes - Cabinet Member for Children's  
Services, Education, and Skills**

**Key Decision: Non-Key**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. This report provides a year-end report to Cabinet regarding the performance of Wiltshire Council's Adoption Service, alongside a consideration of the effectiveness of Adoption West. It is a requirement of the condition of registration, as described in the 2014 Adoption Minimum Standards and 2013 Statutory Guidance, that Cabinet is satisfied the Adoption Agency complies with the conditions of registration, is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children.
2. Cabinet received an Annual Report regarding the Adoption Service in October 2023, covering the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. This report relates to the full year 2023/24 reporting period.
3. This report includes information regarding the management and performance of Wiltshire Council's Adoption Service, relating to children who require adoptive families and those who are placed, the disruption of placements and children where the plan for adoption changes. It also includes summary information about the recruitment and approval of adopters by Adoption West and the work of the Adoption West Panel. It should be noted that details of the performance of Adoption West as an organisation can be accessed in that organisation's annual report.
4. It is recommended that the contents of this report are approved.

**Relevance to the Council's Business Plan**

5. Wiltshire Council's Adoption Service contributes to a central priority as set out in Council's Business Plan 2022-2032; namely to protect those who are most vulnerable and provide permanent homes for children in care.

6. Wiltshire Council remains an adoption agency because it retains responsibility for children requiring adoption. Adoption West has responsibility for the recruitment, assessment and approval of adoptive families, family finding and adoption support.

### **Background**

7. Adoption is a route to provide permanence for children who are no longer able to live safely with their parents or other family members. This is achieved through the provision of quality adoptive placements for Wiltshire's children where a decision has been made that adoption is in their best interest.
8. The fundamental requirement is that children are placed with families who have been assessed as being suitable to adopt. A recommendation of suitability is made by the Adoption West Panel, and this is ratified as a decision by that organisation's Agency Decision Maker (ADM). Through this process, there is rigorous assurance that approved adopters can provide safe, secure and enduring family placements for this vulnerable group of children. In turn, this allows them to grow, develop and thrive in a nurturing, supportive and loving family environment, removed from the stigma of being a child in care by the local authority. To do this, there must be an appropriate range of enduring adoption placements to meet the assessed needs of children who need permanent adoptive families. These families must promote stability, safety and positive outcomes for children by working in partnership with all agencies, as required.
9. The legislative basis of this work is the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the accompanying 2005 Regulations.
10. The Local Authority, through reporting to Cabinet, must be assured of regulatory compliance and effectiveness through performance monitoring, challenge and improvement planning.
11. Adoption West has the responsibility to recruit, assess and approve adopters for children. This includes those who can provide permanence for children who may be considered 'harder to place'. This group includes older children, sibling groups, and children with additional needs and disabilities.
12. Adoption West is a Regional Adoption Agency: a partnership of six local authorities. It provides adoption services in line with government requirements, from the point of expression of interest to adopt, through to assessment and approval at panel and beyond, to Adoption Support.

### **Main Considerations for the Council**

13. The main consideration for the Council is to be assured about statutory compliance and the effectiveness of the Adoption Service.
14. Wiltshire has set local performance targets in addition the national scorecard data. In Wiltshire 22 children were made subject to adoption orders in 2023-24, an increase on the 16 adopted in 2022-23.

15. A10: 50% (11/22) children adopted moved in with their adopters in less than 380 days from entering care. An increase and improvement on 32% (5/16) in 2022/23.
16. A2: 86% (19/22) children adopted were matched with an adoptive family within 160 days of the Local Authority receiving authority to place a child. An increase and improvement on 69% (11/16) children in 2022/23.
17. A20: 50% (11/22) children adopted were made subject to a placement order below 230 days from the date of coming into care. An increase and improvement on 44% (7/16) children in 2022/23.
18. These children's journeys have all been reviewed and the reasons for delays are not practice related or generally within our control. They relate to protracted care proceedings, the impact of additional assessments being ordered within the court arena, family members coming forward to be assessed at a late stage, and positively assessed family members withdrawing prior to final orders and/or placement. Given the significance of adoption for birth families, it is understandable that when family members present late in proceedings the Court and all those involved will want to make every effort to ensure families are assessed and considered as a kinship carer for a child. For some children the delays relate to the longer period of time taken to find a suitable match, potentially needing to search beyond Adoption West these children tend to be older, sibling groups and/or have additional needs.
19. There remain challenges with care proceedings concluding within the 26-week timescale, due to several factors outside of the Local Authority's control as described above. These challenges are subject to continued scrutiny via the Wiltshire Family Justice Board and nationally informed by research findings, National reviews and DfE innovations which Wiltshire is at the forefront of.
20. Wiltshire Head of Service (HoS) for Support and Safeguarding is now the chair of the Wiltshire Family Justice Board Performance and Data subgroup, which is working to The National Family Justice Board targets to reduce delays in timeliness of care proceedings with a focus on understanding barriers and looking at how to improve practice across the judiciary and Local Authority operational Social Care services. Adoption West are now represented at the Wiltshire Family Justice Board and have recently undertaken presentations at the Wiltshire Family Justice conference on Early Permanence and maintaining contact post Adoption orders.
21. Wiltshire have also in the last year worked with the DfE pilot to involve the Childrens Guardians (CAFCASS) prior to the first Case Management hearing in a care proceedings case, with the overall aim to seek to reduce the use of experts in proceedings and the overall length of proceedings. The shortening of care proceedings will have a direct impact on the timeliness of adoptions. Following an original proof of concept this work is being rolled out nationally and Wiltshire have supported learning events for other Local Authorities developing these ways of working.

22. Overall, this demonstrates continued commitment to secure permanent arrangements for all children where adoption is in their best interests, even though it could take longer to find an adoptive match. To ensure continued progress and improvement, careful attention will be given to all aspects of adoption work that remain the responsibility of Wiltshire Council Adoption Service, whilst ensuring, through governance arrangements and challenge, the effectiveness of Adoption West.
23. Management arrangements and staffing within the Council are compliant with regulation in terms of qualification and experience. The Director of Children's Services (DCS) has overall responsibility for aspects of adoption retained by the Council. Reporting to the DCS is the Director with responsibility for the Families and Children's Service. The Head of Service for Support and Safeguarding and one of their Service Managers ensure the effectiveness of overall adoption provision; this Service Manager is the designated link with Adoption West. The Service Director for Adoption West came into post in July 2018, this provides strength and clear accountability with an opportunity to develop and enhance the strategy for improvement and ensure best outcomes for children.
24. The Director of Families and Children is the Adoption West company Director and sits on the Board of Directors. Adoption West is subject to a Scrutiny Committee that reports into Children's Select Committee. The last panel was held on 9<sup>th</sup> July and AW Scrutiny Panel presented to Children's Select Committee on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2024. This noted overall that adoption has increased but the numbers of adopters coming forward have not, causing a strain.
25. Six children were placed outside of the Adoption West area, in 2 cases these were sibling groups with children aged over 5yrs, a single child aged 5yrs and a child aged 3yrs with significant health needs. This is an increase from 2022/23 when only 3 children were placed external to Adoption West. Decisions to look for external placements are robustly oversighted by the Support and Safeguarding Service Manager with responsibility for adoption and Head of Service, and include balancing the needs and ages of individual children, impact of delay in placing for adoption and understanding the availability and matching wishes of prospective adopters coming through Adoption West for assessment in the forthcoming 6 month period.
26. In 2023/24, there were no rescissions post Placement Order of ADM decisions that children should be placed for adoption. For three children the ADM decision was rescinded as the plan moved away from adoption due to family members coming forward during the Care Proceedings.
27. During 2023-2024 there have been no adoption placement disruptions and no placement breakdowns. This demonstrates strong matching.
28. Early Permanence (EP) is one of the DfE's aims in the 2021 National strategy: Achieving Excellence Everywhere. Adoption West has taken the lead in the Southwest. Early Permanence is an umbrella term we use when talking about certain types of adoption placements for babies or toddlers. It includes placements also referred to as Fostering for Adoption (FfA) and Concurrent Planning. Early Permanence placements allow babies and young children who

may need adopting to be placed with a potential permanent family earlier than a conventional adoption. Of the 59 household approvals in 2023/24, 46% of these adopters will consider Early Permanence. Increasing EP carers should see a positive improvement for children in the timeliness of their adoption journey and achieving permanence. In 2023/24 seven Wiltshire children have been placed in EP placements compared to five children in the previous year.

29. Adoption West are involved in a new project implemented in June 2023 'The Southwest Project for children with disabilities' working with Oxford University. The aim of this project to look at bespoke models of recruitment for children with a disability. Family finding for a sibling group of three Wiltshire children are being considered under this new project.
30. The Adoption West Adoption Panel complies with Regulation. This is important assurance as children who are the responsibility of Wiltshire Council are matched with adopters at these panels. The panel is chaired by a suitably skilled and experienced Independent Chair who ensures that the functions of panel are delivered effectively. There are Agency Panel Advisers from Adoption West to ensure that the panel is always adequately supported. To ensure that panels are quorate, there is an Adoption West central list of panel members established which includes members with direct experience of adoption, including adopters, and those who have been adopted.
31. To comply with regulation, all Panel members, including the Chair, receive annual appraisals which consider their effectiveness as panel members and any areas for development. There is an annual training day and Chairs meet regularly with the Panel Advisors to discuss operational and developmental matters relating to the panels' work and consistency, making any changes and improvements as required. There are quarterly meetings between the Panel Chairs with their Panel Adviser and Agency Decision Makers from Wiltshire. These meetings provide an opportunity for two way communication between Adoption West and the local authority sharing feedback from panels about the work undertaken by us in matching children and potential adopters. Panels also provide feedback on each case presented to them on the quality of reports, whether they have met the regulatory requirements for the qualifications of the workers writing reports. For the 2023/24 Wiltshire's Child Permanence Reports were graded as 15% Satisfactory, 65% Good and 19% Excellent. Adoption Placement Reports completed by the child's social worker and the adoption social worker were graded as 12% Satisfactory, 56% Good and 32% Excellent evidencing strong performance in the region and reflects the training undertaken in the region and within local authorities to ensure social workers understand the importance of these documents for the child and the appropriate style of writing is used.
32. The average duration of Care Proceedings for Wiltshire 2023/24 was 33 weeks, this remains the same as 2022/23. Wiltshire are currently in the second year of a national pilot of the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) which works on the principle that parents with addiction issues often need in excess of 26 weeks to evidence sustained change, before final decisions can be made. These cases are recognised as taking longer due to the therapeutic interventions and agreed approach with the courts. If we remove these cases from our figures, the average



for 2023/24 would be 31 weeks, significantly lower than the national CAFCASS figure for 2023/24 which is 45 weeks. Through robust tracking, we know that there are key factors beyond the control of the Local authority impacting on timeliness. The Care Proceedings Case Manager (CPCM) has specific oversight of adoption from pre-proceedings. Delays beyond 26 weeks are due to a mixture of reasons from court availability, expert assessments causing delay, assessment of parents and kinship carers and cases where international elements and Non-Accidental Injuries cause delays.

### **Safeguarding Implications**

33. This service is delivered in accordance with Wiltshire Children's Services Policy and Procedures. The local authority has clear and effective safeguarding procedures in place for children and vulnerable adults. The partnership with Adoption West is regulated and Adoption West has the appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures in place.

### **Public Health Implications**

34. The risk of poor health and wellbeing outcomes is known to be greater for children in care. Safe and high-quality environments provided by adoption placements are, therefore, an opportunity to mitigate these risks and improve long term outcomes for these children and young people.

### **Procurement Implications**

35. There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

### **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

36. Throughout the adoption process due regard is had to the Public Sector equalities duties but as this report is for noting there are no specific equalities issues raised by this report.

### **Environmental and Climate Change Considerations**

37. There are no implications arising from this report.

### **Overview and Scrutiny Engagement**

38. The report will be presented to Children's Select Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and then due to timetabling, will be presented at Performance and Outcomes Board on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2024. Adoption West Annual Report was presented to the Adoption West Scrutiny Panel on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2024.

### **Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken.**

38. This report is for approval; no specific decisions are being requested.

### **Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks.**

39. This report is for approval; no specific decisions are being requested.

### Financial Implications

40. The final outturn position for 2023/24 was £447,796 broken down as follows

Adoption Report	Actuals £	Budget £	Variance £	Actual FTE	Budgeted FTE	Variance FTE
Adoption Allowance	268,926	252,600	16,326	1,311	1,144	167
Adoption Support	54,019	50,000	4,019			
Residence Order	26,520	38,200	-11,680	150	208	-58
Inter Agency Fee Expenditure	123,097	49,900	73,197			
Inter Agency Fee Income	-24,766		-24,766			
	<b>447,796</b>	<b>390,700</b>	<b>57,096</b>			

The budgeted number of children & young people supported by adoption allowances was 1,144 but, in the event, the number in receipt of support was higher, at 1,311 this led to the overspend of £16,326 representing, 6.4% of budget. We have seen an increase in external placements from 3 to 6 children (reasons already in report) and an increase in children receiving allowances from 22 to 25, positively for 3 children they have been adopted by their foster carers which involves a transitional 2year payment of fostering allowance. Residence Orders are now used less frequently by the Courts and therefore the number of children & young people supported was less than planned by 58 and this led to the underspend of £11,680 representing, 30.6% of budget.

Inter-agency income and expenditure is challenging to predict because it is driven purely by adoption matches between counties and for this reason we do not budget for income. Budgets are reviewed annually as part of the MTFS update.

### Legal Implications

41. It is a requirement of registration as an Adoption Agency that the Executive of the Council receive regular written reports regarding the effectiveness, compliance and management of the Agency. It is agreed that this is in the form of an annual report, ensuring that legal requirements are met. There are no additional legal implications arising.

### Options Considered

42. This report is for approval; no specific decisions are being requested.

### Conclusion

43. Recent years have seen considerable change within the sphere of adoption with the introduction of RAAs and a focus on improving adoption performance nationally. At the heart of this is the belief that, for some children, adoption is the

## DRAFTREPORT

best route to legal permanence, security and the opportunity to achieve their potential. Wiltshire Council is committed to monitoring and improving service delivery where necessary for these children, with robust local measures in place to oversight practice.

44. Adoption practice in Wiltshire is strong, as evidenced within this report; and where timeliness is impacted, the reason for this is known and scrutinised.

### **Jen Salter Director Families & Children**

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Report Author: Pier Pritchard

[pier.pritchard@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:pier.pritchard@wiltshire.gov.uk)

#### **Appendices**

None.

#### **Background Papers**

None.

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# adoption west

## Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel September 2022 – September 2024 Annual report



*“sometimes superheroes  
reside in the hearts of  
children fighting huge battles”*



Bath & North East  
Somerset Council



Wiltshire Council



*Foreword by the chair of Adoption West Board*

Although the Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel does not fall under the banner of 'Overview and Scrutiny' as defined by the Local Government Act 2000, it is providing a much-needed scrutiny function within the management and framework governance established to oversee the effectiveness of Adoption West.

*Name*

*Job title, LA*

*Chair of the Adoption West Board of Directors*

*Foreword from the chairman of the scrutiny panel*

We always anticipated that this would be a complex area of work, and a challenge for councillors to develop sound knowledge and understanding of the world of adoption. We have not been disappointed!

It has also become clear that being on this panel will mean continuous learning for its members – and quite rightly so.

During the period covered by this report we have seen considerable changes to the membership of the panel and as grateful as I am for the enthusiasm and commitment shown by our new members, I wanted to thank our previous members for being part of this unique venture.

Thank you, Cllr Dr Andrew Miller (Gloucestershire County Council), for your energy and contribution as vice-chairman, Cllr Wendy Griggs (North Somerset Council) and Cllr Nic Labuschagne (South Gloucestershire Council) for your positive challenge and insights. At the time of writing this foreword, it was also announced that Cllr Christine Townsend (Bristol City Council) had to step down from the panel due to increases in work commitments with her own local authority.

I would like to welcome Cllr Beki Hoyland (Gloucestershire County Council), Cllr Joe Tristram (North Somerset Council) and Cllr Sandra Emms (South Gloucestershire Council) to the panel. You have all already shown interest and dedication to this work and I look forward to carrying on working with you.

The report focuses on the past and the work we have undertaken, so I will take the opportunity to instead focus this foreword on the future. You will see in the appendix that we have an ambitious work programme for 2024-2025. We appreciate this will be a change of pace for the panel and requires increased commitment. However, we do believe that it dovetails better with the work of the Adoption West Board. We are looking to maximise on the flexibility of the panel and its ability to reach out directly to adoptive families, adopted adults and birth families, as well as seeking the views of adopted children and young people. We are exploring creative ways of delivering effective, but also sensitive, scrutiny as we are increasingly aware of the personal and potentially emotional nature of some of the areas of work we want to focus on, particularly support for adoptive families and “customer satisfaction”.

I think delivering our work programme will be challenging but I also believe that it will be tremendously rewarding as our first opportunity to provide evidence to support change where it may be needed.

*Cllr Jon Hubbard, Wiltshire Council  
Chair of the Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel*

## Purpose of the report

1. This report is written to:
  - a. publicly present the work undertaken by the Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel (thereafter referred to as the “scrutiny panel”) from September 2022 to September 2024 to the following committees:
    - Children, Adults, Health & Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel, Bath and North East Somerset Council
    - People Scrutiny Commission, Bristol City Council
    - Children and Family Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Gloucestershire County Council
    - Children and young people’s services policy and scrutiny panel, North Somerset Council
    - Scrutiny Commission, South Gloucestershire Council
    - Children’s Select Committee, Wiltshire Council
  - b. enable the Adoption West (AW) Board to monitor the efficiency of the scrutiny panel.
  - c. invite suggestions from the scrutiny committees (as listed in a. above) and the AW board on:
    - areas of focus for the scrutiny panel in 2024-25;
    - the contents that should be included in the scrutiny panel’s annual report in future; and
    - formatting and presentation of the information to ensure ease of reading for future reports.

It should be noted that this report is out of the usual pattern due to factors including significant changes to the membership of the scrutiny panel and supporting officers.

## Background

2. Adoption West (AW) started operating on 1 March 2019, as a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) created by Bath and North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, Gloucestershire County Council, North Somerset Council, South Gloucestershire Council and Wiltshire Council as a response to the government’s plans, published in June 2015, to regionalise adoption services across England and Wales.
3. Adoption West is a local authority trading company which is owned by the six local authorities and commissioned by them to provide adoption services. Adoption West is registered with Ofsted as a Voluntary Adoption Agency. Further information can be found on its [website](#).
4. The primary aim of this regionalisation was to deliver an adoption service which offer improved outcomes for both children and those who want to adopt.



5. The scrutiny panel (Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel) has been created to act as a critical friend, providing independent scrutiny of the work of AW and making constructive recommendations to ensure that AW meets its performance targets and expectations. The terms of reference for the scrutiny panel are included as Appendix 1.
6. The scrutiny panel is an essential element of assuring democratic accountability for the use of public funds; although it does not fall under the banner of 'Overview and Scrutiny' as defined by the Local Government Act 2000 in that it is not a body jointly formed by the six participating councils.
7. The scrutiny panel reports directly to the AW Board. The AW board will monitor the efficiency of the scrutiny panel, including through this annual report.

## **Membership**

### Elected Voting Member

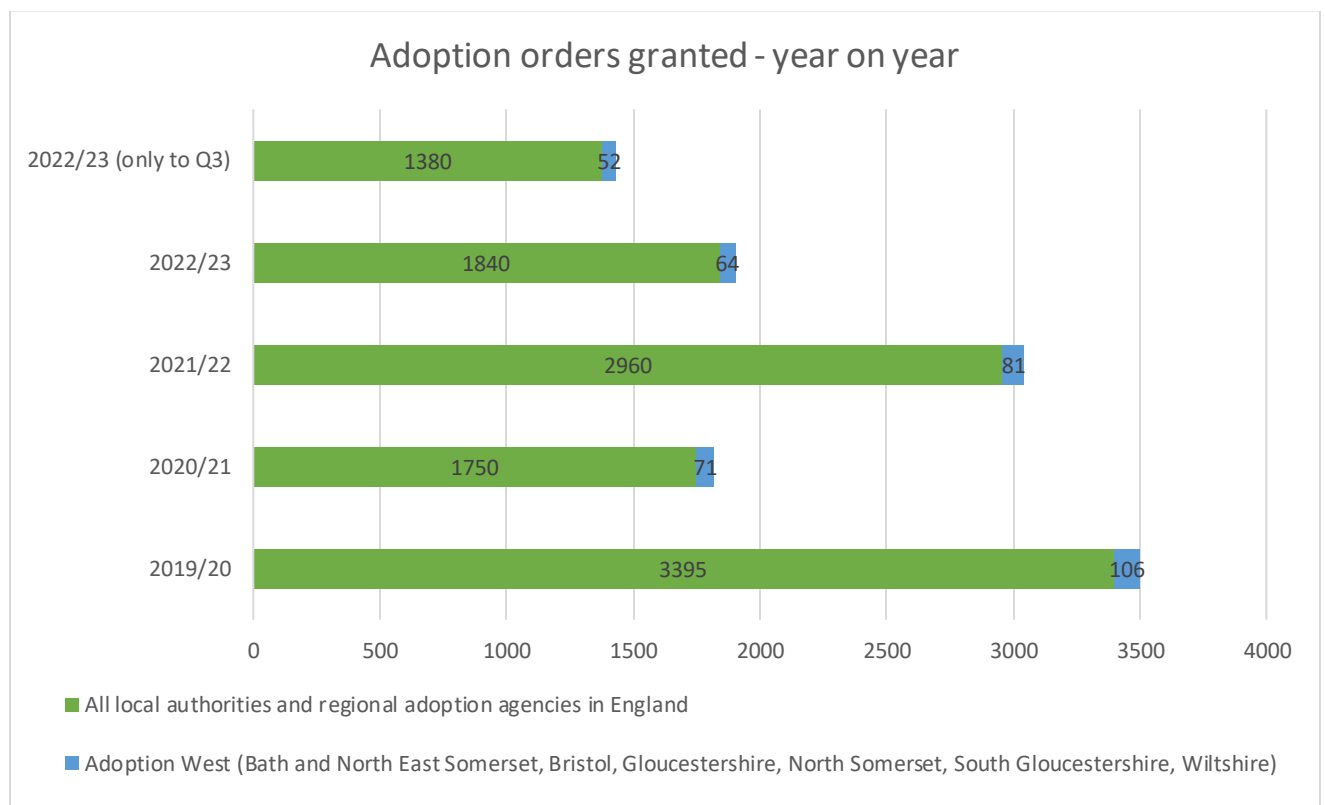
Cllr Michelle O'Doherty Bath and North East Somerset Council  
Vacancy, Bristol City Council  
Cllr Beki Hoyland Gloucestershire County Council  
Cllr Joe Tristram North Somerset Council  
Cllr Sandra Emms South Gloucestershire Council  
Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman) Wiltshire Council  
Cllr Carole King Wiltshire Council

## Snapshot overview of adoption figures

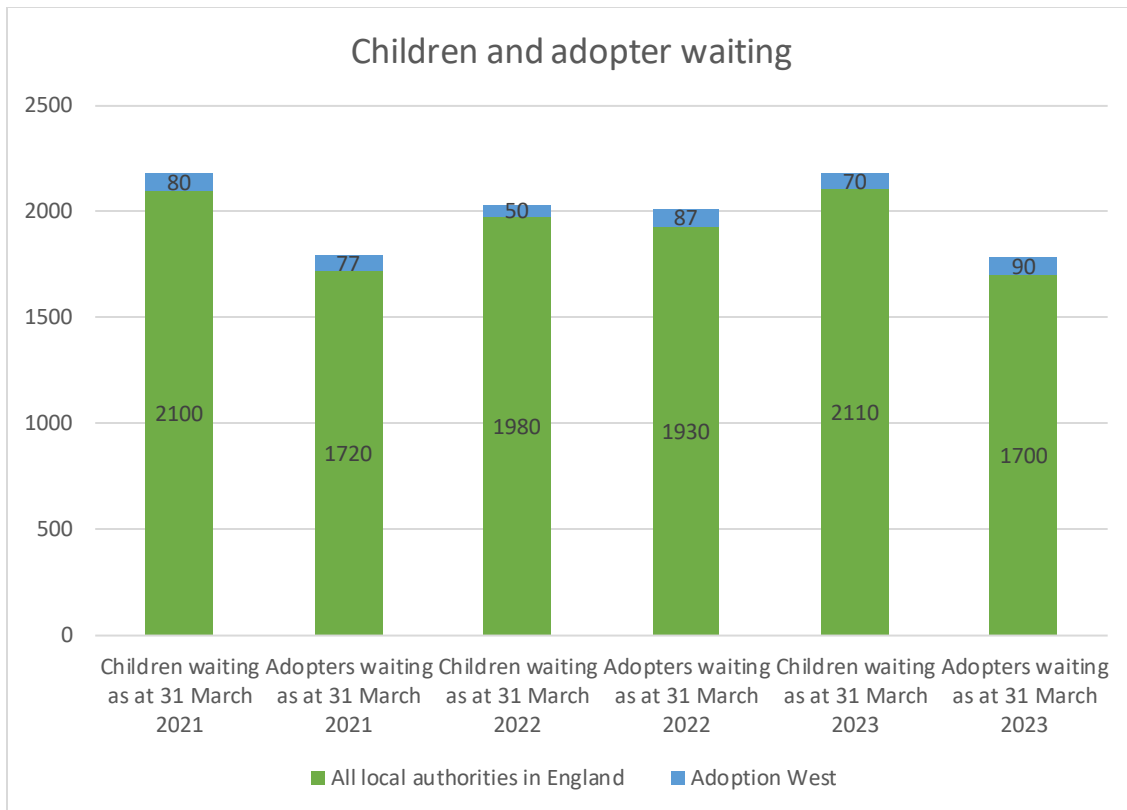
[Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2023](#)  
(figures as at 31 March 2023)

Children looked after (CLA)	CLA (Children Looked After) per 10,000 children	CLA who were adopted
<b>83,840</b> ↑	<b>71</b> ↑	<b>2,960</b> ↓
Up 2% on 2022, continuing the rise seen in recent years	The same as 2020 and the highest in the time series	Down 2% from 2022, following up 2% in 2021 but down 18% on 2020

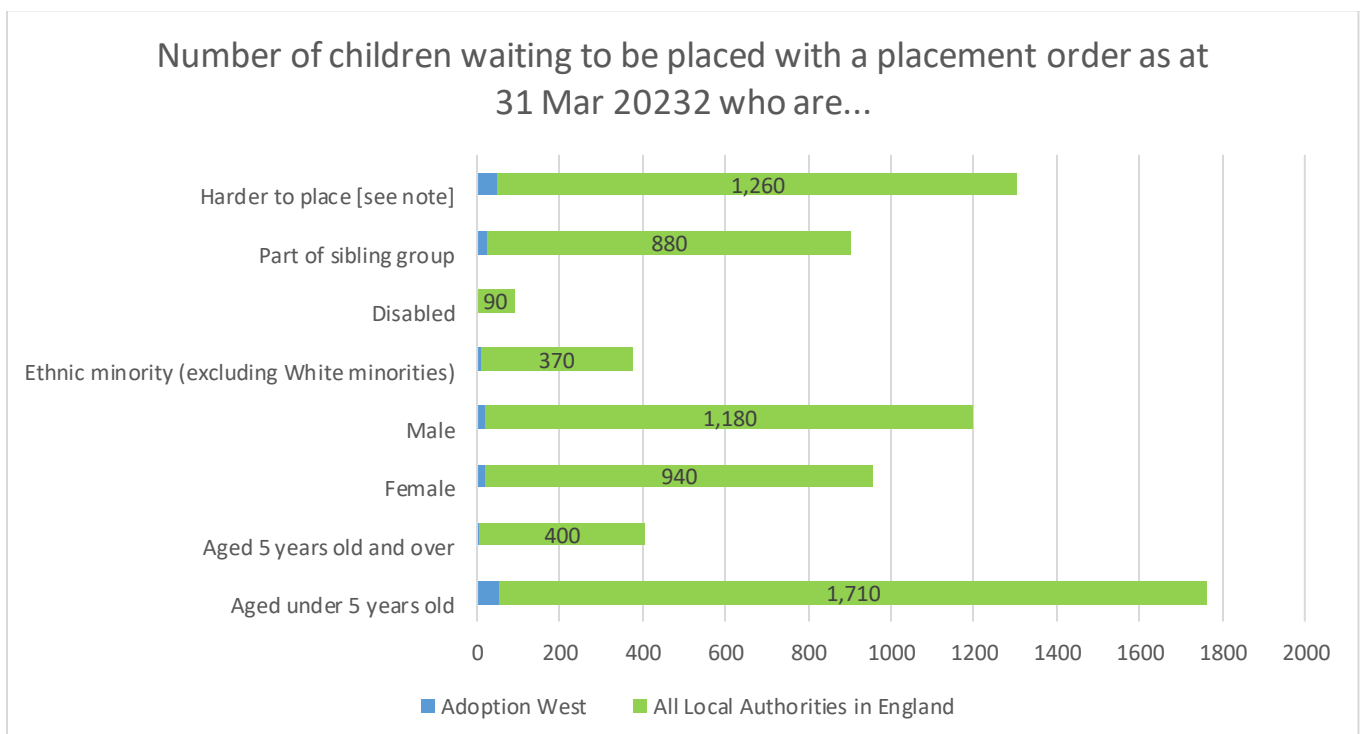
### [Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board](#)



**NB** It should be noted that for the table above for 2022-23 the only data currently available is Q1 to Q3.

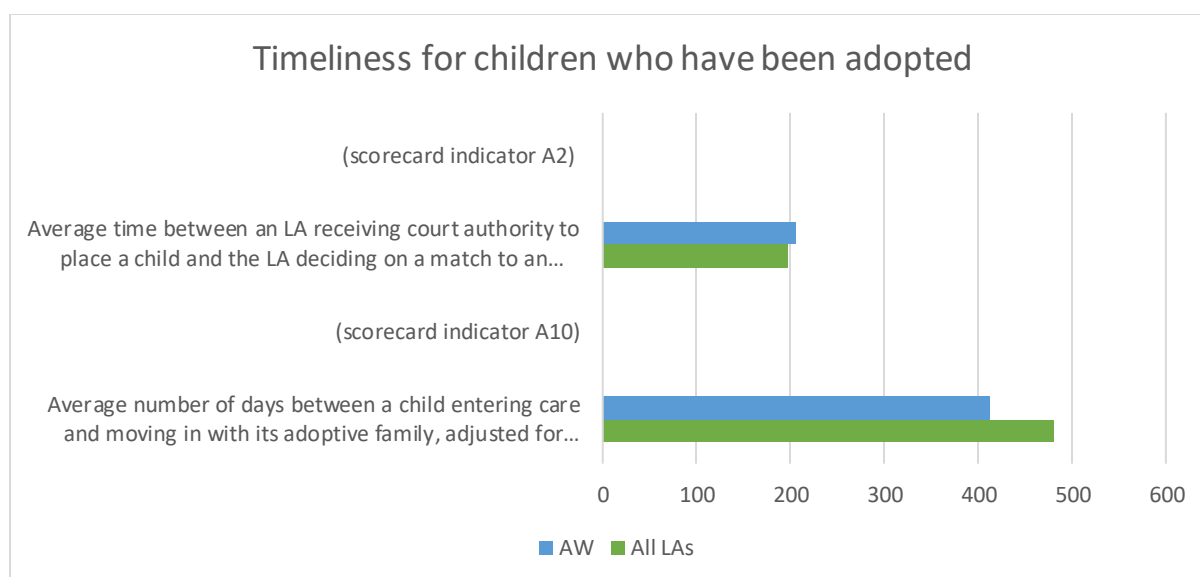


Children with a placement order but not yet placed  
 Number of approved adoptive families waiting to be matched with children



*Note - "Harder to place" is defined as a child who is any of the following: 5 years or over, of an ethnic minority (excluding White minorities) background, disabled, or part of a sibling group. Children with more than one harder to place characteristic will be counted in each characteristic.*

*Note – the figures for Local Authorities were often suppressed due to low numbers – where a count is 5 or fewer, or times and percentages are based on a count of 10 or fewer*



## Work undertaken

- Between September 2022 and September 2024, the scrutiny panel held six meetings.

### October 2022 – performance monitoring

- The scrutiny panel considered Quarter 1 performance for Adoption West, as well as its recruitment strategy and evaluation of the “front door” pilot. No critical issues were identified based on the information presented.
- The meeting highlighted the need for the panel to gain deeper understanding of other permanency options such as Special Guardianship Orders.
- The panel recognized the potential to gather further information from prospective adopters who pulled away from the process to identify possible stumbling blocks and made that recommendation to Adoption West.
- This also linked with the “sufficiency gap” (number of adopters compared to number of children) especially with the difficulty in ensuring that adopters waiting or being trained were the right match for the children for whom adoption would be identified as the option for permanency that were anticipated based on previous years demand. The sufficiency is not just the numbers but also ensuring that adopters are within the categories needed (e.g. sibling groups, older children, disabled children, etc.). Trends on these numbers are monitored locally, regionally and nationally as may have an impact on the sufficiency gap.

### **July 2023 – performance monitoring**

13. The panel considered many reports on performance including the AW 6-months report, performance data for Q2, AW development plan and the outcome of the evaluation of Regional Adoption Agencies.
14. Overall performance appeared to be at expected levels, and where performance was lower the panel was reassured that this had not, of itself, created delays for children waiting for adoption.
15. The panel was reminded that each Local Authority would still have its own Ofsted inspection with regards to performance linked to adoption for the activities undertaken by the Local Authority (in a simplistic summary – the journey of the child prior to the adoption order being granted). This reinforced the purpose of the scrutiny panel as the conduit for overview and scrutiny for all aspects of adoption.

### **September 2023 – contact and support**

16. The panel was offered a first glimpse into the complex area of contact between adoptive families and birth families.
17. It was concluded that, as reflected in research on contact undertaken since the 1990s, contact remains complex due to the multitude of possible family situations as well as the fact that the children's need for and interest in contact are likely to change and evolve as they grow. The research seem to indicate that contact is generally seen as positive for the children.
18. The panel received a presentation by two members of Adoption West's Birth Links team. Birth Links is an independent support service for adopted adults and for birth relatives affected by adoption. It aims to provide advice, support, information and guidance. The presentation also offered some information about the Pause Projects which is completely independent from Adoption West but whose purpose aligns with Birth Links' work (Pause works with women who have or are at risk of their child/ren being removed and works to break the cycle of pregnancies leading to repeat removals.).
19. The panel also considered the annual Adoption UK Adoption Barometer 2023. It was positive to note that the recommended support for prospective adopters within the Barometer matched the plans presented by Adoption West. However, there were still concerning, and saddening, data shown nationally for support of young adults and adult adoptees.

*“There were 526 respondents who had children aged 13-25 at the time of completing the survey, representing nearly 700 children between them. These respondents were twice as likely to describe their family as facing severe challenges or at crisis point in 2022 than parents of younger children (46% compared to 23%), more likely to not be in paid work (23% compared to*

16%), and less likely to feel optimistic about their family's future (66% compared to 83%).”

“Only one in five of the adult adoptees who responded to the survey had ever been given materials produced by adoption professionals that were designed to help them understand their histories and life stories (e.g., life story books, later life letters), and more than half of these were adopted during the 1990s or later.”

### **February 2024 – contact and adopter sufficiency**

20. The panel delved deeper into the complex area of contact between adopted children, adopted adults and members of their extended birth family. Contact may also be between siblings who live with different adoptive families or other forms of permanence (long term fostering, Special Guardianship orders, etc.).
21. In a crude summary contact may be indirect (aka letterbox contact – an exchange of letters between birth and adoptive families facilitated by adoption services) or direct (meet ups – some being supported by adoption services and some arranged directly between birth and adoptive families or between adoptive families). Adoption West managed over 1000 indirect contacts and 140 direct contacts (meetings) in the past year.
22. Feedback was collected from participants for direct contact to inform development. A key message given to the panel was the evolving nature of contact (both direct and indirect). It was also noted that supporting direct contact entailed communication, imagination, flexibility and planning whilst ensuring that the meetings were child-focused and as positive as possible.
23. The panel then focused on recruitment, retention and support for adopters. The challenges in recruitment over the last 12-18 months were noted and the concerns expressed by Adoption West as the number of children requiring adoption were not lessening. Adoption West updated its recruitment strategy every year and recruitment remained a priority to ensure adopters sufficiency.
24. The panel had received two articles that highlighted the impact on children of the trauma they experienced in early life and the resulting challenges for them and their families. It was noted that families had reported that the social care system did not recognise their unique position and support services were not available. The panel noted that respite was often mentioned and was available for foster carers and highlighted the development of the Mockingbird Project, but not currently widely available for adoptive families.
25. Reassurance was offered that support for adopters and understanding how adopters and children experience the adoption process was a priority for the national adoption strategy.

26. Finally, the panel considered the Adoption West's Quarterly report and Supervision Audit report. Both were overall positive reports but the panel expressed again its concern over the resources provided for Adoption West against the panel's understanding of the longer term support needed for adoptive families. It was felt that a first step may be members of the panel to challenge their own Local Authority to ensure that adopted children are included in the definition of "care experienced", which may enable the children to access support and services currently not available to them.

### **March 2024 -**

27. Following a significant change in membership for the panel, the meeting was centred around a recap on adoption, including:
- a. What adoption means and other options for permanency.
  - b. Why there are Regional Adoption Agencies (such as Adoption West).
  - c. The different functions of Adoption West and the six Local Authorities involved.
  - d. The adoption journey from the perspective of the children and the adopters.
  - e. Living with adoption (including support available).
28. The panel also considered the Q3 (October to December 2023) performance report and noted Adoption West's concerns with regards to adopter sufficiency (number of placement orders going up but number of people coming forward to adopt dropping, which is a trend seen nationally).
29. In considering the report of Adoption West's Panel Chair, the panel sought reassurance of measures put in place by Adoption West to incorporate the findings of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review undertaken by the Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership following the murder of Leiland-James Corkill by his prospective adopter.
30. It was confirmed that greater checks of medical circumstances, as well as financial circumstances, were undertaken throughout the adoption process.

### **July 2024 – adoption panel**

31. An Adoption West service manager who oversees the work of the adoption panel attended the meeting and gave a very detailed presentation on the work of the adoption panel.
32. It was agreed that to further their understanding of the work of the adoption panel, members of the scrutiny panel may be invited to attend some of the adoption panel meetings.
33. The issue of ensuring consistency of the quality of the Child Permanency Reports (CPRs) drew the attention of the panel who asked for further update through the year of the training offered.

## **Ambitions for 2024-2025**

34. The scrutiny panel remains committed to developing its membership to include up to five stakeholders within the “adoption triangle”, such as (but not limited to) adoptive parent, adopted young person, adopted adult, birth family member. This would have the dual benefit of deepening the scrutiny panel’s understanding of adoption and, hopefully, enable continuity of work through continuity of membership.
35. A key area of work for the panel in 2024-25 remains to work with all six local authorities to ensure that reporting on adoption is co-ordinated as best as possible to enable robust scrutiny, including “synchronising” consideration of different reports linked to adoption:
  - a. Local authority’s performance report with regards to adoption;
  - b. AW’s annual report;
  - c. This scrutiny panel’s annual report.
36. The scrutiny panel has set its work for 2024-2025 (Appendix 3 – forward work programme) and welcomes input on this.
37. The panel is determined to work more closely with the Adoption West board to ensure that scrutiny happens at the right time and at the right level to provide the most added value, as reflected in the work programme.

## **Conclusion**

38. The scrutiny panel has an ambitious forward work programme for 2024-25 and the enthusiasm to deliver it.
39. Adopters have expressed an interest in joining the scrutiny panel which would also support the delivery of the forward work programme.

## **Proposal**

For the scrutiny committees (as listed in paragraph 1.a. above) and the AW board to:

40. Note the annual report October 2021 to September 2022 of the scrutiny panel and make suggestion on contents to be included for future annual reports, and formatting and presentation of the annual report to ensure ease of reading;
41. Note the forward work programme for the scrutiny panel for 2024-25 (Appendix 3) and suggest any amendments or additional areas of focus for the scrutiny panel;

For the scrutiny committees (as listed in paragraph 1.a. above) to note that:

42. The scrutiny panel would like to invite all councillors to read the executive summary for the Adoption Barometer 2023, to gain some understanding of the



lives of adoptive families. The Adoption Barometer 2023 can be accessed, alongside previous ones, here: [Adoption Barometer](#).

For each member of the panel to:

43. Present this report to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee within their own Local Authority and feedback any comments to the panel.

**Cllr Jon Hubbard, Wiltshire Council, Chairman of the Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Committee**

Date of report: 20 August 2024

Report author: Marie Gondlach, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Wiltshire Council

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – terms of reference of the Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel

Appendix 2 – Split of responsibilities between Regional Adoption Agency and Local Authority

Appendix 3 – forward work programme

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# adoption west



April 2023 to March 2024

## Annual Report

Prepared by Alison Lewis, Service Director



Bath & North East  
Somerset Council



Wiltshire Council



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## Introduction

This is Adoption West's fifth Annual report and provides the agency's performance data across family finding, adopter recruitment, adoption panels and adoption support services. An important aspect of the report is the focus on the practice of the agency and experience of people who have been involved with Adoption West in the year.

Adoption West is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) commissioned by Bath and North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, Gloucestershire County Council, North Somerset Council, South Gloucestershire Council and Wiltshire Council. The agency is a local authority company wholly owned by the aforementioned local authorities. As a separate legal entity from the local authorities Adoption West is registered with Ofsted as a Voluntary Adoption Agency.

This report is produced in accordance with National Minimum Standard 25.6, which details that the Voluntary Adoption Agency Board Members should:

- Receive a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency, every six months.
- Monitor the management and outcomes of the services provided, in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users.
- Satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

It is also a requirement of the Social Care Common Inspection Framework (SCCIF): voluntary adoption agencies, that the six-monthly reports are shared with Ofsted on an annual basis.

Appendix A provides details the governance, commissioning, and local government scrutiny arrangements.

It is important to acknowledge that Adoption West has been operating for 5 years on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024. There have been significant events in this time. Most notably the pandemic only a year into the agency being established; this changed the way in which Adoption West now operates. Adoption West is a relatively small service covering a large geographical area, the changes to hybrid working and the use of virtual meetings which has been a significant benefit to the service and would not have been achieved in the same way in different circumstances. The "Somerset Ruling" and implications for children's and adopters' medicals across the region occurred as we were inspected by Ofsted, we still achieved a Good in the inspection. Importantly we worked effectively and quickly to address the impact the medical issue had on adopters.

In these five years .....

427 children have been adopted

124 children placed with early permanence carers

390 adopters approved.

4945 applications made to the ASF for children and families to access therapeutic support

In addition, more birth parents are accessing support with more children having arrangements in place to enable them to maintain contact with their birth family.

We have established good working relationships with our local authority partners and other partners across the sector pan regionally and nationally.

## Re- Structure of Adoption West

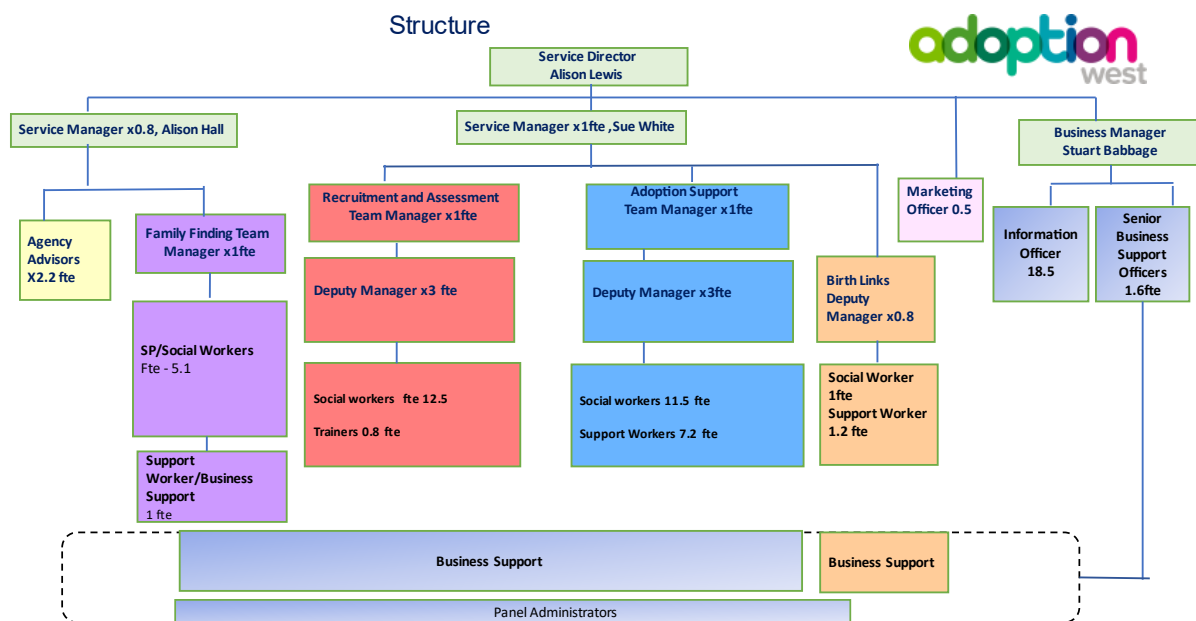
In April 2023 Adoption West started the process of moving from a hub based model, in which three hub offices provided the adoption service to two specific local authorities each. A review of the agency identified the following reasons to move to regional service specific teams:

- Unequal and variable workflows and needs for services across the 3 hubs
- Management of the work in specific service areas across hubs not always effective and could lead to an inequitable service in the region.
- Inconsistency of processes
- Hub managers having a focus on recruitment and assessment of adopters
- Reflecting the national position, the need for adoption support services were growing year on year, the service needed additional management capacity to adapt ways of working and delivery
- Regional teams had been introduced for family finding and birth links and were working well across the six local authorities
- Having a focus on the retention and succession of staff the new structure provided more opportunity to progress to first management level deputy team manager roles

The transition has been gradual over a few months with the appointment of the additional deputy team managers and the transition of work. The new teams are:

- Adoption Support – Anjali Gupta, Team Manager
- Birth Links – Claire Jarvis, Deputy Team Manager
- Family Finding – Kate Worthington/ Jen Brennan, Team Manager (job share)
- Recruitment and Assessment - Jane Priborsky/ Jen Brennan, Team Manager (job share)

## Adoption West Structure Chart



## Working with our Local Authority Partner - (Please see appendix Governance and Scrutiny Arrangements)

Adoption West works closely with the six local authorities at all levels, social workers, team managers, service managers and the Adoption West Board. These relationships strive to ensure joined up working for individual families, development of consistent processes and a shared strategic direction and vision.

In March as part of national social work week three Adoption West Board Directors spent some time observing practice.

*"I just wanted to write to say how much I enjoyed my observation of practice. I thought you were really great, sensitive, compassionate and focused on how to really support the family with tangible outcomes, as well as the holistic assessment. Was lovely to see in practice how Adoption West are supporting families."* (LA Assistant Director)

We continue to have monthly tracking meetings with each, to support our local authority colleagues to progress plans for children who are unable to live with their birth parents and adoption is being considered as a permanence option for them.

Through bi monthly Adoption Lead Managers meetings the group have:

- Reviewed Disruptions
- Considered consistent approaches for managing requests for adoption allowances
- Reviewed and agreed the guidance for managing adoption by foster carers
- An Adoption Lead Manager was involved in an Adoption West audit of supervision

In 2024/25 the group is continuing to work on:

- Adapting practice regarding adopter medicals following the Leiland James Serious Case review and subsequent Coram Baaf briefing
- Establishing a working group to develop practice around maintaining relationships in adoption
- Progressing the Early Permanence action plan and the work of the South West Permanence project
- Developing processes for families that need the involvement and support of both adoption support teams and children’s social care



## The Children

There has been a significant increase in all aspects of adoption activity relating to children. This year, **132** children have had **plans for adoption**, an increase of 7 from the previous year. This is the third year in a row that ADMs have increased.

**Placement orders** were granted for **123** children an increase of 23% and **105** children have been placed for adoption, which is a significant increase from 2022-23. **86** children were **adopted** in this period, which is slightly higher than last year and it will be significantly higher in 2024-25 due to the increase in children placed for adoption this year.

The number of **early permanence** placements has fallen this year with **29** children placed compared to 36 the previous year. This reflects the fall in adopter recruitment numbers which will be discussed in this report. It is positive that referrals from the local authorities are remaining consistent reflecting the work across the region to increase the understanding of early permanence as a positive placement option for children.



Adoption West Adopters 78



External Adopters 27

The number of **children placed with Adoption West adopters** reverted to levels seen in 2020 – 2022 at 74%. This was anticipated due to the increased number of children needing placements at a time of reduced adopter availability in the region. However, there continues to be a far greater number of children placed within the region



## Family Finding

### Children with a Placement Order currently waiting for adoption at 31/03/24.

	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-12 Months	12 -18 Months	18+ Months	Total by LA	Q4 22/23 By LA
<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>84</b>	76
<b>Q4 23/24 Number of Children</b>	40	19	13	2	2	76	

There were **84** children **with Placement Orders** without a match at 31/03/24. This is higher than the 66 children at the same period last year for reasons given previously in the report. This figure does not include children with a placement order who had a 'change of plan away from adoption' which is being progressed by the local authority, with regards to a rescission of the plan and revocation of the placement order.

Of the **84** children with placement orders yet to be placed at the end of Q4, **40** were already linked with adoptive families. This includes 10 children who were matched in Q4, two children whose matches went to panel in late Q4 with a decision made in early Q1 2024-2025, 22 children who are linked to adopters and five foster carer applications/assessments, one of whom was adopted in early April 2024.

There are currently **23** children **waiting longer than six months**, 9 are matched with adopters and in the process of transitions, 2 are linked and 2 in the process of being adopted by their foster carer.

There have been **10** children for whom family finding has stopped as their **plans have changed a way from adoption**. This is slightly higher than 8 last year but remains substantially lower than 19 (2020-21), 18 (2021-22).

The national CORAM I Q3 2023-24 data for children adopted, available at the time of writing, shows that the average time in the Adoption West region between the six local authorities for the child's journey (A 10) continues to be quicker than the England average 462 days compared to 505. The time between placement order and match (period of family finding activity) at **193** days, slightly quicker than the England average of 196.

The family finding team held six virtual family finding events for children during the year, as well as attending adoption exchanges both locally and further afield. Some children were also supported to attend external activity days – a sibling group of two children have since been placed with adopters, and two single children with additional needs have been linked and are proceeding to matching panel. The family finding team didn't proceed with their own activity day during the year due to not having enough children to make the day viable but are planning

an activity day for October 2024 providing there are enough children who might benefit from this nearer the time.

The family Finding Team were asked about their key highlights for the year

*"We successfully placed a little girl with complex health needs in December 2023. Given her needs a national search was undertaken to enable us to access the full reach of available adopters and family finding opportunities. Alongside the national search the child's social worker and family finding social worker retained a consistent focus and commitment to proactively exploring new and available adopters within Adoption West. Positively the adopters she has been placed with were assessed & approved by Adoption West, she has thrived in their care and her adoption order was granted in May 2024.*

*We also successfully matched and then placed her brother; he has a diagnosis of autism and attends a special educational provision. He too has thrived in his placement and his adopters are committed to making their application soon. This is an external placement however within the Adoption West region. The two families were supported to meet and the children are now having positive sibling contact supported by their respective adopters."*

*"In August 2023 we matched a sibling group of three with adoption west adopters, they were placed for adoption at the end of September 2023. The adoption order applications have been submitted and we are now waiting for a court hearing to be listed. Despite the evident challenges in moving 3 children to adoption, the foster carers and adopters worked commendably well together to ensure that the transition remained child focused at all times."*

## Early Permanence

This year **29** have been placed in Early Permanence placements. The slightly lower number is due to the impact of the overall reduction in available adopters.

In 2023-2024 an EP Lead senior practitioner role was created from the existing family finding team, in recognition of the growing number of referrals and placements of children in early permanence placements. The purpose of the role is to have a dedicated person to respond to the local authority social workers managing EP referrals which includes liaising with Recruitment and Assessment social workers and adopters. The EP Lead also takes a crucial role in progressing the actions identified by the Early Permanence project. We appointed to the role in September 2023 from the existing family finding team and the successful candidate has significant experience in respect of both early permanence and adoption.

With more children placed with approved adopters as temporarily approved as foster carers, it is inevitable that there will be a corresponding rise in the number of children whose long term plan is to grow up with a member of their birth family. The example below demonstrates how this can be managed keeping the child at the centre and supporting both families involved.

*A - was placed with early permanence. Through the care proceedings it became evident that the plan was likely to be reunification to father's care. The EP carers were supported to meet with the child's mother and father, and they were able to get to know father; they took A to his father's house to spend time with him as part of the transition plan, which also included exchange of photos and video calls. The day A returned to his father's care the Adoption West social worker travelled with the EP carers to take A home and say goodbye. The father spoke very positively about the EP carers and expressed his gratitude to them and has since given them updates on how A is doing.*

*Therapeutic support was quickly set up for the EP carers who took some time out. Initially they thought they would not wish to return to family finding, however with their social workers support and encouragement they have made use of the therapeutic support available and they plan to return to family finding June 2024.*

Following the conclusion of the Early Permanence Project ( Adoption England Funds) in September 2023 and with the developments in EP Practice that we have been working on across Adoption West, a submission was made in March to Coram Baaf for the EP Quality kite mark. We have now heard that this was successful.

*Congratulations. I am delighted to say that your submission has been viewed by external moderation and Adoption West are awarded the EP Quality Mark. .... Thank you for an excellent submission.*



This is a great achievement and we remain committed to not only sustaining but continually improving this practice. We have some current challenges with a slight fall in the number of EP carers and we have already started to review the practice across the agency to ensure we understand the reasons for this change and address them. The approach that the agency has previously taken, as endorsed by this Kite Mark, will ensure that we continue with the positive recruitment we have had.

*To increase the number of children placed in Early Permanence placements (NMS 13)*

## Recruitment and Marketing

Recruitment activity during this period focussed on social media, a return to community events and updating the website content, centred around these objectives.

- To recruit enough adopters willing to consider children who wait the longest for adoptive parent/s (specifically siblings, Black children, and those children with complex needs).
- To recruit adopters willing to explore Early Permanence as a route to their family.
- To provide and promote support to enable people to adopt.

Which are framed within and reflect the National Campaign objectives.

- **AWARENESS:** Drive awareness and continue to reshape attitudes about what adoption looks like today
- **RECRUITMENT:** Address barriers and drivers to people considering adoption, to encourage the right individuals and families to consider beginning their journey. Additionally, to keep those already in the funnel warm, engaging and influencing their attitudes and expectations throughout the journey

## Adoption West Online Coffee Mornings



We ran an online chat for anyone interested in adoption these are advertised on the Adoption West website and via social media. Each event is hosted by Becky Myers Recruitment and Marketing Officer and another member of staff. These events ran approximately every six weeks during the 2023/24 period.

## National Recruitment Campaigns

Where the emphasis was placed on the 2023 digital campaigns

- Priority children
- Child-centred
- Digital first (for targeting/agility)
- Inclusion of 'support' messaging
- Two equally weighted campaigns

1. The June 2023 campaign focussed on real-life experiences centred on the support theme.
2. The October NAW 2023 campaign highlighted the positive impact adoption has had on adopted people's lives and the strides made in the sector to put children and their sense of identity at the heart of the adoption journey.

For NAW the local marketing enhanced the recruitment focus of the national campaign, with a specific press release highlighting the need for more adopters in the region. This provided the opportunity to be involved in two radio interviews on local radio.

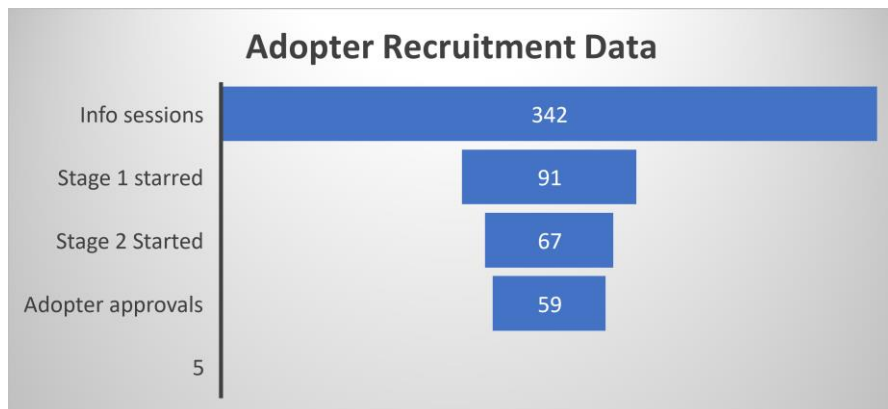
Digital activity during NAW 2023, led to some targeted PR work in the Bristol area.



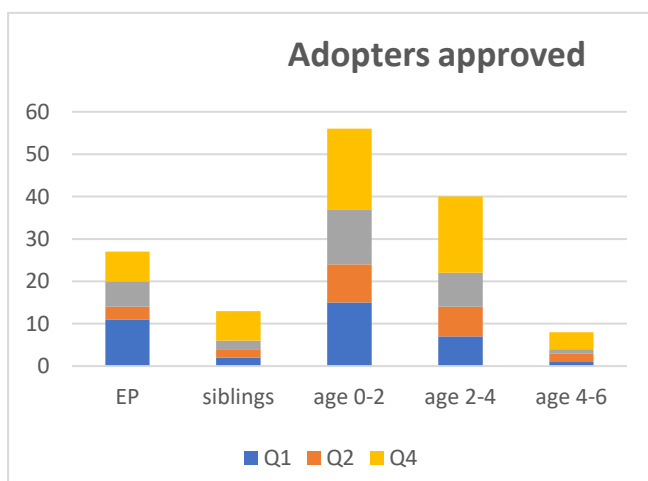
This year has been very challenging for adopter recruitment, we have experienced a fall with lower than average numbers of people coming forward to start the process since early 2022. This has resulted in low adopter approval numbers from the end of 2022 to end of 2023. **59** households have been approved which is a decrease of 21 from the previous year. It is encouraging that the numbers of applicants starting the process has risen since September 2023 and from January to June 2024 we anticipate 40 approvals which will take the agency back to the levels of 2022/23.

The national data continues to show that there are more children needing adoptive families than adopters available.

The number of people attending information sessions and starting stage 1 is higher this year than in 2022/23 and is now starting to convert to improved adopter numbers.



The chart below shows we have seen a fall in the number of adopters considering being matched with siblings, however as recruitment numbers improved in Q4 and Q1 2024/25 this has returned to a 1/3 of approvals. **46%** of adopters were approved with matching advice for early permanence which is a fall from 56% last year



The number of adopters approved and not yet matched for adoption (including those on hold and with EP placements) is **68**, this figure is decreasing each quarter as adopters get matched more quickly due to the current lower number of approvals. Currently there are 38 adopters waiting more than 6 months to be matched, however 15 of these adopters are providing an early

permanence placement and a further 3 previously had EP placements that have ended and are now on hold.

There has been an increase in placement performance with **74** Adopters having been matched and **92** children. The number of placements in quarter 4 is consistent with last quarter and is an increase of 16% on the previous year. There has been an increase in sibling placements with 18 children having been placed with their brother or sister compared with 12 last year. The percentage of adopters providing homes for children within the Adoption West region is **85%**.

## Adopter Assessment and Placement Support

Recruitment and Assessment team has been adapting to the new structure with a number of new deputy team managers and social workers in post. Often social workers join the team with little or no direct experience of adopter recruitment. To add to the induction programme, we have been rolling out a series of mini workshops run by workers in the team with a particular area of knowledge and expertise; positive feedback has been received. Following the restructure, we recognised the need for improved liaison between Family Finding and R & A workers and as a result implemented 6 weekly liaison meetings between the two teams to offer an opportunity to discuss children, approved adopters and those coming through assessment.

Alongside the challenges in recruitment and transitioning to a new structure, the team have been developing practice in the adopter assessments.

The new Adopter Assessment Report (AAR) was developed by Barnardos funded by the DfE through Practice Improvement Funds. Some staff had attended a briefing session and felt positive about both the assessment format and the accompanying assessment tools. A decision was taken to ask three workers to use the AAR with an adopter assessment. These have all been completed, considered by the adoption panel and approved by the Agency Decision Maker. The feedback about the AAR from the Panel, ADM, family finding and children's social workers has been mainly positive so far. Therefore, we are now extending the use of the AAR across the team with more prospective adopter assessments. The intention is a decision will be made next year as to whether Adoption West will use the AAR for all assessments. The stage 1 workbook has been adapted to fit with the AAR.

### An example of adapting an assessment to include a child in the family

*"I was working with a family who have a birth son (7), he was fixated on wanting to read what I was writing about his family – a fair point considering how many times I was visiting! He obviously couldn't read the entire AAR and so I made him his own mini AAR with subheadings of Information about Me, School, Family Home, Being an older brother and then Shelley's thoughts, where I summarised what a great big brother I thought he would be. This was sent to him recorded delivery and for him to add his signature.*

*The information I shared with him included an overview in age appropriate terms of my assessment of his family and his relationships with family members and school, with a positive outcome."*

### The Introduction of Family and Friends Network Meetings

Adoptive families need a good network of support from family, friends and other adopters. Part of the assessment is to consider the strength of the network, also to support the adopters in preparing their family and friends for a child joining the family. The Family and Friends training has been a key aspect of this for many years and this year Adoption West social workers have started to introduce Family and Friends Network meetings.

*“Network Meetings – These meetings have been held virtually and have been useful in terms of providing a brief overview of adoption and the needs of adopted children, in addition to gathering information from everyone who’s attended, about the kind of support they will be able to offer the prospective adopters. They have provided an opportunity for friends and family to show their willingness to help and to provide extra details about what this might involve, for example, sharing relevant professional experience, highlighting their daytime availability and one colleague offering to provide work cover. The adopters have been very positive about the experience, feeling that the commitment of their network to supporting them in their adoption journeys, has been brought to life by seeing them all in one place.”*

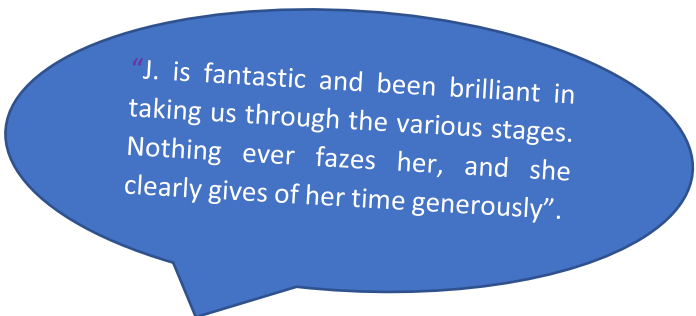
The Recruitment and Assessment team have worked to imbed the new structure and has also been introducing the new AAR (Adoption Assessment Report) and started planning for participating in an Early Support pilot project and planning changes to improve the front door.

The following compliments have been given to staff and reflects the relational aspect of the work between social workers and adopters as they progress through their journey:


*“She put us at ease and explained everything very clearly. She was friendly open and approachable. She was great with the children, they enjoyed talking with her. I felt i could talk openly with her without judgement. Her support was excellent and made the process so much easier to cope with.”*

*“Thank you doesn't come close enough, you have been truly amazing the last two years. You have supported us so amazing. A massive personal thank you as you really have been my shoulder to rant on and really helped me.”*

*“We really appreciate everything you’ve done for us and for E. As we mentioned yesterday, we were so close to giving up on the whole process after what happened and it was only your support and understanding that kept us going.”*



*“J. is fantastic and been brilliant in taking us through the various stages. Nothing ever fazes her, and she clearly gives of her time generously”.*



*“N has been a sensational support to us through the process and simply we don’t feel we would have been a family without her support”.*

*“My wife and I did our adoption through Adoption West, and G was pre-adoption SW. Now we have the L, post-adoption, who is helping us navigate secondary school and ASF and more. We are very grateful for the support that we have received as a family.”*

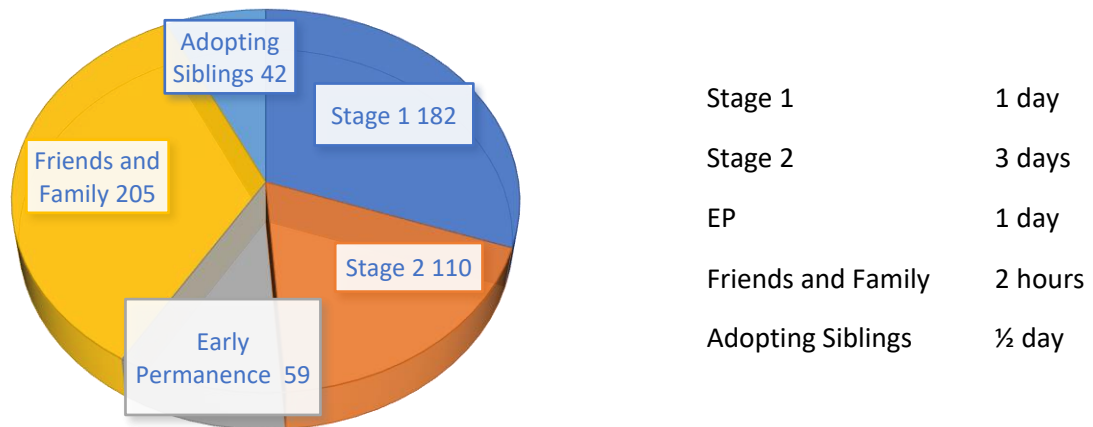
*The assessment process is clearly explained to prospective adopters (ibid) (NMS 10.3)*



Agencies respond to requests for detailed information (following initial enquiries either to the National Gateway for Adoption or directly to an adoption agency) within ten working days, through an information session, a visit, pre-planned telephone call or similar arrangement with the prospective adopter. (NMS 10.4)

To implement an effective recruitment strategy, meeting the needs of children with a plan for adoption in the AW region (NMS 10.1)

## Adopter Preparation Training



For those adopters who want to provide an Early Permanence placement, they are asked to attend an additional 1-day training course during Stage 2 of their assessment. Those adopters wanting to be matched with siblings should complete the Adopting Siblings Workshop, prior to matching panel.

Stage 1,2 and EP training have an average evaluation score of 9.4/10

*"A huge thank you to the trainers for sharing their expertise as social workers and adopters - the training was very informative and engaging"*

*"We never realized how the early years of your life could affect a child's development, and cause trauma, before we started the adoption process. We really enjoyed all the training days."*

*"Excellent training. Have both come away from the training so excited to continue the process and feel more committed than ever to providing a loving and supportive home to some amazing children."*

## "Twilight Sessions"

Bringing together the work with the birth parent groups and the preparation of adopters three Twilight Sessions have been held this year. This provides the opportunity for birth parents and prospective adopters to talk together. This enables birth parents to share their story with the intention of helping prospective adopter to gain insight and understanding to,

the circumstance of many families, the experience of children and long term implications for the birth family, adoptive family and importantly the child.

Next year we are considering how these sessions can be supported so that more adopters can attend and have this opportunity.

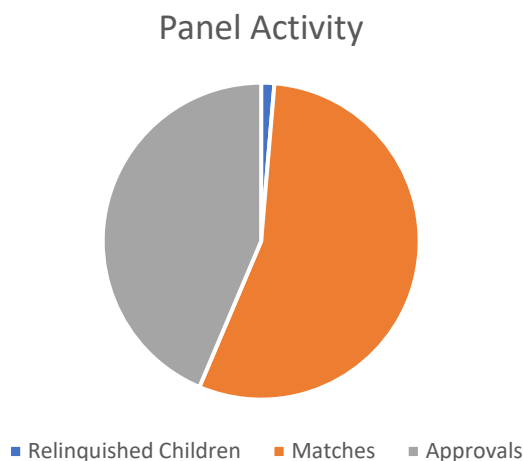
*Applicants are given the opportunity to talk to approved adopters, adoptees and birth parents whose children were adopted. (NMS10.7)*

*Preparation courses are held and made available to all prospective adopters, including foster carers who wish to adopt the child (NMS10.8)*

*Prospective adopters are prepared to become adoptive parents in a sensitive way, which addresses and gives them skills knowledge and practical techniques to manage the issues they are likely to encounter (NMS10.9)*

## Adoption Panels

The Adoption West Panel Chairs Report has been completed for this period, meeting National Minimum Adoption Standards 17.2 and 25. This report includes full details of the panel's process, membership, appraisals, quality assurance, training and activity, with recommendations to the agency.



Panel business this year has included:

2 relinquished children,  
82 matches for 106 children  
65 approvals considered.

Adoption West continues to run on average 4 panels a month with 33 active panel members as follows:

- 3 panel chairs
- 7 social worker representatives (including 1 vice chair),
- 13 independent panel members (including 3 vice chairs)
- 10 medical advisers

Adoption West is committed to expanding the diversity of panel members and is actively seeking to recruit new panel members from a diverse ethnic background. One of the new panel members recruited is from a global majority background. We are currently developing a focused recruitment campaign.

We continue to provide two training days a year for panel members one of which includes staff from across Adoption West. The training days covered the following items:

- Update on Adoption West staffing, structure and practice
- Presentations on post-adoption support
  - Working with birth parents, presented by support workers of the Birth Links Service
  - Supporting adopters. A presentation of the work of the post adoption support team
- Thinking about the adoption support plan
- A reflection about the aim of the panel feedback forms
- Presentation from Medical Advisers regarding Adult Health Reports
- Presentation of the AAR pilot
- Learning from adoption disruptions
- Positive adoption stories
- A summary of feedback from attendees at panel
- Discussion of the Chair's Annual Report

Feedback is requested from all those attending panel. It is important that the panels understand how they are experienced by those attending so that changes and improvements to practice can be made where required.

#### **Adopters Comments:**

*"We think the panel ran well. We had some level of anxiety, as expected, but the panel members were warm and kind. Overall, it was a positive experience."*

*".....It was reassuring to be given [before panel] the information about how the panel would work on the day and it was useful to test the online connection."*

*".....Panel was running late and started later than scheduled, however my social worker was informed of this and she told me. I appreciated this because it could have been a more anxious wait without knowing this for certain."*

*"Thank you for making what could have been an uncomfortable situation a very positive and efficient experience. We appreciate all your time, excellent communication and advice."*

#### **Social workers Comments**

*"This was my first time attending panel and it was a very positive experience"*

*"I felt it was a well-balanced panel, panel members warm and appropriate questions were asked."*

*"The Chair has a lovely way of making people feel comfortable"*

*"Really like X's panel format as she gives me the time for contributing and I'm specifically asked for input – it can be hard to speak when panel is in full flow and at pace so its good time is given."*

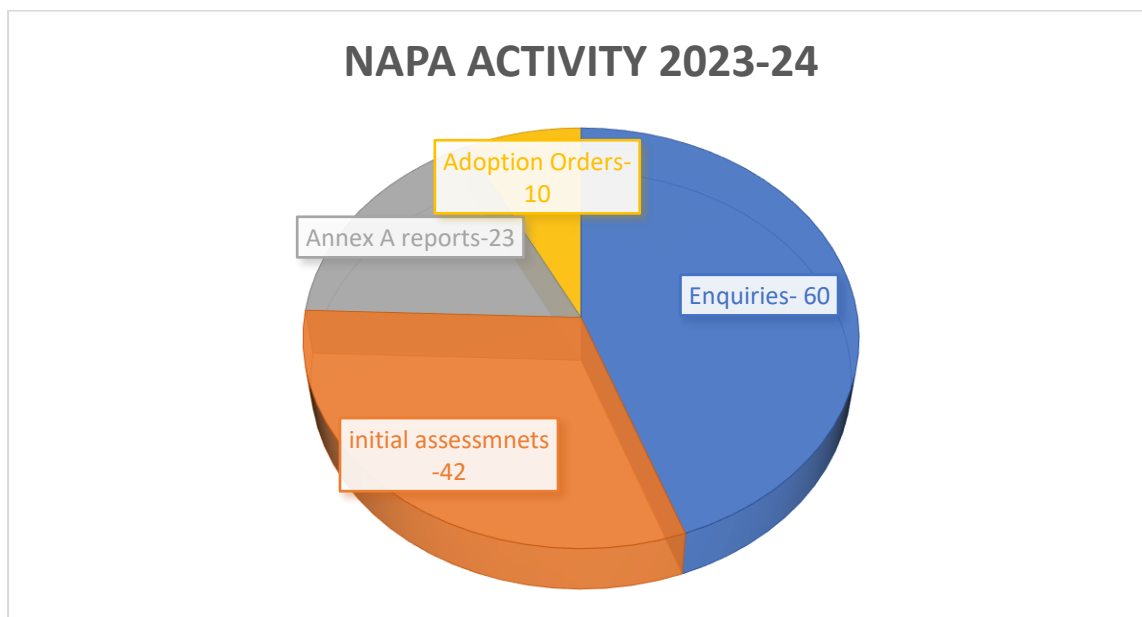
#### **Adoption Disruptions**

There have been no adoption disruptions this year

## Non-Agency Partner Adoption (referred to as Step-Parent Adoption)

Adoption West manages enquiries regarding partner adoptions via a triage process. Applicants are required to submit their notice of intention to adopt to the local authority and Adoption West then completes the checks, references and court report.

This work is completed by social workers in the Recruitment & Assessment Teams in each hub, enabling the flow of this work to be managed at a regular pace and appropriately balanced with the priorities of agency adoptions.



## Adoption Support

The adoption support service is now one team covering the region which includes three deputy team manager teams in Bristol, Gloucester and Trowbridge. In June 2023 agreement was given by the local authorities for additional funding for 1 additional social worker and 3 support workers full time posts for the adoption support services. This enabled a temporary social worker to become permanent; 2.5 additional support worker in the adoption support team and a 0.5 post in Birth Links to work with birth family members. All posts are now recruited to and new workers are settling into their roles and the organisation well. Despite holding vacancies during this time, the adoption support service has still managed a high turnover of work and provided support to a large number of families and children. The increased funding means that they can now improve the offer with lifestory support, education issues, direct work with children and young people and therapeutic parenting advice.

2023/24	Enquiries /Contact	Enquiries resulting in an assessment	Assessments not started	Av time enquiry to Assessment start	Assessments completed
Adoption West	819	157	41	12.5	167

The above table gives the data for enquires to assessment. In the last eighteen months, there has been a steady increase in the time families are waiting for an assessment. Families are provided with a keeping in touch call and will be prioritised outside of this system if the family is in crisis. However, this wait time is considerably outside of the target of 6 weeks which the agency had been able to operate within until this period. We are working to address this in the short term using the additional capacity of recruited independent social workers.

As part of the re structure we immediately changed the duty system to offer a specific adoption support service to adoptive families. This has provided some challenges and has led us to identify and move towards a new front door service which will offer more consistency and early intervention/support. A task group have completed some initial work on the shape of this service. We have 2 Senior Practitioner roles and a support worker who will run this service which is planned to start in September 2024.

31/03/24	Children receiving a service	Children rag rated red	Children rag rated amber	Children rag rated green
Adoption West	914	41	206	692

The level of support required by families can vary significantly and the rag rating is an attempt to identify this. This year up to 10% of the children have been referred to children's social care due to concerns about risk in the community and risk to the stability of the family.

### Service Developments

An Adoption Support Strategy based on a Theory of Change model has been written and focuses on the development of our 3 tier adoption support model and in particular aiming to expand services at the universal and targeted level to have a wider support offer this includes peer support groups focused groups/training and social events.

- Advice/helpline/duty We have dedicated social workers available every working day: 9am to 4.30pm Monday to Thursday and 9am to 4pm on Fridays.
- Support with maintaining relationships face to face contact and Letter Box
- Events for adopters and children – summer parties x3 and Christmas parties x3
- Regular Newsletter and social media post to provide information from across the region and nationally
- Support groups- contract with CCS Adoption
- Connections to Peer Support across the region, WANDS , ITAV
- Access to Virtual School Lead for support and signposting regarding education issues – range of webinars on education topics including transitions
- Early Permanence Support Group monthly from August 2024

1

- Catch – Adopter Hub (PACT)- web platform of resources and webinars – licences for prospective adopters from stage 1 for a min of 1 year
- National Association Of Therapeutic parents – membership for adopters
- Therapeutic Parenting courses – for adoptive parents with a child placed x 3 a year
- Using Theraplay skills in parenting - for parents with young children x1 a year
- NVR – for parent experience child to parent violence x1 a year
- Cathedral School Group – pilot group for adopter teens in collaboration with FACE – Sth Glos Youth Service
- Lifestory work Course
- Birth Parent Support groups – x2 Bristol and Gloucester meets monthly
- Early Placement Support Core Offer – Pilot from June 2024

2

- Currently provided by the Adoption Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)
- The ASGSF provides funding to help adoptive parents pay for therapeutic services following adoption.
- Assessment of a family's adoption support needs.
- Application and all administration of the grant monies
- Accreditation of private providers of therapeutic support who can be funded via application to the ASGSF

3

### Peer Support Groups

Adoption West had worked with Wiltshire Adopters Network for Development and Support (WANDS) to put a proposal to the Adoption West Board for the development of peer-to-peer support across all six local authorities, which was agreed in April 2023.



The aim is to develop an adopter led network of peer support across the Adoption West region. Two adopters from WANDS have been networking with adopters across the six areas and have connected with other adopters who have been keen to develop groups in their areas, this includes 3 groups in Bristol and two groups in Gloucestershire. Their medium/ long term plan is to create a charitable organisation called “It Takes a Village” which will be an umbrella organisation of peer support groups.

## Groups/Training

**NVR group** for adopters who were struggling with their children’s behaviours including child to parent violence. The group was funded by ASF and facilitated by an Advanced, Accredited NVR Practitioner & parenting specialist and Lead Clinical Specialist (Placement Support Therapist), Wiltshire CAMHS In-Reach Team. Eight parents completed the evaluation report demonstrated the positive benefit to them.

**Theraplay** group aimed at families with children aged 2-3 years, was run for eight weeks April to June 2023, facilitated by two Adoption West social workers. The focus of the group was to provide and practice theraplay activities with the aim of building attachments. Five parents and their children attended the course. This is some of the feedback:

***Practical ideas that have become part of our everyday lives***

***Most enjoyed seeing the bond grow between the children and enjoyment of all the activities***

***Really useful to attend great idea***

***More sessions/activities like this would be great***

**Therapeutic Parenting Courses** are provided on line three times a year facilitated by Adoption West social workers. This is some of the feedback:

Online experience?

- ***Couldn’t have done the course if it wasn’t online but connection problems made it difficult sometimes and we missed some information***
- ***Online experience was very good***
- ***If it had been face-to face I couldn’t have attended***
- ***Still felt like we were a group and everyone was happy to chat***

What has been most useful?

- ***Being reminded of things you know but have forgotten***
- ***I couldn’t cope with the tantrums and dysregulation, being reminded about their emotional age rather than their chronological age has been really helpful***
- ***The whole course was helpful to understand my child’s behaviour***

- *The advice to regulate ourselves, to slow down and think and to think about ourselves. I've read a lot of therapeutic parenting books but they haven't mentioned us*
- *It's helpful to talk to each other and for people to bring different things to the table each week*

**Cathedral School Group** is an example of innovation and joint working as described by Kay Adoption West support worker -

It had been recognised by this school in Bristol and the adoption support team that there were a number of adopted children attending the school. After discussions between Adoption West (AW), Cathedral School and the Foundation For Active Community Engagement (Face) it was agreed that all adults believed that bringing together a number of adopted young people (YP) to form a group would be a good idea. The school recognised that these YP were naturally gravitating towards one another, AW recognised that nationally adopted groups were becoming established and that there was a high population of adopted YP in one setting that were expressing themselves in various ways, FACE had experience of running different types of youth provision for a range of YP and were interested to get the views of adopted YP about what they felt they needed or wanted. In March 2022 we got to work arranging a consultation with YP. Dawn an employee of FACE and Kay and employee of AW met with Miss Stevens from Cathedral and a number of selected adopted YP to seek their views.

Dawn and Kay had come armed with some activities and questions. The YP had come armed with break time excitement and nerves about meeting us. The room was full of chatter and the YP shared with us their thoughts about the school and when we introduced ourselves some YP shared aspects of their adoption stories, we spoke about boundaries and identified different YP's desire to identify as adopted or their desire for this not to be a talking point. After consultation agreed that a focus needed to be how difficult YP had found it to come together and be part of a group and felt that that should be the priority.

Face wrote a bid and secured funding from the two organisations, John James and Quartet. The funding was to run sessions with YP around the topic of identity, the bid included resources, trips and staffing of a FACE employee.

In September 2023 Miss Stevens arranged a coffee morning with the parents of students that the school had identified to introduce Kay and Debbie. Parents generally felt the group was a good idea.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023 we held our first session. Sessions are held monthly at the school and attendance has been high. We have done a lot of forming and storming as a group and identified that our end goal of performing together as a group will come in time. We have seen relationships develop and evolve both between YP and more recently parents. We quickly noticed that unlike the consultation group, this group were not so determined to share their adoption stories. In fact, it became apparent from week one not all YP knew that their peers were adopted, with H announcing "oh so your adopted", with clear surprise and delight in his voice. Adoption as a topic has been lightly touched upon in sessions. However, most of the sessions have been about relationship building and boundary setting. We began with a programme that has needed to be adapted as we go along. Understanding the impact of the group is in the small details, hearing YP's comments within the session "oh so they are just like me", "Sir, we are the adopted kids" seeing how much of a struggle coming together and behaving in a considerate way can be, testing the boundaries with



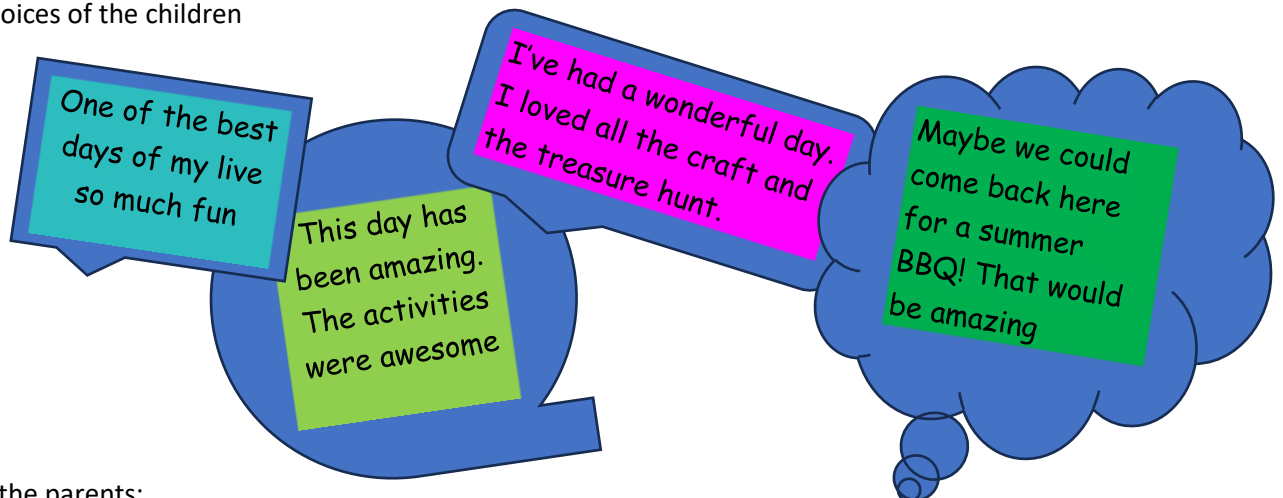
each other and making sure staff can hold their feelings, seeing the pain a YP can feel when they sense their actions were not well received can be really difficult but seeing YP introduce their new “friend” to parents and asking to arrange playdates, having YP want to share with you parts of their life story and seeing YP encourage each other and accept and even embrace one another can at times be very moving. The group has its challenges and it has many strengths. I am aware that at times, to the untrained eye we look like organised chaos, I see the relationships and growth and it inspires me. I look forward to seeing what the future brings.

## Events

This year summer parties were arranged in two areas and Christmas parties which were held in 3 locations across the region. These were well received with positive feedback and requests to have more events like these.



The voices of the children



Now the parents:

*We all had a great time, caught up with some familiar faces and made some great new contacts too.*

*Nice to have a Gloucester local event. Been a long time since last.*

*My oldest didn't want to come but once there he recognise a boy, took the initiative and went to talk to him and they entertained themselves for the whole evening. This is quite rare. And as parents we were so amazed!!*

*This is a social event we are really looking forward to. Maybe could we have other parties during the year? I might ask too much. but definitely it was a success.*

Three summer parties and three Christmas parties are planned for 2024

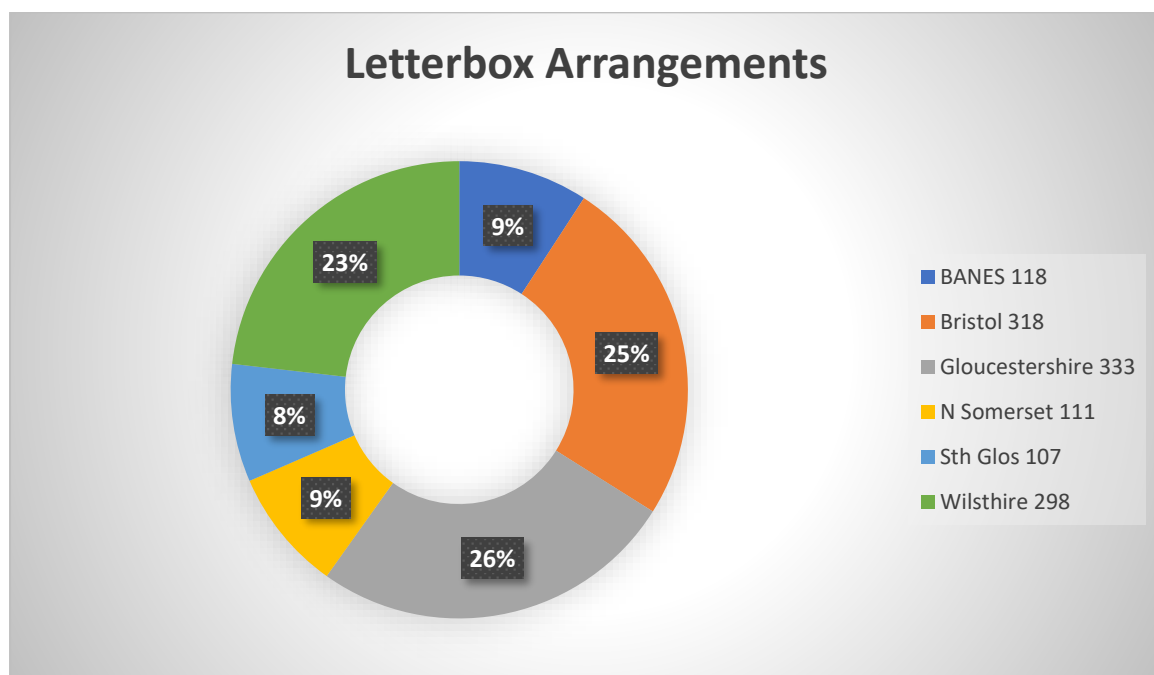
In addition to these groups and events Adoption West continues to provide funds to CCS Adoption to enable adopters in the region attend groups run by CCS Adoption Bristol, which includes a parent and toddler group, holiday activities and activity groups for teens and

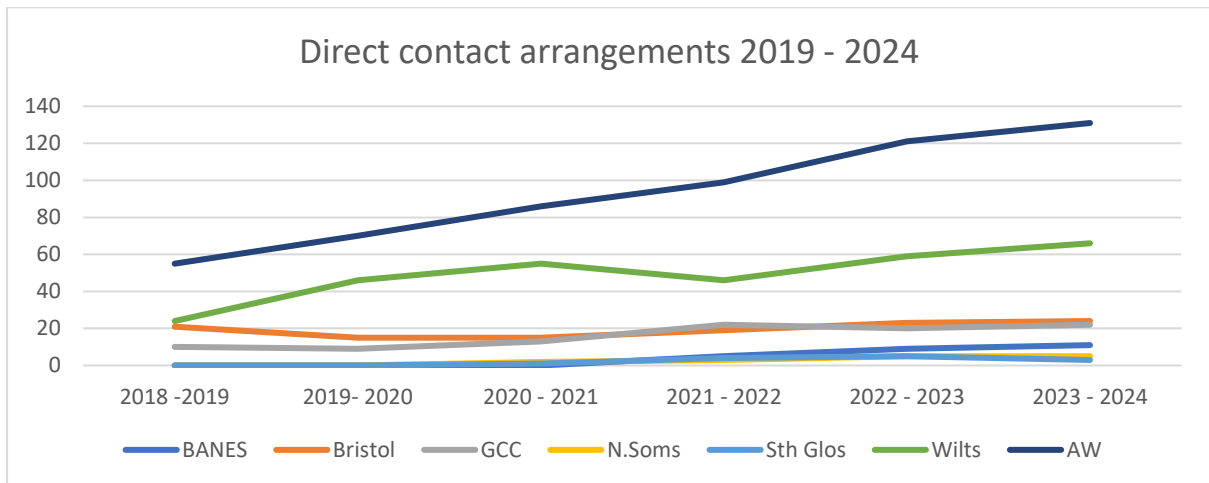
## Maintaining Relationships

The maintaining connections service has been working hard to manage and support letterbox contact and meeting up times between birth family members, adopted children and their adopters. The number of meeting up times is increasing and the support workers are managing these well. We have had a number of young people and birth family members making contact with each other via social media and have provided support to mitigate and manage risks here possible and ensure that concerns are addressed. 3 members of the team presented a workshop on maintaining connections at a national conference held by Adoption England in 2023. Adoption West manages 1,285 letterbox arrangements.

***I wanted to thank you all for being part of the conference last week. Without your support, valued input and workshops we couldn't have made the day as great as it was***

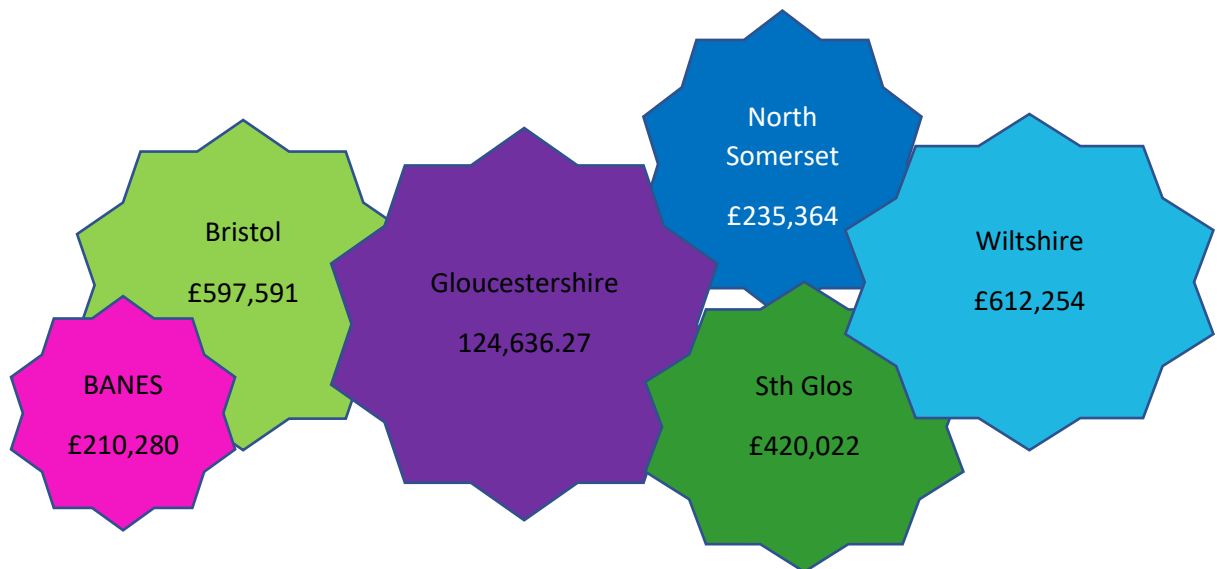
***Vicky Swift - Project Manager National Adoption Strategy Team***





## Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund provides funds to pay for therapeutic services for adopted children and young people. The Adoption support teams must complete an assessment of need with the child and family to identify the appropriate support and provider. **1008** applications were approved for families in the Adoption West Region with **1151** recipients accessing therapeutic support. This is a further year on year increase in the number of families accessing the fund. We accessed **£3,673,231** to provide therapeutic support to children and families.



*“he is doing really well at school; we are very proud of him and doing everything we can to support him. So far so good! the therapist been a fantastic support, not just to Kayden but also me and he really likes her so I think it's a great fit and positive all round!.....”*

## Feedback and Compliments

*“Thank you very much for so efficiently sorting all this for both our boys, it’s much appreciated. Thanks also for becoming our named support worker, that’s really very helpful.”*

***“Thank you so much for dealing with the allowance and for suggesting we apply for DLA. We have heard back from both places in the last 5 days and basically it will change our lives. Also thanks for recommending I do the online course with the Belay Foundation”***

*“Thank you for all your support, we are, as a family, in such a different place than we were last year. Long may it continue!!!”*

***“We’re in an OK place at the moment- mostly thanks to your team!..Many thanks as ever for all the help and support. I honestly don’t know how we would have survived the last few years without your team! “***

*Adoption National Minimum Standard 15*

*Adoption support*

*Children and adults affected by adoption receive an assessment of their adoption support needs.*

*Children and adults affected by adoption receive an assessment of their adoption support needs. Service users confirm that the adoption support service provided met or are meeting their assessed needs. (NMS 15)*

*Contact with birth parents, siblings, other members of the birth family and significant others is arranged and maintained when it is beneficial to the child. (NMS 8)*



## Adopted Adult Service

Provides counselling and access to records for adopted adults this also includes advice about how to access intermediary services if people wish to trace birth family members.

The waiting time for adopted adults to access their records and to receive Sch2 counselling session has increased over the last three months, please see below. This has been due to the small service being impacted by health related absence issues which are now resolved, so this should improve in the next quarter.

### Number of referrals:

Total	Adopted Adult (Sch 2)	Adopted adult (Access to records)	Intermediary advice	Birth family	Adopted adult (post commencement)
<b>Total 2023/2024</b>	45	76	29	104	5
<b>Total 2022/2023</b>	39	75	35	103	1

## Birth Family Support

There have been some changes in the team with an additional 18.5-hour support worker post has been created and provide support to birth families in the Wiltshire area. It not only means the team have more available support time but the reduction in travel time across the region also means further increased availability. A new member of staff was appointed in the Gloucester area after someone left the agency and started in March. These new appointments have enabled the service to provide a more equitable and efficient service across the region. In Q1 2024/25 the waiting list has reduced and the team are now meeting the 6 week target from referral to allocation of support.

**The Bristol and Gloucester Birth parent groups** continue to run not only supporting each other but also sharing their lived experience with Adoption West. This has been invaluable and helped to improve wording of the letterbox leaflet, giving feedback about value of direct contact & the benefit of maintaining relationships and feedback re: content of adopters' letters.

### **“Birth Links’ Seed of Hope Tree”**

Bristol City Council are working in partnership with *Trees for Streets* as one of a number of innovative strategies to plant trees across the city. They offer the opportunity to sponsor a celebration tree in one of the city's parks to mark an occasion, celebrate or remember someone special. Sallie Turnbull support worker writes about the Bristol Groups involvement with this initiative:

*Our Birth Links’ Support Group heard about this scheme and felt it would be a great idea to have a tree planted to celebrate and remember their children and all children who have been adopted. They hoped it could be a place where birth relatives whose lives have been changed by adoption could visit and spend time to think and reflect and remember special dates and anniversaries. A place where at times they could find comfort and peace.*

*They wrote a letter to Alison Lewis, Service Director in August 2023 asking if Adoption West would agree to sponsor a tree and when this was agreed, Birth Links arranged for a tree to be sponsored on their behalf in an area of parkland chosen by them. It's a small-leaved lime tree (*Tilia cordata*) and is planted on Ladies Mile, Durdham Downs, Bristol.*

*A plaque has been attached using words chosen by them - “Birth Links’ Seed of Hope Tree”.*

*The Group have visited the tree, and a summer picnic is planned. They are working on a leaflet with our Marketing Service which can be included with letterbox information when new letterbox exchanges are set up, signposting birth families to the tree as a place to visit.*

*It means so much to them, more than you can imagine!*



## Birth Links Support Workers with a flourishing Birth Links Seeds of Hope Tree

Adoption West is committed to promoting the voice of birth family members and this year support workers have delivered information sessions to adoption panel members and to Councillors from Scrutiny Panel. Going forward we are working towards increasing their voice at Adoption Panel ideally with a birth family member of panel and also by the groups developing a selection of questions that panel can ask from the birth family perspective.

In June 2024 the first ever adoption support map for birth families launched by the Family Rights Group. This is an interactive map of support services for birth families looking for information and support before, during and after adoption. This map is the first of its kind in England and will help thousands of families find the critical support they need.

*“Too often, birth families affected by adoption struggle to access the support they need. It can also have a significant impact on the outcome for the children involved. Our new interactive map will, for the first time, create a go-to resource for families to find support at this critical time.”*

**Pam Ledward, Principal Social Work Adviser at Family Rights Group**

The Birth Links team provided information and details of the service is now included and accessible via the map which is hosted on Family Rights Group’s website

<https://frg.org.uk/birth-families-map/>

**Adoption National Minimum Standards 12.3** Birth parents are given access to, and are actively encouraged to use, a support worker from the time adoption is identified as the plan for the child. The support worker is independent of the child’s social worker. (NMS12.3)

**Adoption National Minimum Standards 12.6** Birth parents are helped to work through their concerns through the counselling they receive and understand what is proposed for their child and how the child will benefit if they take an active part in their child’s adoption. (NMS12.6)

**Adoption National Minimum Standards 16** Intermediary services - Adopted adults and birth relatives are assisted to obtain information in relation to the adoption, where appropriate, and contact is facilitated between an adopted adult and their birth relative if that is what both parties want

**Adoption National Minimum Standards 23.9** Birth records counselling and disclosure of adoption information

## National and Regional Developments

The National Adoption Team is led by the Strategic Adoption Lead Sarah Johal, allows for RAA leaders to work collaboratively on developing and improving practice and delivering improved outcomes for children and families as part of the government's national adoption strategy- achieving excellence everywhere. The 3 year programme has 3 key priorities, recruitment of adopters, the child's journey and adoption support.

## South West Permanence Project

The aims of the project are:

- To increase aspirations of permanence for children with disabilities throughout the system. With improved and speedier permanency opportunities for children with disabilities.
- Reduce delays for children by diversifying the regional pool of adopters.
- Greater placement stability through earlier placement and better understanding of children's support needs. Earlier attachments, reducing impacts of trauma and loss and improving life outcomes.
- Greater placement stability from tailored, informed adoption support packages secured at the point of placement.
- Adopters more aware of the needs of children waiting and better prepared to meet them.



The project lead Claire Downes has been working with Alys Bates a social worker from Adopt South West to establish the project. A management and advisory group has been established which include Andrew Brown a researcher from the Oxford University Rees centre who will be evaluating the project.

The project will be looking at improvements in the assessment recruitment, matching and support for adopters adopting a child with a disability.

A unique aspect of the project is the enhanced family finding model which involves:

- Develop in-depth understanding of the child/ren, and their support needs.
- Working where possible with birth families as well as foster carers and social workers to create a detailed ecomap showing the child's current and historical networks of support. Projects show genograms can need to include between 30-100 identified people before successful permanence options can be identified. These include members of family, social and professional networks.
- Locating and contacting people within the network through phone calls, emails, social media, visits etc. to identify those who have an interest in supporting the child/ren.

- Discussions to identify who would be able to meet the child/ren's needs and how permanence would present for the child within the family. Including development of a support plan.
- Refer to adoption team or local authority for full assessment of family as adopters/special guardians or long-term foster carers.

The project has been working with the local authorities to ensure information sharing agreements cover its approach. Children have now been referred to the project and the enhanced family finding approach has started to be used with a small number of children. The project has already worked with LinkMaker to improve the quality of children's profiles and has made connections with the Maudsley hospital in relation to the support adopter need.

### Early Support Core Offer Pilot – from June 2024

Adoption West have been working as part of National Task and Finish groups to develop a core offer for early placement support from linking for adoption to the Adoption order. The working groups have defined what support should be provided to adopters and children during this period and developed the following guidance and tools:

- Core Offer to families
- Core Offer and guidance for practitioners
- The Purple Book – a new workbook for adopters for them to be able to record and store information about the child, but also record their reflections and understanding about the child's needs
- The Purple Book – Guidance

Adoption West will be involved in the pilot to trail these new initiatives.

### Adoption Support Plan Pilot

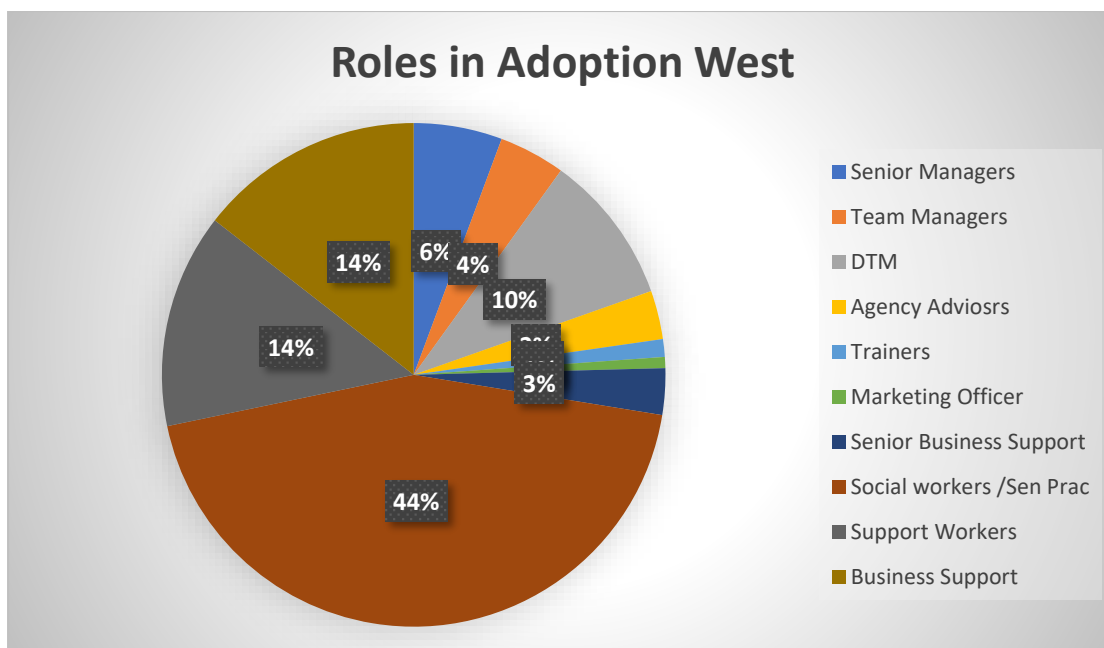
The same task and finish groups have revised the Adoption Support plan which Coram Baaf are now taking forward to pilot. Adoption West will also be trialing this with a small number of children as they are matched with adopters

### People

The average number of staff employed by Adoption West is 93 with 67 fte.

In 2023/24 67% of the staff in Adoption West worked part time, this includes hours ranging from 18.5 to 30 hours a week. 58% of social work staff are part time and 19% of those in a management role are part time. Whilst this does enable Adoption West to attract new staff, there is an impact on management time with a higher number of people to be supervised.





The Senior Management Team, as detailed below, remains stable.

- Alison Lewis, Service Director- Agency Decision Maker (Adopter Approvals)
- Stuart Babbage, Business Manager
- Sue White, Service Manager – Recruitment, Assessment & Adoption Support
- Alison Hall, Service Manager (30 hours) – Family Finding and Panels, Agency Decision Maker (Adopter Approvals)

## Finance

Adoption West received a commissioned contract income of £4.036 million in 2023/24 from its 6 local authority partners to deliver adoption services. The breakdown of budget allocation is shown below:

Category	Budget (£'000)
Employee Salary, NI & Pensions	3,416
Other employee related spend	127
Commissioned Services, subs & adopter recruitment activity	156
Post Adoption Support activity	96
ICT & Office Costs	155
Other Support Services	88
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,036</b>

Adoption West has also received Adoption Support Fund grant income and manages the related expenditure on behalf of the 6 local authority partners. As a Voluntary Adoption Agency, Adoption West operates on a not-for-profit basis and any surpluses are returned to the local authority partners that control the organisation.

Adoption West has managed its finances effectively to deliver services within budget under the added pressures of inflationary increases and various other organisational challenges. The financial processes and systems in place have proved effective and are being continuously improved to meet requirements, increase efficiency and enable Adoption West to realise new opportunities.

*Financial viability and changes affecting business continuity. The Voluntary Adoption Agency/Adoption Support Agency is financially sound. (NMS20)*

## Complaints & Data Breaches

Adoption West has received seven complaints this year, four of which were resolved at local resolution level and two progressed to stage 2. One was on hold due to an investigation being in process and was not reinstated. The stage 1 and 2 complaints were partially upheld with apologies provided learning about practice and relevant processes taken forward.

There have been two data breaches this year. All incidents were reported to the Data Protection Officer, and none were reportable to the ICO.

## Concluding Remarks

Adoption West's fifth year has been one filled with challenges and new opportunities.

This year the service has successfully managed a transition to a new structure. This has involved undertaking the necessary recruitment to address staff changing roles as well as the additional staff that were possible due to the additional adoption support funds.

The recruitment of adopters has been at its lowest level for many years while in this region the number of children needing an adoptive family is increasing. It is difficult to be sure why these two things have been happening. Nationally we know that the number of adopters has fallen and consider that the cost of living crisis could be a factor in peoples own individual decision making. However, it is important that we continue to scrutinise this issue at a local regional level, so we will be working with the local authorities to understand the changes for children leading to increased numbers with a plan for adoption. At the same time locally, we will continue to promote the need for people to consider adoption. It is positive to see that the numbers of people coming forward to adopt are starting to turnaround.

We are operating in a time of limited resources that impact on the lives of the birth families, adopted families, adopted adults and children with whom we work. To provide permanence for those children who need adoption and support them and their families long term, Adoption West is working well with other organisations at both a local and national level. I hope that this report demonstrates the creativity and desire to address the challenges and do as much as we can for our service users. This year there have been positive steps toward the provision of a consistent adoption support service across the region.

The report indicates areas of development that we are taking forward for next year as follows:

- At a time of fewer adopters, we will strive to ensure that the timeliness for children achieving permanence by adoption is not impacted. To do this we aim to recruit 80-85 adopters this year and work with our local authorities to develop a longer term plan for meeting the needs of children locally.
- The Adopter Assessment Report (AAR) pilot will be concluded alongside taking part in the national pilots for the Adoption Support Plan and Early placement support core offer.
- Plans will be progressed to improve the experience for applicants at the front door from information session through to the completion of stage 1.
- We will continue to develop the diversity of Adoption Panels including the involvement of those with lived experience.
- Our commitment to ensuring early permanence placements are available for those children who will benefit will continue, with a re-focus of the EP support group d review of the training provided.
- Birth Links aims to establish a support group for birth parents in the Wiltshire area, thereby provide additional support across the region.

- Working across the service we will refine the Twilight sessions to ensure more prospective adopters can have the opportunity to attend. This will enhance the work we are committed to ensure adopted children have a clear and supported plan for maintaining relationships.
- The provision of adoption support services will build on the start made this year by continuing our work with It Takes a Village to expand peer to peer support, the provision of regular events and groups as well as working with CCS adoption to ensure the offer meets the needs of children and families.
- Adoption West will work with Adoption England to improve the voice and influence of those affected by adoption in our local planning.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who works for Adoption West for positively working with the changes that have been made this year. Adoption West is reliant on the commitment, creativity and desire of the staff to do their best for all those whose lives are impacted by adoption. Adoption practice is about relationships with people this report includes a few examples of this just to show what is happening every day. Thank you all for going the extra mile time and again



**Alison Lewis**  
**Service Director**

### Contributors:

Sue White: Service Manager

Alison Hall: Service Manager

Sue White: Service manager

Stuart Babbage: Business Manager

Anjali Gupta: Team Manager Adoption Support

Jane Priborsky/Jen Brennan: Team Manager recruitment and Assessments

Kate Worthington/ Jen Brennan: Team Manager Family Finding

Rebecca Myers: Marketing and Communications

Claire Jarvis: DTM Birth Links

Kay Jones: Support Worker

Sallie Turnbull: Support Worker

## Appendix 1

### Governance Arrangements:

As a local authority company, Adoption West is owned by the six partner local authorities through the Joint Committee of Directors of Children's Services. The management of Adoption West is delegated to the Adoption West Board of Directors and to the Service Director.

### Adoption West Board of Directors:

#### Voting members:

- Sheila Smith – Director of Children's Services, North Somerset Council (Chair and Responsible Individual until June 2023)
- Mary Kearney-Knowles – Director Children and Young Peoples Service, Bath and North East Somerset Council (Chair and Responsible Individual from June 2023)
- Andy Dempsey – Director of Partnerships and Strategy, Gloucestershire County Council
- Jen Salter - Director Families and Children's Services, Wiltshire Council
- Fiona Tudge – Director of Children, Families and Safer Communities, Bristol City Council
- Shanti Eaves – Head of Service, Localities, Corporate Parenting and Fostering, South Gloucestershire Council
- Carolyn Fair – Director of Children's Services, From June 2023 to December 2023)/Jane Anstis Assistant Director North Somerset Council

#### Non-Voting members:

- Mustafa Salih – Head of Financial Management and Business Support, South Gloucestershire Council
- Emma Simpson – CEO, CCS Adoption from September 2022

### Commissioning Arrangements:

Adoption West is commissioned by the six local authorities to provide adoption services. The Lead Managers group is responsible for oversight of the commissioning arrangement and developing shared practice between Adoption West and the Local authority children's social care teams.

### Local Authority Adoption Lead Managers Group:

- Elliot Davies – Interim Head of Service: Care Outcomes, Bath & North East Somerset Council

- Amanda Braund – Service Manager, Placements Team, Permanency and Specialist Services, Bristol City Council
- Tammy Wheatley – Head of Service, Permanence, Gloucestershire County Council
- Shelley Caldwell – Service Leader Service Leader Resource Service, North Somerset Council
- Sue Applegate/Lorraine Lawson/ Kerry Seaton – Service Manager, South Gloucestershire Council
- Pier Pritchard – Service Manager, Children in Care and Placement Service, Wiltshire Council

### Scrutiny Arrangements:

As an adoption agency that is funded by public finances to provide statutory adoption services it is crucial that there is effective scrutiny of Adoption West. The Joint Scrutiny Panel has been established to provide this function. The panel meets quarterly, and each meeting includes a briefing about adoption issues. In this period adopters have met with councillors and shared their experience of support via the ASF and being an Early Permanence carer.

### Joint Scrutiny Panel: 2023-24

#### Elected Voting Members:

- Cllr Michelle O’Doherty Bath and North East Somerset Council
- Cllr Christine Townsend Bristol City Council
- Cllr Becky Hoyland Gloucestershire County Council
- Cllr Joe Tristram North Somerset Council
- Cllr Sandra Emms South Gloucestershire Council
- Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman) Wiltshire Council
- Cllr Carole King Wiltshire Council



# Voice and Participation Service Quarter 1 Report

*Prepared by*

Joe Sutton  
Participation Manager

**Voice** and   
**Participation**  
 **Service** 

# FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

## Children in Care Council

### **Adventure Day (9th April):**

A total of 16 children in care participated in outdoor activities and team-building activities

### **Watersports Day (28th May):**

15 children in care attended a watersports day they took part in raft building and paddleboarding

### **PGL Trip (14-16 June):**

20 children in care attended a residential trip to PGL Liddington. This multi-day event offered a variety of team-building and adventure activities, further strengthening bonds among the children and giving them an extended period to experience new challenges in a supportive environment.

These events also allowed the children to interact with others in similar circumstances, helping to build a supportive community and create lasting, positive relationships among participants.





# CICC COPRODUCTION

## **Residential Home Visit (12th August 2024):**

Two young people attended a youth inspection and training session at the new residential home in Melksham, Phoenix. They explored the facility, provided feedback, and conducted a group training discussion with the staff, sharing insights from their own experiences of living in residential homes. The provided feedback influenced care approaches at the new residential home.

## **Joint Care Experienced Session with Wiltshire and BANES (19th June 2024):**

Five care leavers from Wiltshire had the opportunity to meet with care leaver ambassadors from BANES (Bath and North East Somerset) Off the Record. The session facilitated insightful discussions and exchange of ideas regarding ongoing work and experiences.

## **Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP):**

Two to three Voice Ambassadors consistently participated in each Corporate Parenting Panel meeting, where they shared updates on their work as part of the Voice and Participation Service. Voice Ambassadors' regular involvement in CPP meetings informs decision-making and is a reminder of the lives behind the data.

## **Chief Executive Interview Panel (16th July 2024):**

One care-experienced Voice Ambassador was part of the interview panel for the Chief Executive position, ensuring that young people had a say in the hiring process. Involvement of a care-experienced Voice Ambassador in the interview panel aligned leadership with young people's needs.

## **Young Person Fostering Panels**

Seven fostering panels were held, with eight different care-experienced young people participating. These panels provided applicant foster carers with a unique opportunity to engage with 'experts by experience,' offering valuable insights that could enhance their understanding and readiness to foster.

## **Voice Ambassador and CiCC Training Workshop (22nd June 2024):**

A Voice Ambassador for SEND and a Children in Care Council member delivered a training workshop to volunteer advocates. The session provided a unique opportunity for advocates to learn directly from young people who are experts by experience.

## **Practice Educator Training (15th July 2024):**

Ambassadors supported the delivery of a training session for practice educators, aimed at improving the practice and approach of social workers and their students, particularly in ensuring inclusivity for young people and parents with lived experience. This training inspired social workers to adopt inclusive and trauma-aware approaches

## **Safeguarding East Open Day (17th May 2024):**

Focused on safeguarding practices and how those impact those with lived experience.

## **Family Time Training with Foster Carers (12th June 2024):** Addressed best practices for family time arrangements.

## **Writing Workshops (10th July 2024):**

Conducted during the South West IRO/Conferencing Officer Virtual Regional Conference, aimed at improving staff's empathetic and trauma-aware writing skills.

*Last Year's*

# MIND OF MY OWN

The Mind of My Own Lead attended the Vox Con annual conference on May 16th.

The team provides regular monthly updates on staff and team usage to promote the app.



## **Outcomes:**

- Opportunity to network and represent Wiltshire at a national level.
- Participation in unique workshops and updates during the Vox Con session.
- Empowering staff to utilise Mind Of My Own, a valuable tool for young people to share their experiences.
- Due to the team's efforts, there was an increase to 72 statements in July, showing positive progress towards the target of achieving 100 statements monthly.

The Mind of My Own App will be a key tool for the new Independent Advocacy Service its features include personalised profiles, secure messaging, and easy-to-navigate categories for different types of support and feedback. This will help streamline the advocacy process, making it more efficient and responsive to individual needs. By providing a platform for direct and unfiltered communication, it ensures that every voice is heard and valued, ultimately leading to more tailored and effective support services.

# Wiltshire Youth Council

## **One Council Approach:**

The capacity to deliver on Wiltshire Youth Council has been reduced due to focussing on working with Wiltshire's most vulnerable cohorts. The Voice and Participation Service has been exploring how other directorates can assist in the delivery of the initiative. Democratic Services has agreed to facilitate the Wiltshire Youth Council elections.

## **Youth Council Meetings:**

Since April, the Youth Council has held five meetings with various guests, including representatives from School Effectiveness and Public Health. Upcoming meetings in September will feature discussions with Libraries on the new five-year strategy and with Community Engagement on the Community Area Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (CAJSNA) results, which Youth Councillors and CiCC members contributed to earlier in the year.

## **Mental Health First Aid Training:**

Four Wiltshire Youth Councillors attended Mental Health First Aid training at their request. Discussions have been held on how they will implement this training in their schools by acting as Mental Health Ambassadors from September onwards. The Youth Councillors will collaborate with link teachers to embed these practices and will provide feedback on their progress.



## **Youth Conference (Youth Con) – 27th July 2024:**

Four Youth Councillors, including three Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) and the Head Secretary, attended the South West Youth Conference. They participated in workshops, engaged in discussions about the "Make Your Mark" results, and connected with other MYPs from the region. Additionally, the dates for the MYP residential were set for 25th to 27th October 2024.

## **Hygiene Product Campaign:**

The Youth Council continues to work on their hygiene product campaign, which involves setting up donation boxes in schools that are part of the Youth Council.

## **Healthy Schools Inspections:**

Youth Councillors conducted three youth inspections as part of the Wiltshire Healthy Schools programme in partnership with Nick Bolton from School Effectiveness. These inspections received significant public attention, highlighting the schools' efforts to promote healthy lifestyles and well-being.

## Outcomes:

### **Empowerment and Representation:**

Youth Councillors feel that their voices are being heard through their interactions with various council staff, allowing them to represent the interests of young people on key issues effectively.

### **Mental Health Ambassadorship:**

In response to the Youth Councillors' request, a Mental Health First Aid training session was delivered by Nick Bolton on 20th July 2024. This training equips them to serve as mental health and wellbeing ambassadors in their schools, promoting mental health awareness and support.

### **Understanding and Advocacy:**

The MYPs have gained a clear understanding of their roles and are now equipped to promote the "Make Your Mark" campaign within their schools and communities.

### **Personal Achievements:**

- One Youth Councillor successfully applied to Bishop Wordsworth School, using their work with the Youth Council as a reference.
- A former Youth Councillor completed their Gold Duke of Edinburgh (D of E) Award, using their involvement in the Youth Council as part of their evidence.



# FAMILY VOICE

## Parental advocacy

The Family Voice service plays an essential role in supporting parents during Child Protection Conferences, offering crucial assistance in understanding the processes, accessing reports, and effectively communicating with professionals. By preparing parents for these meetings, the service significantly reduces stress and fosters better communication between parents and professionals, ensuring parents are informed and confident.

Advocacy cases have been a key area of focus, with five cases successfully closed and five live referrals currently being managed. The service has actively supported parents during critical meetings, including attending three Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) and five Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPCs). Additionally, five Core Group meetings were attended at parents' homes, and a complaint meeting was attended in person, providing parents with consistent support throughout the process.

In preparation for these meetings, the service conducted 16 pre-meeting home visits. These visits were instrumental in ensuring that parents were well-prepared, informed, and confident before attending their meetings. Furthermore, restorative work has been an integral part of the service, with a preparative meeting conducted with a parent, followed by a joint session with both the parent and young person. This approach has been successful in fostering better understanding and communication within families.

The outcomes of these advocacy efforts have been overwhelmingly positive. Feedback from parents indicates significant improvements in their confidence, communication, and relationships with social workers. Parents reported a dramatic increase in their confidence to speak up, with initial scores rising from 1 to 5 (1 = lowest 5 = Highest) by the end of the advocacy process. Similarly, feelings of being listened to improved from an initial score of 1 to a final score of 5. Parents also felt more valued and included in decisions, with scores in these areas increasing from 1 to 3. The relationship between parents and social workers saw substantial improvement as well, with the score rising from 1 to 5.

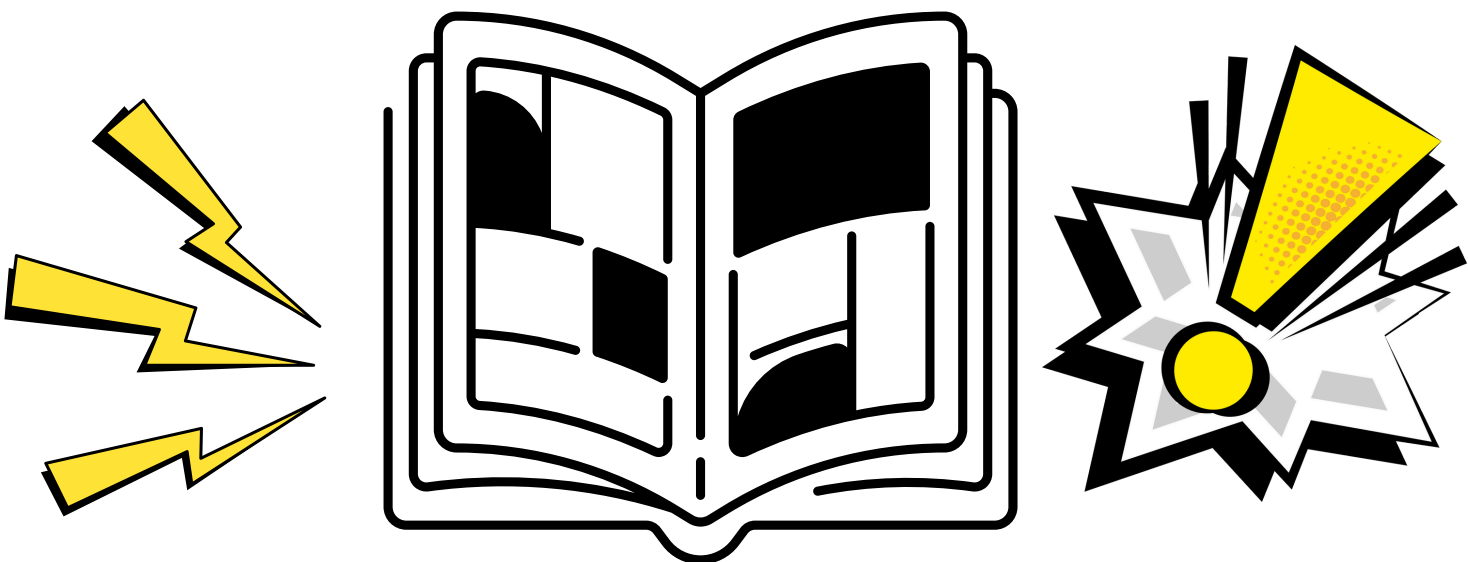
These outcomes clearly demonstrate the positive impact of advocacy in empowering parents, helping them feel more confident, listened to, and involved in the decision-making processes affecting their families. The lessons learned from these advocacy efforts are vital for shaping feedback and improving systemic practices to better support families in the future.

## Family Advisory Board

The Family Advisory Board (FAB) remains an active and essential component of the Family Voice service. Key members consistently participate in monthly meetings, where they host guest speakers and collaborate on creating tools and strategies for social workers. Recently, FAB members contributed by reviewing draft Child Protection documents, offering valuable insights to senior leadership. This involvement ensures that family voices and experiences are incorporated into the development of policies and practices affecting child protection services.

FAB members have highlighted that professionals often overlook identifying parents' SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) requirements during assessments by Family and Children's Services. Research conducted in Wiltshire supports this observation, stating, "In 40% of cases, there was no evidence of tailored interventions, especially related to pre-birth work. There was minimal adjustment in pre-proceedings, including a lack of adaptation in the forms used." The FAB is currently collaborating with a task group to create a new Additional Needs Screening Tool that will help professionals identify if someone has an additional need so they can tailor support adequately.

The Family Advisory Board is also working on a comic book that illustrates how parents feel when they are being worked with by professionals. The ambition is that the comic will follow a family from their first interaction with professionals through the whole process. When complete this will be shared with the workforce.



# INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY SERVICE



The service received 32 referrals during the Q1 period. The distribution of cases includes 12 active Children Looked After (CLA) cases, 13 active Child Protection (CP) cases, and various other categories, such as Care Leavers and Children in Need (CIN). Seven cases were successfully closed, while 24 remain open and actively managed.

One notable case involved a young person expressing emotions regarding fabricated allegations and highlighted issues with living arrangements and bullying at school. The service advocated for educational support, including the need for a Teaching Assistant (TA), and ensured that the young person's wishes were documented and discussed in relevant meetings. This advocacy led to increased confidence in the young person, empowering them to express their feelings in person during the Child Protection Conference.

Lessons learned during this period have highlighted the need for improved management of cases involving children with multiple statuses, such as those who are under both the Independent Mental Capacity Advocate (IMCA) and CLA frameworks. To address this, the service is developing a dashboard to better track these cases and streamline the referral process, particularly for children on child protection pathways, aiming to reduce last-minute referrals for Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs).

In terms of process improvements, a new referral pathway for ICPCs has been introduced. This pathway includes integrating advocacy service information into ICPC invites, improving communication between advocates and social workers, and ensuring parental agreement before proceeding with referrals. The service has also developed a new wishes and feelings document that better captures the views of children and young people, helping Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and CP Chairs understand how the young person has reacted to sensitive information.

Overall, the Independent Advocacy Service is evolving to better meet the needs of its clients, with continuous improvements being made to referral processes, case management, and the quality of advocacy provided to children and families.

# SEND VOICE

## **Post-16 SEND Deep Dive**

The Post-16 SEND Deep Dive focused on four key areas: Community Inclusion, Independent Living, Employment, and Health. The primary purpose was to gather and amplify the voices of young people with SEND in Wiltshire, assessing their confidence in transitioning to adulthood, identifying areas where additional support is needed, and recognising effective strategies already in place. This was achieved through in-person consultations with 30 young people across five settings, supplemented by secondary research from Wiltshire CIL and WPCG. The findings from this deep dive were integrated into the SEND strategy, ensuring that the voices of young people are not only heard but acted upon. This report was subsequently forwarded to key stakeholders for inclusion in broader strategic planning.

## **Inclusion in Mainstream Deep Dive**

A deep dive into SEN support within mainstream education was conducted, highlighting important areas of learning, such as building confidence in young people with additional needs and promoting inclusion within schools. The Wiltshire Youth Council, which includes young representatives from mainstream schools across the county, played a crucial role in these discussions. Young people expressed that they would likely turn to their school's pastoral services, peers, or use the SIMs system to share information about their additional needs if they needed support to have their voices heard. Although time constraints affected the quality of the report, it is currently being revised to meet the expected standards, ensuring that it effectively contributes to ongoing discussions on mainstream inclusion.

## **Networking**

Throughout the period, valuable connections were established with various groups, including Iproffit, Silverwood, 4Youth, Springfields, and Canons House. These engagements have significantly enhanced collaboration opportunities for future SEND initiatives, strengthening the network of support and resources available.

### **SENDIAP Consultations**

Involvement in the SENDIAP consultations focused on incorporating the views of parents and young people into the SENDIAP strategy. The role in the working group was pivotal in ensuring that the strategy was developed with a strong emphasis on authenticity, truly representing the voices of those who were consulted.

## **Silverwood Fair**

Voice ambassadors participated in the Silverwood Fair, actively promoting involvement with the council and advocacy for young people. This event successfully engaged young people, empowering them to share their views and contribute to decision-making processes, thus enhancing their participation in shaping policies that affect them.





### **SHARE Initiative**

The SHARE initiative serves as a platform for professionals across education, health, and social care to collaborate and better understand the needs of children with SEND. Preparations are underway for the first theme meeting scheduled for September, which will focus on children's involvement in EHCP reviews. An information package for professionals has been prepared and is ready for dissemination to ensure informed and cohesive participation in the initiative.

### **Local Offer Videos**

A project is underway to co-produce videos covering Community Inclusion, Independent Living, Employment, and Health, aimed at making the Local Offer more accessible and engaging. These videos will highlight available services, success stories, and personal experiences, thereby enhancing the overall impact of the Local Offer.

### **SEND Development Plan**

Collaboration with various stakeholders has led to the development of a comprehensive SEND Development Plan. This plan outlines upcoming projects and goals, streamlining processes to ensure that the local offer reflects the impact of ongoing work and continues to meet the needs of the SEND community effectively.

### **Replacement of POET Survey**

The objective to replace the POET survey with a new tool that better meets the needs of the SEND community is in the initial planning stages. Work is ongoing to develop a draft and an accessibility plan that will ensure the new survey is fit for purpose and inclusive of all voices.

### **Ambassador Training**

To enhance the effectiveness of voice ambassadors in meetings and advocacy, a focus on developing their professional skills has been a priority. A training day has been organised to further build their skills and confidence, enabling them to contribute more effectively to discussions and decision-making processes.

### **Summary of Outcomes**

The efforts made through these initiatives have ensured that young people's voices are thoroughly integrated into key strategic plans and initiatives. Engagement has been strengthened across the SEND sector, with increased collaboration with stakeholders and empowerment of young people to participate in decision-making. The continuous focus on strategic development has contributed to the refinement and implementation of the SEND strategy and related projects, ensuring that they remain responsive to the evolving needs of the SEND community.

# Young Carers

## Young Carers Festival (28th - 30th June)

The Voice and Participation Service accompanied 10 members of the Young Carers Council to the annual Young Carers Festival to foster connections within the group. The group gave their views on the national conversation around what they expect from a new government and also took over the young carers radio for part of the weekend. The young participants described the weekend as fantastic and are looking forward to attending again next year.

## Young Carers Council

The Young Carers Council has met once since the festival, the meeting looked at what they would like to be called as a group and also prepared them to be part of the interview process for the new Young Carers Workers due to join the team.



## Young Carers Voice Worker

The role for Young Carers is now open, and we aim to have someone in this position by late autumn.

## Young Carers Schools Worker

The role for Young Carers in schools is currently open, and we plan to fill this role by late autumn.

## Young Carers Advocate

The Young Carers Advocacy position will become available once we have recruited another Advocate for the Independent Advocacy Service.

# FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S VOLUNTEERING

## Community Mentoring

5 children were receiving mentoring once a week during this period.

2 children completed their mentoring, we were only able to get feedback from one of these children. In comparison to when the child first started mentoring, she reported an increase in self-esteem/and or confidence, relationships with friends, physical wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, and independence skills. (in areas where an improvement is not shown, this can be because the child was scoring high at the beginning of the mentoring or the child's score has stayed the same). Narrative feedback from the child, mentor and parent was positive.

We now have a shortage of female mentors and need to have a marketing plan in place for the Autumn.

We have some male mentors waiting to be matched but have not had referrals in the areas where the mentors are. Sean is sending out regular emails to the Young People's Service detailing where we have mentors waiting.



## Youth Justice Panel's

During the reporting period, the Youth Justice Service conducted a total of 53 panels, facilitated by 16 different volunteers. These panels resulted in 9 children receiving a Referral Order, with 8 of these Orders being successfully completed by the end of the quarter. Impressively, 94.34% of the scheduled panels proceeded as planned, reflecting a strong level of adherence to the planned schedule.

However, some challenges have been identified. Concerns have been raised by panel members regarding the cancellation of panels, which occur for various reasons. A particular issue has been the cancellation of panels due to staff sickness. To address this, efforts are being made to ensure that other staff members are available to provide cover, thereby reducing the frequency of such cancellations.

Additionally, there is a recognised need for more panel members to ensure comprehensive coverage across all areas of the county. In response to this need, plans are in place to offer panel training for new volunteers in the Autumn, which is expected to bolster the team and improve the service's capacity to handle future panels effectively.

## **Primary Mentoring**

In the past quarter, our school mentoring program has shown notable success. We supported 34 children, surpassing our annual target of 30 children within just the first three months. This early achievement reflects the program's growing impact and effectiveness.

Of these 34 children, 10 completed their mentoring sessions during this period.

Feedback from various stakeholders—including children, schools, mentors, and parents—has been overwhelmingly positive. This feedback underscores the value and positive influence of our mentoring program on participants.

A significant development this quarter is the approval from the Commissioners to trial a new primary-to-secondary mentoring transition program. This initiative will support 4 children transitioning from two primary schools to their secondary schools. The mentoring will continue for the first two terms in the secondary school, with the same mentor providing weekly support. This trial addresses a long-standing request from primary schools, children, parents, and mentors and represents a promising step forward in our programme's evolution.

## **Appropriate Adults and Youth Justice Voice**

Since joining us on 19th June, our new Voice and Participation Support Worker has made significant contributions across both the Youth Justice Service (YJS) and Voice and Participation (V&P) roles. With extensive experience as an Appropriate Adult (AA), she has greatly alleviated the support burden by assisting with AA duties, providing essential coverage, and reducing the support load for volunteer AAs.

Currently, her work is focused on several key areas. The First Time Entrants (FTEs) into Police Custody project aims to gather feedback from children who experience police custody for the first time through face-to-face meetings. She also provides support to these children and their families until a case worker is assigned. In addition, she is collating data from all AA episodes, including those involving volunteers, social workers, and other support figures. This project will analyse the impact of AA training and address issues related to the lack of legal representation when an AA is untrained.

Another important area of focus is the rise in knife crime among children. This project seeks to investigate the underlying causes and explore preventive measures through feedback collected from affected children and their case workers. Similarly, she is involved in a project addressing the increase in assaults by girls on emergency workers. This initiative aims to understand the reasons behind these incidents by interviewing the involved girls and developing strategies to prevent future occurrences. This project was initiated by a volunteer panel member who will compile a report on the findings.

A recent development is the return of the Appropriate Adults to the Melksham Custody Suite in May, following the revamp of the Swindon Custody Suite. This change has allowed some AAs to resume their roles who were previously unable to travel to Swindon.

Despite these advancements, there are challenges that need to be addressed. There have been delays in the FTE project due to issues with gaining access to police custody, and it is anticipated that additional police checks may be required beyond the standard DBS checks. Additionally, there is an ongoing need for more Appropriate Adults to cover the rota, particularly at weekends. Recruitment efforts are necessary to ensure adequate coverage and support for the programme.



# Independent Visitors Scheme

The Independent Visitor (IV) Scheme has shown significant activity over the period from April to June 2024. A total of 10 referrals were received, with 11 assessments and 7 matches completed during this period. On average, the time taken from referral to match was 171 days, while the time from assessment to match averaged 124 days. Despite these challenges, the scheme managed to arrange a total of 199 visits, with 167 of those visits being successfully completed. Currently, there are 121 open IV cases, with the majority (85) at the matched stage. The data shows that 18% of the children and young people in care in Wiltshire are supported by an IV, one of the highest percentages in the country. During this period, 85 children and young people were actively receiving support from an IV, and 4 new IVs were recruited, with 3 more anticipated to join in August.

However, several challenges were identified. There are currently 6 children whose referrals are on hold due to placement instability, and another 6 children in out-of-county placements, for whom matching with local IVs has become increasingly difficult due to recruitment challenges in those areas.

Moreover, there are 25 children on the waiting list who have been assessed but are yet to be matched with an IV. This situation raises concerns about the capacity of the current support staff, as the number of matches increases, potentially necessitating additional resources to manage the growing caseload effectively.

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## DfE updates and changes – July to September

### Improving behaviour in schools – Collection

1. Resources to support schools and trusts in developing, implementing and maintaining a whole-school behaviour culture [Improving behaviour in schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-behaviour-in-schools) published 25/4/24

Wiltshire's position: The Behaviour Support Team publishes a model behaviour policy suitable for primary and secondary schools that is in line with this guidance and DfE guidance around suspension and exclusion from school. A new model anti-bullying policy will be available for schools to use from September 2024 and both link closely with the council model safeguarding policy.

There are additional resources and training for schools available on the Behaviour Support Pages of Right Choice to help schools develop and maintain an inclusive approach and culture through their policies.

### Local authority school places scorecards – Collection

2. A snapshot of the progress local authorities made in delivering good-quality school places in 2023 [Local authority school places scorecards 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-school-places-scorecards-2023) published 27/06/24

Wiltshire's position: Each year the DfE publish scorecards to display a snapshot of the progress each local authority across England is making towards ensuring there are sufficient good quality school places. The data is taken from several annual DfE returns, primarily SCAP, plus Ofsted outcomes.

They mostly contain information which has previously been published, however they also contain new information on the quality (school Ofsted category) of new places delivered between 2021/22 and 2022/23, accuracy of pupil forecasts and the DfE's estimate of the percentage of spare places in 2025/26.

In Wiltshire, all new school places created between 2021/22 and 2022/23 were in good or outstanding schools compared to 94.1% nationally.

Our pupil forecasts overestimate pupil numbers by 2.1% at primary level and 1.1% at secondary level. Our forecast modelling method is currently being reviewed and updated to improve accuracy.

The DfE's estimates of spare places show that the percentage of spare places in Wiltshire and nationally will increase marginally by 2025/26.

### Provision for children under 5 in England: January 2024 – Official statistics

3. Statistics on children aged 2 to 4 registered for funded early education and childcare entitlements in England, including on staff and providers delivering them [Provision for children under 5 in England: January 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/provision-for-children-under-5-in-england-january-2024) published 11/07/24

Wiltshire's Position: The data shows that uptake of the Early Years Entitlements remains good. In Wiltshire we have 96% take up for our disadvantaged 2-year-olds which ranks us as 1<sup>st</sup> for our

statistical neighbour and the south-west, this also makes us 16<sup>th</sup> nationally. Our uptake for 3–4-year funding is 98%. As the new entitlements are rolled out, we will continue to monitor this uptake.

#### **Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England: 2022 to 2023 – Official statistics**

4. Levels of suspension and permanent exclusion in the academic year 2022/23 by school type, and the reasons for suspending and excluding pupils [Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England: 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions-in-england-2022-to-2023) published 18/07/24

Wiltshire's position: The data for Wiltshire is presented to the committee for scrutiny via regular updates within the 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' reports.



## Children's Select Committee (CSC) – Forward work programme Agenda items for the committee

### Standing items (at all meetings)

Title - Details / purpose	Type	Report author / lead
<b>Safety Valve update</b> – summary of recent developments, successes and issues	Written	Ben Stevens
<b>Update from Wiltshire Youth Voice</b> - summary of recent activities	Written	Joe Sutton/Gary Norton-Sanders
<b>School Ofsted Judgements</b> - effectiveness of schools as seen by Ofsted Inspection.	Written	Amanda Butler
<b>DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education</b>	Written	David Harris
<b>Working together to improve school attendance</b> - latest requirements of the non-statutory guidance the DfE published in May 2022 to apply from September 2022.	Written	Louise Lewis
<b>Schools Forum's update</b> - very brief update on key items from the last meeting of Schools Forum	Written	Lisa Pullin
<b>Corporate Parenting Panel update</b> - brief update highlighting key items from the last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel	Written	Lisa Pullin
<b>Directors' update</b> <b>Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holders' update</b> <b>Chair's update</b>	Verbal	All directors Cabinet Members and Portfolio holders Chair

Verbal updates highlighting any key issues (current or emerging), successes or milestones in their respective areas since the last meeting of the committee, which may not require a full agenda item and are not covered elsewhere on this agenda.		
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<b>Tuesday 26 November, 10.30am</b> <i>Pre-meeting briefing topic: Affordable school strategy – Kathryn Davis</i>			
	<b>Title</b> Details / purpose and Timeframe (if applicable)	Origins / history	Report author / lead officer
Substantive	<b>Youth Strategy to include Youth provision and area board youth funding task group executive response</b>  To review progress on actions of the executive response to the Youth Provision and youth area board funding task group to include the youth strategy and draft amendments to the area board funding criteria before it is published. Area Board.	CSC Jan 2024	Rhys Schell
Substantive	<b>Alternative Provision (NB linked to SEND items)</b>  Current Alternative Provision available, known issues or gaps and development plans.	OS/Executive meeting 14 May 2024	Kathryn Davis
Substantive	<b>Reducing inequalities in schools</b> A wider determinants report to explore: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child poverty / social mobility and correlation to school attendance and attainment</li> <li>• What schools can do to reduce inequalities (affordable school strategy – NB will also be pre-meeting briefing topic)</li> </ul>		Kathryn Davis
Substantive	<b>Child Sufficiency Annual Report</b> To include specific requests made at CSC, 6 June 2024	CSC, 6 June 2024	

<b>Tuesday 26 November, 10.30am</b> <i>Pre-meeting briefing topic: Affordable school strategy – Kathryn Davis</i>			
	<b>Title</b> Details / purpose and Timeframe (if applicable)	Origins / history	Report author / lead officer
	<a href="#"><u>Agenda and draft minutes - Democratic Services - Wiltshire Council</u></a>		
Substantive	<b>Families and Children’s Services Roadmap 2024-2026</b> (outcome from National Independent Review of Children's Social Care update - Children’s Social Care: Stable Homes Built on Love consultation.) <i>To receive an update in Summer 2024 to include learning from pilot projects and other local authorities.</i>	<a href="#"><u>CSC October 23</u></a>	Jen Salter Tim Sandle
Informative	<b>Wiltshire Learning Alliance (WLA)</b>  To receive feedback following a “relaunch” and advertising campaign in September for the WLA.	OS/Executive meeting 14 May 2024	Kathryn Davis
Informative	<b>Early Years, childcare and entitlement strategy</b>  An update on expected changes	OS/Executive meeting 14 May 2024	Lucy-Ann Bryant

<b>Wednesday 15 January 2025, 10.30am</b> <i>Pre-meeting briefing topic:</i>			
	<b>Title</b> Details / purpose and Timeframe (if applicable)	Origins / history	Report author / lead officer
Substantive	<b>Safety Valve – one year review</b> Report to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timeline and plan to enable future monitoring;</li> <li>• Financial impact;</li> <li>• Service impact (for “customers”).</li> </ul> Aim – to determine if OS is required.	OS/Executive meeting 14 May 2024	Lucy Townsend
Substantive	<b>Children and Young People Health Wellbeing Survey – “so what” / analysis report</b>  To consider actions taken from the responses to the survey	CSC 24 January 2024  OS/Executive meeting 14 May 2024	Kate Blackburn Sally Johnson
Substantive	<b>Family Hub update</b> – to include input from libraries & leisure (following briefing to chair and vice-chair)  For a report to be presented to the full committee on 15 January 2025 detailing the mobilisation of the new contract, development of Family Hubs by Spurgeons and evaluation of performance, dependant on the updates received by the Standing Task Group.	CSC 24 January 2024	David Redfern Jen Salter
Informative	<b>NHS Dentistry access and oral health improvements</b> to include the service for looked after children. Update on progress being made. Agree with officers if this item needs to be deferred and a recommendation for Council post May 2025	CSC 18 July 2024	

<b>Thursday 6 March 2025, 10.30am</b> <i>Pre-meeting briefing topic:</i>			
	<b>Title</b> Details / purpose and Timeframe (if applicable)	Origins / history	Report author / lead officer
Substantive	<p><b>School improvement / performance</b></p> <p>Report from the school performance officer group to inform the committee of current performance and improvement over the last year and future plans to address known issues / concerns. This would also include up to date information on SLAs with schools.</p> <p>This would inform the committee’s legacy report in terms of any further scrutiny required.</p>	OS/Executive meeting 14 May 2024	Kathryn Davis Louise Lewis
Substantive	<p><b>Family Hub – one year review</b></p> <p>To consider a report on the implementation of the Family Hub model, on the monitoring of performance and on plans for the year ahead.</p> <p>This would inform the committee’s legacy report in terms of any further scrutiny required.</p>	OS/Executive meeting 14 May 2024	Jen Salter
Informative	<p><b>Ofsted inspection outcome - Business plan update</b></p> <p>To receive the updated Business Plan</p>	CSC 24 January 2024	
Informative			

## Children's Select Committee (CSC) – Forward work programme

### Task groups and rapid scrutiny exercises

#### Current / active task groups

Name (establishment date by CSC) Terms of reference / aims Meeting(s) update	Membership Vacancies Supporting officer	Start date  Final report expected
<p><b>Children's Select Committee's Standing Task Group</b></p> <p>Detailed reviews of the regular reports that come within the Children's Select Committee's remit and to present any key issues, findings and recommendations to the Children's Select Committee, and / or other relevant committees, for discussion, endorsement or further scrutiny where appropriate.</p> <p><u>Meeting(s) update:</u> n/a</p>	<p>Cllr Helen Belcher John Hawkins Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chair) Cllr Jacqui Lay Cllr Jo Trigg Cllr James Sheppard</p> <p>No vacancy</p> <p><i>Supporting officer Marie Gondlach</i></p>	<p>n/a - Standing task group</p>
<p><b>Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel</b></p> <p>The panel acts as a critical friend, providing independent scrutiny of the work of Adoption West (AW). It is an essential element of assuring democratic accountability for the use of public funds.</p> <p><u>Meeting(s) update:</u> n/a</p>	<p>Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chair) Cllr Carole King</p> <p>No vacancy</p> <p><i>Supporting officer: Marie Gondlach</i></p>	<p>n/a - Standing Panel</p>

#### Children's Select Committee – Proposed rapid scrutiny exercises

<b>Name of Rapid Scrutiny exercise</b> Terms of reference / aims (Origins)	<b>Membership (vacancies)</b>	<b>Planned start date</b>  <b>Final report expected</b>
<b>Out of County Education (new proposal for approval)</b>  To set up a rapid scrutiny to understand the impact of out of county education on young people. The focus will be on students who live in a catchment area for a secondary school outside of Wiltshire.		Nov 2024
<b>Education Performance Outcomes</b>  To set up a rapid scrutiny to understand in more depth the Year 6 performance figures, trends and outliers (CSC 12 March 2024)		Nov 2024
<b>Inclusion</b>  To review currently available data on inclusion and determine if further scrutiny could add value. This may include a review of current exclusion data and whether the information available enables monitoring of impact for pupils with either EHCP or SEND. Links to Alternative Provision and Safety Valve should be considered in terms of the timing of this activity. <a href="#">(OS/Exec meeting 2024)</a>		Jan 2025
<b>Homelessness (as relevant to Children's Services)</b>  To ensure the robustness of the council's action plan / measures in place in response to ILAPS / Ofsted recommendations <a href="#">(OS/Exec meeting 2024)</a>		Early autumn

### Children's Select Committee – Proposed task groups

<b>Name of Task Group</b> Terms of reference / aims (Origins)	<b>Membership (vacancies)</b>	<b>Planned start date</b>  <b>Final report expected</b>
<b>School performance and attainment outcome</b>  To consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance</li> <li>• What can be done to improve results?</li> <li>• The role of the Wiltshire Learning Alliance (WLA) in delivering improvement</li> </ul> NB – information on the WLA is coming to the committee in November 2024 <a href="#">(OS/Exec meeting 2024)</a>	<b>Vacancies: 5</b>	<i>Origins: OS/Exec meeting 2024</i>
<b>Residential care and complex care</b>  Longer term support for children with more complex needs.  To consider (by comparing with other models available): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shaping of the service</li> <li>• How to ensure good outcomes for children</li> </ul> NB – this links to a tender process in the New Year <a href="#">(OS/Exec meeting 2024)</a>	<b>Vacancies: 5</b>	Autumn  <i>Origins: OS/Exec meeting 2024</i>
<b>Children and Young Peoples Mental Health services and developments</b>  Proposed over three meetings: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Review of needs assessment undertaken and outcomes / analysis</li> </ol>	Cllr Caroline Corbin Cllr Jo Trigg Cllr Mark Verbinnen Cllr Carole King  <b>Vacancies: 1</b>	<b>ASAP</b> – Report Sept 2024?



<p>b. What is being done elsewhere? Both national / regional comparison as well as what third sector is doing in Wiltshire (will link with Youth Network - and others - as witnesses for this part)</p> <p>c. Proposal for future service(s) with a focus on the outcomes sought (and how these would be measured and monitored)</p> <p>NB – consideration to be given on how to get young people’s views (may be survey promoted by different providers / groups). <b>(OS/Exec meeting 2024)</b></p>	<p><i>Supporting officer</i> <i>Marie Gondlach</i></p>	
<p><b>Post 16 provision – task group</b></p> <p>To establish a clear picture of post-16 education provision available to young people in Wiltshire and availability of / options for transport to access that provision.</p> <p>This should also take into consideration the following information the committee had previously identified as of interest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following the Youth Transport task group’s work and executive response – including National Bus Strategy and any decision or progress regarding a single “Wiltshire Youth Card” .</li> <li>• To include input from the council’s review of transport services for children and young people with SEND (commissioning team).</li> </ul>	<p>Cllr Jo Trigg Nikki Barnett Cllr Graham Wright Cllr Bridget Wayman Mr Michael Thompson</p> <p>Vacancies: 0</p> <p><i>Supporting officer</i> <i>Marie Gondlach</i></p> <p>Lead officers Kirstie Barter Cara Madden Clara Davies</p>	
<p><b>Budget and Major Contracts task group</b></p> <p>To regularly review implementation of the budget and impact on services, and to consider major contracts (value to be agreed) either when they are approaching renewal or extension or before the tender process with a focus on the council’s expectations and requirements with regards to the quality, quantity and frequency of monitoring information provided by</p>	<p>endorsed by CSC on 17 January 2023</p> <p><b>Vacancies: 5</b></p>	

contractors and how that information will be monitored by the council (including overview and scrutiny involvement)		
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