

Wiltshire Council Adoption Service: 2020-2021 Year End Report

Briefing

1. It is a statutory requirement that Wiltshire Council's Adoption Service provides a year-end report to the Council. It describes the management arrangements, outcomes, priorities, and finances of the Agency for the period 01 April 2019 to 31 March 2021. The main consideration for the Council is to be assured about statutory compliance and the effectiveness of the Adoption Service.
2. The Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adoption West, launched on 01 March 2019. This is the second annual report which relates to two full years of the new organisation being operational. Adoption West is a Local Authority Trading Company that is owned by the six partner Local Authorities and commissioned by them to provide defined adoption services.
3. Wiltshire Council's adoption work was inspected by Ofsted in June 2019 as part of the wider inspection of Families and Children's Services. The overall inspection judgement was Good. It said the arrangements for finding children adoptive parents are a strength and that the relationship with Adoption West is working well and has been seamless for both children and carers. The report added that children in Wiltshire are waiting less time than ever to move in with their adoptive family, scrutiny of the performance of the RAA is thorough and challenging. The report also stated that there has been no detriment to Wiltshire children; in fact, performance has improved. There were no improvement recommendations made.
4. Adoption West is subject to separate scrutiny arrangements through its own Joint Scrutiny Panel, the current Chair being Cllr Jon Hubbard.
5. The most recent nationally published Scorecard available is from 2020 which covers 2017-2020. Performance remains strong with continued improvement over the 3 year period.
6. There are 3 key Scorecard measures:
 - A10: the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (date of adoptive placement or fostering for adoption placement i.e. Early Permanence approved Adopters that have joint Fostering approval), for children who have been adopted.

300 days vs 352 for statistical neighbours and 367 England average.
 - 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.

120 days vs 184 for statistical neighbours and 175 England average.

- A20: the average time between entering care and placement order.

214 days vs 224 for statistical neighbours and 256 England average.

7. Wiltshire performs considerably better than statistical neighbours as well as the England average. That being said, there has been an increase in the number of days it's taking in relation to A10 (the average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family). These children's journeys have been reviewed and the reasons for this increase are not practice related or within our control i.e. relate to protracted care proceedings due to appeals by parents, international complexities and family coming forward to be assessed at a late stage. There was also one situation where the delay was planned due to a sibling group needing a staggered introduction to the prospective adopters. Whilst showing an increasing trend this still remains lower than the latest published average for England and our statistical neighbours.
8. In relation to 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), there has also been a slight increase in the days taken. The reason for this being that following reforms in Public Law there is a more prominent expectation to secure children within their extended family if they are unable to be cared for by their parents. This has led positively to an increase in the percentage of children being made subject to Special Guardianship Orders. The impact of this however is that children requiring adoptive carers will more often be those with more complex needs or part of large sibling groups; this will make family finding more challenging and can impact on the length of time it takes to achieve this. Adoption West has a recruitment strategy in place to address this. There also remain challenges with care proceedings concluding within the 26 week timescale, due to a number of factors outside of the Local Authority's control. These challenges are subject to debate and scrutiny via the Wiltshire Family Justice Board. Wiltshire does however remain in the top 5 court areas in the country for completing care matters in 26 weeks.
9. Positively, across the Adoption West area there have been 100 adopter approvals; exceeding the target of 95 approvals by 5%. The target for 2020/21 remains 95 approvals, with a focus on more adopters for siblings and older children.
10. Wiltshire Council Adoption Service continues to deliver an effective service to our children as evidenced within this comprehensive annual report.