

**Children's Services and Education
Scrutiny Board**

**Monday 16 November, 2020 at 5.00 pm
Virtual Meeting**

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Agenda

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Members to declare:-
 - (a) any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
 - (b) the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.
3. Minutes of previous meeting 21 September, 2020
4. Reset and Recovery Update
To consider a presentation to update the Board.
5. Adoption@Heart Annual Report 2019/20
6. Elective Home Education Working Group – Update report

Date of next meeting – 11 January 2021

D Stevens
Chief Executive
Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury
West Midlands

Distribution:

Councillors Preece (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Ashman, Carmichael, Chidley, Costigan, Z Hussain, McVittie,
Millar, Phillips and Shackleton.

Co-opted Members:-

Charlotte Ward-Lewis (Church of England Diocese representative)
Vacant (Roman Catholic Archdiocese representative)
Tahira Majid (Primary School Governor representative)
Vacant (Secondary School Governor representative)

**Agenda prepared by Deb Breedon
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Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Apologies for Absence

The Board will receive any apologies for absence from the members of the Board.

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Declarations of Interest

Members to declare: -

- (a) Any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
- (b) The existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matters to be considered at the meeting.

**Minutes of the Children's Services and Education
Scrutiny Board**

**21 September, 2020 at 5.00 pm
Virtual Meeting**

Present: Councillor Preece (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Ashman, Carmichael, Costigan, Z
Hussain, McVittie, Millar, Phillips and Shackleton.

Apologies: C Ward-Lewis (Co-opted member).

In attendance: Councillor Underhill Cabinet Member for Best Start
in Life;
Lesley Hagger, Executive Director Children's
Services;
Chris Ward, Director Education, Employment and
Skills;
Sara Baber, Early Years Lead;
Sally Dowie, Data Information Officer, Family
Information Service.

14/20 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 July
2020 be approved as a correct record.

Cllr Millar requested that the Sandwell Childrens Trust
Organisation Structure referred to in minute 12/20 be
circulated.

15/20 **Reset and Recovery – Phase 1 Update**

The Board noted the update report from the Executive Director of
Children's Services which was in two parts firstly to provide the
activity undertaken in Phase One of the corporate reset and
recovery programme services relevant to children's services and
education and secondly, to inform the board of the findings from this
work in relation to impact on the community. The presentation slides
were provided in advance of the meeting.

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The Executive Director Children's Services and Director of Education, Employment and Skills presented slide pack one relating to the Councils Reset and Recovery progress for:

- Council Services;
- Schools and Early Years;
- Vulnerable Children;
- Communication and Information.

The Board noted learning points arising from the new ways of working virtually using online and social media that would be developed and included in future working practice. In particular, remote and flexible home working arrangements for staff who needed or wanted to work from home, it was noted that many staff had continued to work in Oldbury Council House offices.

The Board welcomed the success of the virtual school admission and appeals process and meetings, school place planning, play services summer period activities and packs that were supplied to families using virtual and online services to support children's learning in school and at home.

The Board noted that:

- services were starting back to work in offices and each of these services had been considered by the Reset and Recovery Board process and had undertaken rigorous risk assessment and review.
- Adult and family learning services and connections services were starting to offer face to face work, online and careers interviews had been successful and were very visible on social media.
- Inclusive learning services were supporting children with learning difficulties and vulnerable children with special educational needs and disabilities, transport services had also been through the Reset and Recovery Board process.
- Safeguarding, attendance and prosecution services had continued throughout lockdown. No prosecutions had taken place, the services had focussed on support for families to get children back into school and some staff had been redirected to provide support to schools to reassure parents about getting children back to school. Similarly, nurseries and child minders were receiving support.

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Since the presentations were prepared Sandwell had moved into local restrictions, officers had revised some plans and they had been through the Reset and Recovery Board process again. Assurance was provided about partners working arrangements to ensure there was safe access to front door services, buildings and when accessing spaces to meet with parents and children.

The Director of Education Skills and Employment advised the Board that since start of school term in September, there had been a phased return for pupils and all schools had carried out risk assessments to make services available, safe and ready, this had meant changes to the way they worked.

The Board noted that:

- initially attendance had been good, as schools increased capacity attendance was good but there were increasing requests for elected home education (EHE).
- Engagement with schools and academies had been excellent initially the schools ensured they were following Government guidance and queries were challenged with the DfE.
- When a Covid case had occurred, the school closed down the bubble to ensure other children remained isolated. There had been a number of Covid cases dealt with and numbers of cases changed on a daily basis.
- Early years settings and childminders had initially been impacted, only 25% were open in April and May, but this percentage had increased in September and more had opened as parents returned to work. It was paramount to make sure not too many had been lost as many had struggled financially, and to ensure help and support was provided to help them get back on their feet.
- Sandwell was in an area of intervention, schools were in tier 1, which allowed all schools to open and secondary school pupils were required to wear facemasks in community areas.
- In order to support children when not in schools, all schools had to provide a digital offer, for children to carry on with their studies while they self-isolating.
- School transport for special need pupils was available. There was dedicated transport available or funding that parents could claim if they preferred to get children to school in other ways, parents had a choice.
- There were concerns from schools how to help children catch up. An announcement from Government was awaited relating to

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additional funding of £80 per child, when received they could plan how better to support children.

- Schools focus initially had been checking young people's wellbeing, ensure they were ready to learn and settle into a normal school day. New personal Social Health and Education requirements would be introduced.
- The pupil assessments process had been confusing this year and the Government had been asked to make a decision on exams and studies next year.

The Executive Director of Children's Services informed the Board that at the start of lockdown, a multi-agency group was formed to focus on vulnerable children in Sandwell. The Vulnerable Children Group initially met daily and now met two or three times a week, its conversations had moved onto support for families.

The Board noted that:

- There were 700 shielded children in the Borough and plans were being worked through to support them and their families.
- Detached youth work had continued through the pandemic. It had helped young people to talk and engage, and to get into activities and a positive mindset. The Youth Team had started Doctor Bike Sessions which involved young people in fixing and building bikes, to show them how to get around more easily and in a different way.
- Access to laptops and dongles for vulnerable children to access education had been extended to children self-isolating, who did not have access to IT equipment.
- Data returns to DfE had continued to inform the national picture and some had started to be produced as reports. The Vulnerable Children return had reported the same things that were being experienced at local level.
- Referrals to Children's Services had been much lower in lockdown but the referrals were more complicated, and issues had been exacerbated by lockdown, particularly domestic violence (DV).
- With children back in schools there had an increase of safeguarding referrals and surge planning was underway, working through information and experiences of young people, which had resulted in a surge period to respond to young people. The real impact would not be seen for 6 months or more.

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- Strategic commissioning work had helped to see where services needed to be increased, particularly about Mental Health in partnership with Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).
- Two Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) meetings had been held and valuable conversations with young people had taken place.
- Communication and information daily sessions, created a number of cell meetings whilst in local restriction, taking speedy action where incidents occurred. Partnership meetings had taken place to plan business continuity and Schools involvement had been amazing, with regular meetings taking place. An Ofsted meeting was expected soon, to look at support to vulnerable children between March and September.
- Meetings with parents had been very useful.
- The longer-term impact of Covid was being considered, but it was not clear what that impact would be or whether there would be greater need in the future services.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions relating to the presentation:

- The Board welcomed the work undertaken by officers from home and on site in a very difficult time and thanked officers for all of the elements of the agenda that had been addressed.
- Some of the key issues moving forward were that a number of young people had missed out on university due to information being received too late to secure their place, there was an expected increase in young people not in education, education or training (NEET) and many businesses were not taking on apprentices at this time as they did not have capacity.
- A report would be included in the scrutiny work programme for Spring 2021, when data was available, which would include the destination information for young people from Connexions Team to consider the impact moving forward.
- In relation to mental health in schools, additional work was being put in place, including support from advisors, activities and measures for young people to feel safe.
- Schools focus was to assess children's state of mind and readiness to work. Although many young people welcomed being back at school, there were some who needed additional help from educational psychologists. Schools were being asked to identify young people who may need additional support and they were working with partners to support families where there may be wider issues.

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- There was additional support in the Elective Home Education (EHE) Team to support and advise parents in their decision to educate at home and to put them in touch with the right support and supply material.
- Attendance officers were working in COGS going out to work with families who were EHE, the Council could support families and had the duty to make sure they were safe and well, but had no power to check the quality of home schooling. Support was being offered to EHE parents in supporting children back into school. The Elective Home Education (EHE) Work Group would be meeting soon to consider EHE in more depth.
- Schools had followed process in cases of Covid in school bubbles. Cases were reported to DfE and to test and trace services. Schools were closed on the advice of Public Health where necessary. Additional teams were supporting Public Health in their work and contacting child siblings in different schools for them to take appropriate action. Work was carried out overnight to identify which children and which schools were impacted, to put in place remote learning and to report to relevant bodies. Information about potential Covid cases came from schools, track and trace and parents, and when received it was important to act quickly.
- Youth workers had continued with outreach work and sport activities through lockdown, this had ensured conversations with young people and parents in parks, street corners etc. Many youth workers were multi-lingual, and this had helped explain to parents about social distancing.
- The Council transport funding budget had been extended to make direct payment to families who were not happy with the dedicated transport arrangement, the Council had a duty to get children to school. The funding was based on assessment needs and parents were in charge of the funds and made transport arrangements for their child.
- There was no requirement for parents to wear face masks near school premises, but some schools had asked parents to do so, this was something the Council would recommend as good practice but there was no legislative requirement at this time.
- During lockdown remote learning was made available, there had been work packs made available, online classes and sheets sent to families supporting children learning at home to return to the teacher and receive feedback. Some schools had ICT issues and some households did not have access to a laptop or the internet

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which meant connecting with families was not always possible, particularly in areas of deprivation.

- There was a Government scheme in place to provide laptops to children who had not got access, the Government promised a 48-hour turn around to get the laptop or suitable equipment to the school, it would not be to every child, some households had to share.
- The learning materials supplied to parents were not available pre-Covid however schools were sharing materials and had built a bank of materials and recorded lessons with support to co-ordinate this from the Council. The Board suggested that it would be beneficial to provide material in local language accents.

The Board noted that the Executive Director was leading on the Community Impact Group and were advised that the group had pulled together and considered information from a wide range of national and local sources to get a sense of the direct impact of Covid in Sandwell.

The Board noted key Community Impacts to be:

- Mental Health: highlighting isolation and relationship issues.
- Housing: the impact of poor quality housing and not having gardens.
- Increase in unhealthy behaviours: an increase in issues that impact on health conditions and also food insecurity.
- Digital inclusion: Covid exposed and exacerbated access to ICT with more services going online.

The Board noted that there had been some positives arising from the situation including:

- increased civic participation
- decreased car use
- more people cycling canal tow paths and taking up a healthier lifestyle.

They were advised of some of the negative impacts such as hidden harm and how BAME groups were susceptible to Covid.

The Board welcomed the presentation and the work that had been carried out so far. Members noted that there would be a further report to Cabinet and then work to prioritise and revisit the Council plan could be moved forward.

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The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions relating to the presentation:

- Housing issues were primarily around poor-quality housing, social isolation and households facing eviction. Council rent collection had been suspended but was now due to be collected.
- There was a refocus around housing living conditions and supporting people with poor housing conditions particularly around the private sector housing offer.
- Insight information would be forwarded to members relating to getting involved and taking a leading role in communities.
- Housing and Children's services were working well together using the knowledge, sharing experiences and discussing approaches to learn from recent months.
- The Town Funds Sub Group on Housing was informed and using the information gathered.
- Cllr Millar voiced her interest in participating in the work relating to homelessness and helping people find justice in housing matters.

The Vice-Chair thanked officers for the comprehensive update and for all the additional work that they and their services were doing.

Resolved:

That the Reset and Recovery – Phase 1 Update was noted and that a further update be requested in Spring 2021.

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Sandwell Childcare Sufficiency Report 2020-21

The Chair welcomed the Early Years Lead Officer and the Information Officer from Family Information Services who presented the report detailing trends and the current status of Childcare in Sandwell.

The Board noted the presentation which highlighted that:

- all but one of the childcare providers in Sandwell had re-opened following the return to work after lockdown.
- DfE received data weekly about take up of places, nearly 4000 children had attended childcare in the previous week.
- In current circumstances it was difficult to predict what childcare sufficiency would look like moving forward.

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- The Council funding for 2-4 year olds remained the same.
- Support was available to businesses to make sure people were claiming their entitlement. The biggest loss of earnings for childcare providers was private income because many parents were working from home during lockdown and many had not currently returned to work.
- More business support was needed for the childcare providers, the team had worked with SWEDA and brokered support for childcare providers.
- Public Health data was not currently available, the team used information they had gathered on a month by month basis, to provide the current picture.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions on the presentation:

- Wrap around care provision in schools had been difficult through Covid, some schools had not allowed other providers on site and the guidance from DfE was confused. The childcare team and childcare brokers had worked with individual parents to find provision that was suitable for them and their children.
- There was still undersubscribed childcare provision in the Newton Ward. Communications work had taken place in October 2019 but there had only been one term to focus on it which had not been enough; outreach work was also planned but it did not progress far before Covid stopped activities in March 2020. The work would recommence as soon as it could.
- There was an increase in demand for 2 year old provision, before Covid there were around 1600 names on the list from the Department for Work and Pensions, this had recently increased to 2200, this was attributed to more people losing jobs and more families meeting the financial criteria.
- There was an increase expected in the 30 hour offer for parents that both work.

Resolved:

That the Sandwell Childcare Sufficiency Report 2020-21 be received, and comments of the Board be referred to the Director Education, Employment and Skills.

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Youth Facilities Review

The Executive Director Children's Services presented the executive response to the recommendations of the Youth Facilities Review Work Group.

The Board noted the response which provided an update of progress made to implement the recommendations:

Partnership Framework, Communications plan and Multi-agency approach:

- Work was progressing with Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) on the partnership framework.
- The Just Youth Website was being developed, a single web-based platform with a calendar of activities and links to Discover Sandwell and Families and Children's Services.
- An apprentice post had been created to keep the website up to date but there were not many activities on the calendar at this time due to Covid; there was however plenty of activity using social media.
- The Youth Symposium planning was moving forward but it would not take place in Spring 2021. It would be important to get the technology right to reach young people, professionally we use Teams and Skype however young people use zoom and other platforms.

Young People Spaces:

- There was a delay to progressing the bid to increase mobile provision through the Town Fund process due to Covid, discussions were taking place about use of Community Infrastructure levy to fund a new bus.
- A development bid had been made in partnership with the Albion Foundations to create a West Smethwick Park youth hub, to provide sports activity in different spaces.
- Pilots sessions with Sandwell Leisure Trust at Tipton Sports Academy and Portway Lifestyle had stalled due to Covid and discussion around use of Libraries and other buildings were all waiting at the moment. Detached youth work had been invaluable.

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Better Access to transport:

- Progress was limited under current circumstances, but discussion was taking place around the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) transport plan.
- Young people were not keen to use public transport, there was some development re Metro and potential to assist travel.
- There was progress with Doctor Bike sessions, the Strategic Walk Plan focus on canals and cycle routes.

Strategic approach to funding:

- Through strategic partnerships the Council was exploring strengthening funding bids and looking to increase the skill available and also looking at voluntary sector grants.
- There were concerns how to fund these activities and how to produce high quality bids.
- Thinking about sustainability was really important.

Develop a renewed Youth Offer:

- The current youth offer was mainly detached and online, which had worked really well. Moving forward young people want to meet up and have youth spaces, plans were being made to develop the offer in street based, park based and online.

Budget:

- As the reset and recovery plans were being worked through. the impact on young people has been substantial, health and education and enabling to catch up and think about their future was identified and there was more ambition and significant policy work ongoing to link to corporate plan.

Question Time:

- The virtual platform was not there to engage with young people in terms of connectivity at the moment. This needs further work and was tricky in terms of connectivity.

The Chair noted that there was a lot of 'wait and see' because of reset and recovery measures and suggested the need to programme in a report mid 2021 to get more information when the position was fully known.

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The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions on the presentation:

- Cllr McVittie indicated that the bus was not popular with all young people and suggested that an eco/hybrid versatile minibus should be considered rather than a double decker bus, to utilise facilities in different areas of the Borough and to be more resourceful.
- Tanhouse had potential for future use to develop as a sports hub, the sports hub initiative was welcomed.
- It was noted that young people had indicated that they did not always feel welcome in shared spaces as they were perceived by others to be a nuisance.
- The Question time sessions could be held in the Council Chamber using ICT facilities and the big screens in the future, but this was not an option at this time.
- Utilisation of the Towns Fund and the use of infrastructure levy money was welcomed, the Chair was pleased to see that gaps in funding were being addressed this way.
- Cllr Shackleton suggested that the transit styled vehicles should be used to transport young people who wanted to engage in drama to Conegre Centre particularly for young people with disabilities.

The Board endorsed the suggestion of transit buses to transport people to places and welcomed the progress being made to respond to the recommendations and that there was movement to implement the recommendations.

Resolved:


- 1) that the response and update report be received;
- 2) that a further report be included on the work programme for the Board mid-year 2021.

(Meeting ended at 7.05 pm)

Contact Officer: Deb Breedon Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3896

REPORT TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY BOARD

16th November 2020

Subject:	Adoption@Heart Annual Report 2019/20
Cabinet Portfolio:	Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life
Director:	Executive Director for Children's Services - Lesley Hagger
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Contact Officer(s):	Lesley Hagger – Executive Director for Children's Services

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Scrutiny Board:

1. Receives the Adoption@Heart Annual Report 2019/20;
2. Considers the performance of the first year of the Regional Adoption Agency and provides summary feedback to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 At its meeting on 7th January 2019 it was agreed that the performance of the new arrangement for the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) would be reported to and scrutinised by the Children's Services and Education Corporate Parenting Board.
- 1.2 The new organisation has been operational since 1 April 2019 and an interim performance report was presented to the Scrutiny Board in November 2019.

- 1.3 The first full year of performance is now set out in Adoption@Heart's Annual Report 2019/20. The Annual Report also includes some performance information for 20/21.

2 **IMPLICATIONS FOR VISION 2030**

- 2.1 High quality adoption services improve the life chances of vulnerable children and young people and ensure that all children are offered an equality of opportunity in the way that they are matched with an adoptive family. Adoption offers children a new start in life.

3 **BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 The provision of an adoption service is a statutory requirement and the council is required to monitor the provision of adoption services. The government agreed that all local authorities (LAs) would be expected to deliver their adoption services through an RAA by 2020 and funding was provided by the Department for Education (DfE) to cover the costs of setting up these new arrangements.
- 3.2 On 12th December 2018, Sandwell Council's Cabinet gave approval to transfer adoption services to the new Regional Adoption Agency: Adoption@Heart. These arrangements were considered by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7th January 2019 when it was also agreed that the Scrutiny Committee would undertake the role to scrutinise these arrangements and report its findings to the Corporate Parenting Board, which is chaired by the Lead Member for Best Start in Life.
- 3.3 The RAA for the Black Country local authorities is called Adoption@Heart. The arrangement is a 'hosted' model, whereby the adoption service is hosted by Wolverhampton City Council on behalf of the four Black County local authorities and commissioned on their behalf via Dudley Council. Contractual arrangements are in place for all partners. The adoption service has an operational interface with each local authority children's service; in Sandwell, this is Sandwell Children's Trust.

4 **CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 Adoption@Heart has now been operating for just over 18 months. The number of children adopted in the 12-month period 2019/20 has increased on the previous year performance, and in 20/21 the number of children placed has increased by approximately 20% compared to the previous year.

- 4.2 In the first year of operation, forty one percent of children placed were from Sandwell and consequently numbers placed for the other three partners were considerably lower. This was due to the fact that more Sandwell children were waiting on Placement Orders at the point the service became operational. In the first six months of the current year, this has levelled out with thirty three percent of children placed being from Sandwell.
- 4.3 Key areas of focus for the first year, as set out in the Annual Report, have been on adoption support, early permanence in placing children, adopter recruitment, and increasing adopter engagement and consultation.
- 4.4 Adoption panels have operated since early April 2019 across the four Local Authority / Trust locations on a weekly basis. Panels have approved 51 Adopters and matched 107 children in the year 2019/20 (100 children placed in year). In the first six months of 2020/21 panels have matched 67 children with adoptive parents (62 placed with adopters) and approved 34 adopters.
- 4.5 Whilst the first year of operation for Adoption@Heart had its challenges, as with the creation of any new organisation, performance has been good, and Sandwell has received a particularly high level of support, as shown in the performance data contained within the report.

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- 5.1 During the process of establishing Adoption@Heart there was full consultation with children, young people and families, and with staff that were transferred via a TUPE arrangement from Sandwell Children's Trust to Adoption@Heart.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS.

- 6.1 The framework set out in the report approved by the Emergency Committee will result in the development of plans to enable the organisation and the borough to recover from the impact of COVID-19, therefore alternative options are not required at this stage. When developing approaches and determining specific activities, it will be essential to consider alternative options to ensure the most appropriate way forward is agreed.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 At the inception of the Regional Adoption Agency, the financial contributions were based on the budgets already in existence in the four individual local authorities. Sandwell's budget for 2019/20 was £1.22m, which equates to 24.4% of the budget. The budget has remained the

same in 2020/21. Discussions about future budget arrangements are currently ongoing.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 A contract is in place between the four Black Country local authorities to commission Adoption@Heart, and the organisation is hosted by Wolverhampton Council. A Strategic Commissioning Board meets on a quarterly basis to monitor the contract. The commissioning process is managed via Dudley Council. The Strategic Commissioning Board is chaired by Sandwell Council.
- 8.2 An Operational Board meets monthly to ensure high quality oversight of the operational business. A further meeting is also in place to ensure the successful interface between Adoption@Heart business and the social care practice in each local authority/Trust.
- 8.3 An annual meeting of Lead Members is also set out in the governance document, although, due to Covid pressures, it has not been possible for that group to meet and a meeting is now being set up to take place before the end of this financial year.
- 8.4 Annual scrutiny and assurance is provided in Sandwell via the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board, which then makes its comments available to the Corporate Parenting Board. In Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton, the scrutiny and assurance process takes place within the Corporate Parenting Board meeting.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 Adoption@Heart undertakes its own equality impact assessments. Ensuring that diversity and equality has a prominent focus is a key feature of the RAAs work.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessment is not required.

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 There is no requirement to carry out a Crime and Disorder and Risk Assessment.

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

- 12.1 The sustainability of Regional Adoption Agencies was addressed in the Cabinet paper that gave the approval to establish Adoption@Heart and are specifically set out in one of the Schedules for the Contract between SMBC and the Regional Adoption Agency.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

- 13.1 The immediate impact of COVID-19 on the performance of Adoption@Heart are set out in the Annual Report. It will be important to continue to monitor the impact via the Strategic Commissioning Board.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

- 14.1 There is no impact on council managed property or land.

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15.1 Adoption@Heart is providing a good service to Sandwell.
- 15.2 The Annual Report presents a robust set of performance information.
- 15.3 The oversight of quality and performance through management processes and governance arrangements is clear and regular.
- 15.4 There are clear objectives for the future – particularly in the areas of adopter recruitment and communication/PR.

16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 16.1 Cabinet report -12th December 2018
Scrutiny reports – 7th January 2019, 11th November 2019

17 APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Adoption@Heart Annual Report

Lesley Hagger
Executive Director for Children's Services



Report title:

Adoption Service Report

- 30 September 2019 to 31 March 2020 &
- 01 April 2020 to 30 September 2020

Date of report: 02 November 2020

To: Sandwell Council

Produced by: Mark Tobin
Head of Service

Service: Adoption@Heart

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report

This report fulfils the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report below.

The report jointly covers the full year 2019/20 and the interim period of six months 1 April to 30 September 2020.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 30 September 2020.

Adoption@Heart is a Regional Adoption Agency, providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. The service is hosted by Wolverhampton City Council and became operational 1 April 2019.

2. Number, type and age of children waiting for adoption and length of time waiting

As at 31 March 2020:

There were 48 children subject to placement orders, but not yet placed for adoption. The breakdown of timescales for these children is below:

Nine children require their placement order to be rescinded. A further eight children were no longer subject to family finding, as foster carers were under consideration to become their adoptive parents.

Of the 31 children in active family finding, 20 were in the process of being matched with adoptive parents and five children were already placed with adoptive parents, but not yet legally adopted.

There were six children in active family finding, where adopters had not yet been identified.

Less than 3 months:	7
Between 3 and 6 months:	11
Between 6 and 12 months:	5
Between 12 and 24 months:	8
Children waiting over 2 years:	0

As at 30 September there were 29 children on placement orders and not yet placed with an adoptive family. Six children have been subject to a change of plan, so not in active family finding.

23 children were on placement orders with an active plan of adoption. Six were in the process of being adopted by their foster carers and a further three were in the process of having their

plan reviewed. These children were therefore no longer subject to active family finding. Three children were matched but not yet placed with their adopters. Eleven children were subject to active family finding.

Less than 3 months:	4
Between 3 and 6 months:	5
Between 6 and 12 months:	8
Between 12 and 24 months:	2
Children waiting over 2 years:	4

2.1 Children Made Subject to Placement Orders

As at 31 March 2020:

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
5	5	4	3	3	3	23

As at 30 September 2020:

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Total
0	2	2	6	0	1	11

2.2 Children Subject to Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions

As at 30 September 2020 there were 44 children with the decision to be placed for adoption (SHOBPA), but not yet subject to a placement order. Nineteen were waiting to have decisions rescinded.

Data was not available for the number waiting at 31 March.

2.3 Number of Children who had a SHOPBA during the period

As at 31 March 2020:

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
7	2	4	8	2	8	31

As at 30 September 2020:

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Total
2	1	5	1	1	3	13

2.4 The Numbers of Children who had a Change of Plan in the Period

Five children were subject to a change of plan away from adoption during the 6-month period to 31 March 2020.

2.5 Number of Children Placed for Adoption during the period

For 12 months to 31 March 2020:

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep
2	3	1	7	2	4

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total in year
7	1	3	0	5	6	41

For the six months to 30 September 2020:

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Total
2	4	4	3	7	0	20

Children Placed in Previous Years:

Financial Year:	16/17	17/18	18/19
Children Placed:	29	35	36

Analysis:

The number of children placed in the 18-month period to 30 September 2020 have exceeded performance in previous years.

3. Number of Children Adopted

The number of children legally adopted by their adoptive parents in the full year 2019/20 was 31.

The number adopted in the first six months of 2020/21 was 13.

Number of children adopted in the three previous years is below:

Financial Year:	16/17	17/18	18/19
Children Adopted:	36	39	28

The number of children adopted in the 12-month period 2019/20 has increased on the previous year performance. Due to the time delay in a child being placed and adopted, this does not at this stage relate to Adoption@Heart practice. The numbers adopted in the 6-month period to 30 September 2020 is slightly lower and it is expected that the full year number of children adopted will be lower, due to court delays created by Covid-19. The numbers of children leaving care nationally via adoption has reduced continuously since 2017.

Adoption Scorecard Performance

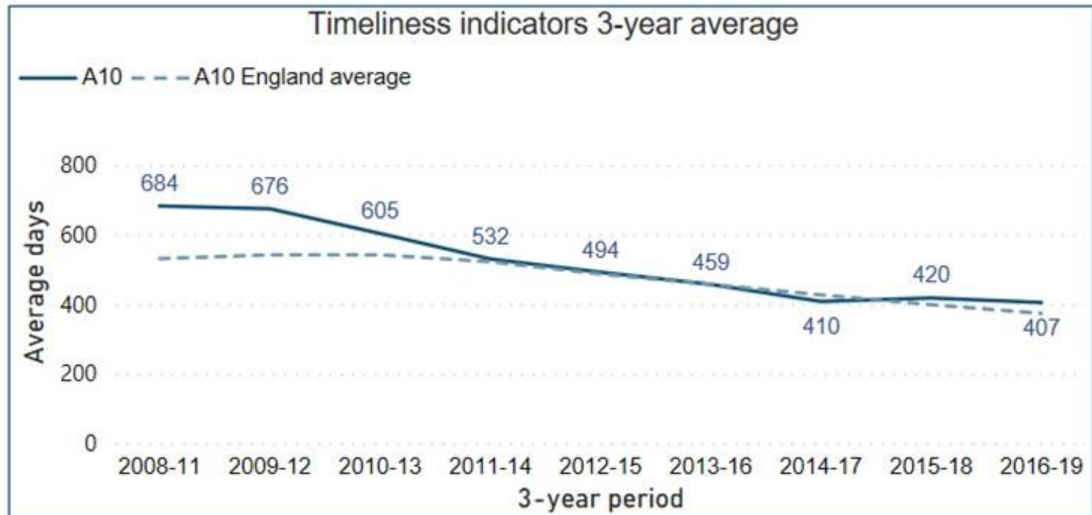
In 2014, as part of its' Adoption Reform Agenda, the government introduced Adoption Scorecards to track local authority performance and to tackle delay in the adoption system. Scorecards are produced for a 3-year rolling average, with the latest data being published for April 2018 - March 2019 (Published April 2020).

The current indicators are:

A10 – number of days between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. The current threshold is 426 days.

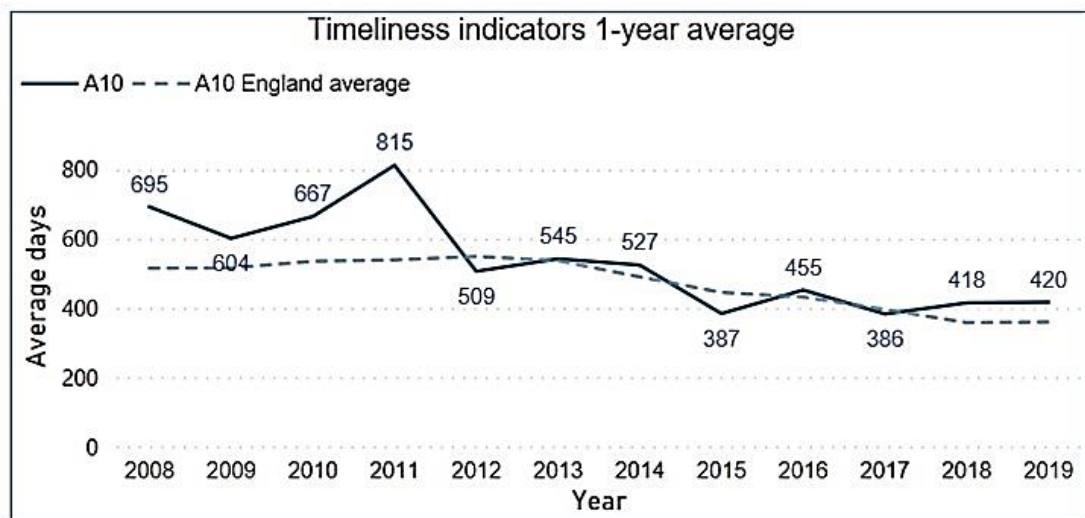
A2 – the number of days between receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and the Agency decision about a match to an adoptive family. The current threshold is 121 days.

A10: Average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster care adoptions:				
2019 average days:	2019 England average:	Average time in 2019 was longer than in 2018	2016-19 average days:	2016-19 England average:
420	363		407	376



A10 Single year and 3 year average performance is under the threshold but higher than national average. Timeliness for children has improved significantly over an 11 year period.

A2: Average time (in days) between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family:				
2019 average days:	2019 England average:	Average time in 2019 was shorter than in 2018	2016-19 average days:	2016-19 England average:
233	170		227	178



A2 performance for both single year and 3 year average is significantly above threshold and national average evidencing delay from the point of obtaining a legal order to matching children with adopters.

3.1 Early Permanency

There were 5 children placed in early permanence placements via Foster for Adopt.

4. Recruitment of Adopters

4.1 New Enquiries

For the period from 1st April 2020 to 30th September 2020, 283 new enquiries were received by the Adoption@Heart Recruitment Team.

This is in comparison to 139 enquiries received last year in the same period. 349 enquiries for the entire year.

During the year 2020/21 adoption enquiries have increased during the Covid-19 crisis and this reflects a national increase also experienced by other agencies.

4.2 Information Events

115 Adopter households attended virtual information events in the year 2019/20.

57 adopter households attended virtual information events took that place in the six months to September 2020, compared with 61 (mix of single and couples) households in the previous six months.

Due to Covid-19 Information Events were run virtually and the service offered a combination of phone consultations and virtual information events from June 2020. 106 adopters (units not individuals have received information in 6 months via this combined approach.

4.3 Initial visits

The number of initial assessment visits carried out to potential adoptive parents is as below:

Full year 2019/20:	128
Six months April to September 2020:	68

4.4 Registrations of Interest

The number of Registrations of Interest to adopt received were as below:

Full year 2019/20	64
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Six months April to September 2020	42
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Analysis:

The service has improved on year one performance in the first six months of year two, with a 31 percent increase in the number of Registrations of Interest.

Of the figures above six ROI's (three in each period) were received from foster carers adopting children in their care.

4.5 Current position

At the end of the period (30 September 2020), there were 19 families in Stage One, three in between Stage One and Stage Two, and 18 in Stage Two.

4.6 Timescales in Stage One

Stage One has a timescale threshold of 8 weeks or 56 days. 26 stage one's have ended in this period and the average duration (including fast track applications but excluding families who withdrew during stage one) is 48 days. 15 out of the 26 were completed outside of timescales.

4.7 Timescales in Stage Two

Stage Two has a timescale of 16 weeks or 112 days from commencement of the process to the Agency Decision regarding the match. 31 have ended in this period with an average duration of 113 days. 11 out of the 31 stage were completed outside of timescales.

4.8 Adopters Approved

There have been 34 adopters approved in this period compared with 34 in the previous six months (51 for full year 2019/20).

Analysis:

There is evidence of improved adopter recruitment performance in the first six months of the year 2020/21. The total number of approvals in the first year of operation was 51, therefore 34 approvals in the six-month period evidences an increase of 33 percent. This together with the numbers in stage one and two at 30 September, suggest that the projected overall number of approvals for the full year should increase to between 60 and 70. There has been some delay in receiving checks and medicals due to Covid-19, which could impact on performance.

4.9 Adopters Required

The service expects to place between 120 and 130 children in the current year and the targeted performance is to place 60 percent in house with this reducing incrementally to 30 percent over the next 3 years. In order to achieve this target performance will need to improve to 80 to 100 approvals over the next 3 years.

4.10 Partner adoptions

The service undertakes four Step Parent Adoption cases for each local authority each year. This will be considerably below the demand for each local authority. Work has been undertaken to embed consistent practice in screening enquiries in the local authorities and Adoption@Heart staff offer consultation on all enquiries received. To date the numbers referred to the service are in the table below:

LA / Trust	2019/20 Full Year	2020/21 6 Months
Walsall	3	1
Sandwell	4	1
Dudley	4	0
Wolverhampton	1	1

5. Marketing Report

Marketing figures for this period are:

- 283 enquiries
- 49 phone consultations and 57 virtual information events attended
- Between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020, we had a total of 10,752 website visits – made up of 8,415 unique visits.

Marketing Activity

Despite the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, marketing activity has remained a priority in line with the national message that recruiting adopters and placing children with adopters remains a priority.

A summer campaign took place across July and August, which featured a digital advert impression campaign with a range of print and radio coverage across four weeks and a series of blog posts from Adoption@Heart Social Workers, detailing their working week from home. A myth busting social media campaign also took place across Facebook.

The national 'You Can Adopt' campaign launched on the 16 September 2020, which seeks to bust myths around who is eligible to adopt and explore what the adoption process involves.

The adoption process can seem confusing and complicated for those who are interested, so the campaign encourages agencies to work together to make sure prospective adopters receive the same message regardless. Adopters need to have the same message, process and experience, when it comes to their adoption journey.

Additionally, the campaign aims to target potential parents from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, as these children traditionally wait longer to be matched. We have to work effectively together to address the reasons why this is the case and we need to be better at reaching into the community to find those people who might be interested but aren't coming forward.

It also highlights that especially during the coronavirus pandemic, there are still children out there who are looking for their new family. A pilot campaign also launched in October across Birmingham and London, which urges potential black adopters to come forward. Two enquiries have been received so far from Home for Good, as part of this drive.

Communication Leads across Wolverhampton, Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall are working together in marketing the service across the region, utilising their knowledge, resources and opportunities to promote the service across the region.

The remainder of the year will see increased marketing activity with the National Campaign combined with localised activities over the Autumn.

6. Requirements on the Preparation of Adoption Report Regulations

6.1 Complaints

There have been three formal complaints about the service since 1 April 2019. Information about complaints specific to this council, as well as generally about A@H include nature of complaints and outcome if concluded.

One of these was from adopters in stage one of the recruitment process, where a decision was made not to proceed. Their complaint related to this decision and delays in communicating this in a timely way. The complaint was partly upheld due to the delay, but the decision not to invite to stage two was not changed. Learning has been identified and discussed with the relevant staff.

The second stage one complaint was from an adoptive parent who had received unauthorised contact from a birth parent, who had obtained their contact details. This did not relate to a child placed by Sandwell. Following an investigation by the Head of Service, it was concluded that this was not the case. The complaint also highlighted issues in communication during the service transition process with the adopter regarding post adoption contact. This part of the complaint was upheld and learning discussed with the relevant Team Manager.

A third formal complaint has been received from an individual who made an enquiry to adopt but was not invited to proceed to registration of interest due to significant vulnerabilities identified at initial visit. A meeting took place between this individual and the Head of Service in Autumn 2019, however the complaint has escalated to stage two and is currently with the Ombudsman.

6.2 Staffing

Total number of staff, numbers in each team, vacancies, capacity issues, use of agency staff:

The service employs 32 qualified Social Workers on a permanent basis along with seven agency Social Workers, who are providing additional capacity due to vacant posts, sickness, maternity leave and additional demand created by Covid-19. Two agency Social Workers are funded for twelve months to provide additional family finding capacity.

There are three Team Managers, with one each covering the thematic service areas. One of these posts (Family Finding) was vacant until September 2020, but a seconded Manager in that role has now been permanently appointed. The panel team have two Panel Advisors (one of these is vacant and currently covered by an agency Social Worker), along with a Panel Co-ordinator and three Panel Administrators, one of which is currently vacant.

The Business Support Team have a Manager, a recently created Senior Business Support Officer post along five Business Support Officers. There are currently two BSO vacancies in the team.

Vacancy rates have remained low since the service went live and despite Covid-19, sickness and absence rates have been minimal during the first six months of 2020/21.

Ongoing consideration is being given to staffing capacity in relation to demand on the service, in particular for Family Finding and Adoption Support.

6.3 Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

There have been no referrals to the IRM in either period.

7. Development of Adoption@Heart

7.1 Practice

Since February 2020, a programme of Practice Development Work has addressed the developmental needs of the service. From this work additional practice guidance has been implemented with a view to raising standards of practice and increasing performance and innovation, as the service becomes more established. Key areas of focus to date have been:

Adoption Support

To develop a measurable, outcomes-based vision for Adoption Support Services, ensuring that services are focused on achieving outcomes.

Ensure that we have the right systems and processes to deliver the right level of the service to the right families, based on levels of need.

Provide adopters with easier access to and better support from other agencies.

To deliver a more responsive birth parent support service and promote birth family relationships.

Improve services for adopted adults.

Early Permanence in placing children

Raising awareness and knowledge about early permanence and embedding the early permanence policy, practice and delivery in house and across partner organisations, through opportunities for training and development to ensure that knowledge is up to date and is widely shared.

Adopter Recruitment

Streamline processes and shorten timescales for all parts of the adopter assessment journey from Enquiry to ADM approval. With the aim that 90% of all assessments are completed in the required 6-month timescale. Development of Stage One and Stage Two processes to address delay and facilitate Adopter Self Learning in Stage One and Stage Two.

Increasing adopter engagement and consultation

To influence service delivery through the development of an Adoption Advisory Board. Adopter Voice is commissioned to support A@H with this work. Increased communication with adopters through their journey by the development adopter database and a plan of regular communication.

7.2 Family Finding Activity

The tables below contain the total numbers of children placed by the service during the year 2019/20, as well as the six months to 30 September 2020/21.

Full Year 2019/20 – Children Placed:

LA / Trust	In House	Inter-agency	Total Placed
Sandwell	20	21	41
Wolverhampton	10	13	23
Walsall	11	8	19
Dudley	9	8	17
(Total)	50	50	100

1 April to 30 September 2020 – Children Placed:

LA/ Trust	In House	Interagency	Total placed
Sandwell	4	17	21
Wolverhampton	6	9	15
Walsall	7	11	18
Dudley	5	3	8
Total	22	40	62

For comparative purposes, the performance of each LA / Trust in placing children is in the table.

2018/19 – Children Placed by LA / Trust (year prior to Adoption@Heart going live):

LA/ Trust	In House	Interagency	Total placed
Sandwell	8	28	36
Wolverhampton	29	13	42
Walsall	16	12	28
Dudley	16	16	32
Total	69	69	138

Early Permanence

In the full year 2019/20, five children were placed via Foster for Adoption.

20 children have been placed via Foster for Adoption in the first six months of 2020/21, five of these children were Sandwell children.

Analysis

The overall number of children placed in the year 2020/21 has increased pro rata by over twenty percent, compared with the previous year performance, despite the impact of Covid-19 on children's transitions. The service is likely to place around the same number of children in total as the combined total of the four partners in the year prior before the RAA was formed.

In the first year of operation, forty one percent of children placed were from Sandwell and consequently numbers placed for the other three partners were considerably lower. This was due to the fact that more Sandwell children were waiting on Placement Orders at the point the service became operational. In the first six months of the current year, this has levelled out with thirty three percent of children placed being from Sandwell.

The numbers of children placed for both Walsall and Wolverhampton have significantly increased in the current year to date. The number of children placed by Dudley remains lower than in the previous year and this should be seen in the context of the numbers of children waiting to be placed for adoption, which are also lower for Dudley. These are provided in the table below.

Inter-agency usage has remained high during both periods, with sixty four percent of children placed externally in the current year to date. The increased numbers of adopters entering the process in the same period would indicate that the number placed in house should increase, as these adopters become approved during quarters three and four of the current year.

Foster for Adopt usage has significantly increased during the first six months of 2020/21. This increase is the result of development work done within the service and across the partnership.

7.3 Adoption Panels

Adoption panels have operated since early April 2019 across the four Local Authority / Trust locations on a weekly basis. Panels have approved 51 Adopters and matched 107 children in the year 2019/20 (100 children placed in year). In the first six months of 2020/21 panels have matched 67 children with adoptive parents (62 placed with adopters) and approved 34 adopters.

Panels have been robust in raising issues about practice where appropriate.

The service now has four panel Chairs, having recruited a further Chair in addition to the three who transferred in April 2019. The two Panel Advisors and the Panel Coordinator have driven the development of robust quality assurance processes and the Head of Service has held quarterly meetings with the Chairs. A joint staff / panel member development day took place in January 2020 and another is scheduled for December 2020.

In April 2020 Covid-19 restrictions led to the need for panels to be run virtually, rather than face to face. Despite initial challenges in moving to this new way of working, the panel team and Chairs worked effectively together in ensuring panels were able to run smoothly via Microsoft Teams. Consideration is currently being given to the benefits of the virtual panel system and to what extent the system might remain virtual once restrictions are lifted. There have been clear benefits regarding adopter attendance and reducing regional travel for professionals.

ADM processes are now embedded and there have been less delays in progressing decisions due to resource challenges.

Following challenges in ensuring panels are quorate during the first-year, additional panel members have been recruited from within the local authorities. This has reduced dependence on independent panel members, improve quoracy and enable effective involvement by partner agencies in panel delivery. There are some ongoing challenges regarding the quality of documentation and adherence to timescales, which are being addressed.

7.4 Partnership Working

Considerable progress has been made during the 18 months since the service went live in strengthening engagement and communication across the partnership. This has improved the interface between the service and partners and improved the understanding of it being a shared service, rather than a separate entity.

Practice workshops were held in all partner services during the quarter four of 2019/20. Further workshops are planned for Autumn 2020.

Adoption@Heart managers are attending key meetings relating to children's care planning and tracking.

Virtual working has improved engagement, due to reduction in travel and impact on time.

Establishment of an Operations Group has improved operational communication at Head of Service and Service Manager level.

A partnership event for all staff is planned for November 2020 (delayed from May due to Covid-19).

8. Adoption Support

During April 2019 to March 2020, the service made 226 ASF applications. In the six months to September 2020, 145 applications have been made to the fund. The split of these according to which area the adopter lived, in is outlined in the table below:

Local Authority	ASF Applications 2019/20	ASF Applications 2020/21 – year to date April to September
Dudley	82	38
Sandwell	40	26
Walsall	58	40
Wolverhampton	46	41

Adoption@Heart is responsible for the following post adoption contact arrangements. The table shows the number of children and the work generated, as some children will have multiple post adoption recipients.

Post Adoption Contact 2019/20 – Full Year

Council	Number of Adoptee	Number of Contacts for Adoptee
Dudley	343	966
Sandwell	544	1083
Walsall	683	1786
Wolverhampton	351	1022

Post Adoption Contact 2020/21 Year to Date:

Council	Number of Adoptee	Number of Contacts for Adoptee
Dudley	357	941
Sandwell	535	1068
Walsall	772	1860
Wolverhampton	400	860

Referrals / Enquiries for Adoption Support

There have been 94 referrals for assessment of need between April 2019 - March 2020 and a further 43 during the period April to September 2020. All of them have resulted in delivering specialist intervention, commissioning therapeutic services either inhouse or with external providers. Additionally, there have been a significant number of reviews of therapeutic intervention and we have made 288 applications to the ASF for new and continued therapeutic services.

In House Therapeutic Provision

The service has an in-house Adoption Support Therapist who delivers therapeutic intervention which includes; Therapeutic Life Story work, DDP informed practice, delivery of parenting programmes including Nurturing Attachment Parenting Programme, plus training sessions. The total ASF claims from work undertaken amounts to £38,314.33.

9. Accountability**Management board**

The service has continued to have in place two key layers of governance with a Management Board attended by Assistant Directors and a Strategic Commissioning Board attended by Directors of Children's Service.

The Strategic Commissioning Board has continued to meet quarterly, supported by the commissioning lead from Dudley. The Chair of this board transferred to Sandwell in October 2020, due to a change of DCS in Dudley who previously chaired.

In May 2020 an Operations Group was established on a trial basis, with a view to increasing engagement, oversight and operational involvement of Heads of Service and other managers from each partners service. This group has met monthly chaired by the Head of Service for Adoption@Heart. Consequently, the Management Board has met bi-monthly given part of its function is now delegated to this group.


Further discussion will take place with the Strategic Commissioning Board in January 2021 about the governance arrangements moving forward.

Report completed by:



Mark Tobin
Head of Service

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board 16 November 2020

Subject:	Elective Home Education Working Group
Cabinet Portfolio:	Councillor Joyce Underhill - Cabinet Member Best Start in Life
Director:	Executive Director of Children's Services – Lesley Hagger Director of Education Skills and Employment– Chris Ward
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Contact Officer(s):	Sue Moore - Group Head for Education Support Services Sue_moore@sandwell.gov.uk Deb Breedon - Democratic Services Officer Deborah_breedon@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board:

1. consider and agree the scope for the Elective Home Education Scrutiny Review;
2. To receive an update presentation of current demand and emerging issues for Elective Home Education Support in Sandwell.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To consider and agree the scope of the review of Elective Home Education and note the progress of the Elective Home Education Working Group.
- 1.2 To consider the increasing demand for home education support in Sandwell.

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR SANDWELL'S VISION

- 2.1 High quality education improves the life chances of children and young people and acknowledge that children and young people have a right to enjoy their childhood as well as enabling them to develop the confidence and aspirations for a successful adulthood.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Nationally, there has been a very significant increase in the number of children being educated at home. Elective Home Education numbers over the last 5 academic years has risen in Sandwell.
- 3.2 Childrens Services and Education Scrutiny Board, 20 July 2020 considered a report relating to Elective Home Education (EHE) in Sandwell. The report and presentation highlighted that there had been an increase in numbers of elective home education cases and it was questioned why parents were choosing to home educate and whether current support provision was sufficient? The Board wanted to know more about the range of ways to carry out education out of the school system and to hear the child's voice about home education.
- 3.3 The Scrutiny Board on 21 September 2020 was advised that there was an increase in the numbers of parents considering EHE and highlighted the need to progress with the EHE working group.
- 3.4 The review aims to gather evidence to understand the have, needs and wants for Elective Home Education in Sandwell and to raise awareness of the limitations placed on the Local Authority (LA).
- 3.5 At a meeting of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families and Directors of Children's Services (DCS) in September 2020, off-rolling and increases in numbers of children in elective home education were discussed. Some Local Authorities (LAs) had seen an increase in EHE. It was considered that the pandemic had heightened the risk that some children may be inappropriately withdrawn from school for EHE, either because parents have reservations about sending children to school, or because they are encouraged to do so by schools. There was a general view that LAs need greater powers and that parents may not understand fully the longer-term implications of EHE.
- 3.6 Previously the Government published updated guidance for parents and Local Authorities (LAs) relating to Elective Home Education in April 2019 following a DfE call for evidence in April 2018. This was followed by a consultation relating to 'Children not in School', to consider establishing a

local authority registration system for children who do not attend state funded or registered independent schools.

3.7 There was a new call for evidence in October 2020.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION – WORKING GROUP

4.1 The report and presentation to Childrens Services and Education Scrutiny Board 20 July 2020 [Elective Home Education](#) provided evidence and set the scene for the review.

4.2 The Elective Home Education Working Group was established and the membership was agreed with the Vice-Chair:

Cllrs Preece (Chair), Z Hussain, McVittie, Millar, Shackleton.

4.3 A core officer group and the Vice Chair of CSE Scrutiny Board met to develop the scope and the timelines for the review. The working group met on 8 October to develop the scope document (appendix 1) which sets out the rationale and the way forward for the working group to review Elective Home Education in Sandwell.

4.4 The working group agreed to utilise a range of methods to gather evidence including desk top research, witness evidence at meetings, surveys for parents and children in home education and a virtual forum to meet with parents, children and EHE teachers.

4.5 The work group will also consider best practice, alternative methods to support education at home and any emerging guidance from DfE.

4.6 The Key Lines of Enquiry – Elective Home Education

- a) What is the current LEA offer?
- b) Why do parents choose to educate at home, what are the drivers?
- c) What do children need and want?
- d) What are the attainment levels of home educated children and how does this impact further education and employment trends?
- e) How does the LEA support and safeguard children in home education?

4.7 The working group intention is to understand more about current demand and provision for Elective Home Education in Sandwell and to hear a range of perspectives from young people, parents, teachers and people that support home education about what is needed, what they think about

current arrangements and how they may be enhanced.

4.8 The aims of the review:

- To understand the current numbers and whether support for Elective Home Education in Sandwell is sufficient.
- To capture young people's perspective on education at home.
- To establish the attainment level and further education and employment trends for children educated at home.
- To raise awareness of the limitations placed on the LA and bring findings to the attention of the Secretary of State for Education.

5 **NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 The Working Group meet on 9th November to consider a scene setting report, case studies and to receive an update on surveys.
- 5.2 The Working Group will carry out a focus group meeting with parents, teachers and children on Wednesday 25th November 2020 and plan to meet in December to review the evidence gathered by survey and at the focus group.

6 **CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)**

- 6.1 The working group have developed two surveys to consult with Parents and children who are educated at home.

7 **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 7.1 The purpose of the review is to consider current support for Elective Home Education and if it meets the needs of young people and parents, findings will inform if the Council should consider alternative options.

8 **STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

9 **LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no current considerations.

10 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 All young people should have equal access to education to give them the best possible start in life.

11 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 There are no current requirements for a data protection impact assessment to be carried out relevant to this paper.

12 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

- 12.1 There are no crime and disorder risks specifically relating to this report, however, it must be noted that the impact of engagement of children in education and positive activities has implications for crime reduction.

13 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

- 13.1 The sustainability of services is reliant on the continued provision of funding for services to meet the demand.
- 13.2 There continues to be increasing demands on the EHE service due to increasing numbers of children being educated at home.

14 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

- 14.1 Good education and attainment levels increase the wellbeing of children and young people and contributes to them having the best possible start in life.

15 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

- 15.1 None.

16. CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 16.1 The Review of Elective Home Education will inform future support for home education and align with the cross-cutting themes outlined in the Council's Corporate Plan.

17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 Elective Home Education Report and Presentation – CS&E Scrutiny Board 20 July 2020

18. APPENDICES:

18.1 Appendix 1 – Scope Document

Scrutiny Review – Scoping Document

Review Title:	Elective Home Education
Scrutiny Board:	Children’s Services and Education
Date of Review:	September – December 2020

Reasons for undertaking the review:

A request for scrutiny to consider home education was received from the Cabinet Member – Best Start in Life. A report was presented to Children’s Service and Education Scrutiny Board [20th July 2020](#).

The report and presentation highlighted that there had been an increase in numbers of elective home education cases and it was questioned why parents were choosing to home educate and whether current support provision was sufficient. The Board wanted to know more about the range of ways to carry out education out of the school system and to hear the child’s voice about home education.

There was consensus that there should be further analysis of data carried out by officers, including: attainment levels of EHE students and the numbers of EHE for each Town.

The Board agreed that the Elective Home Education Working Group be established to scope the review to consider the matter.

Membership of the Working Group:

Cllrs Preece (Chair), Z Hussain, McVittie, Millar and Shackleton.

The working group met on 8 October to scope the review and plan activities to gather evidence. A project plan will be completed for this review.

Key Lines of Enquiry – Elective Home Education

- a) What is the current LEA offer?
- b) Why do parents choose to educate at home, what are the drivers?
- c) What do children need and want?
- d) What are the attainment levels of home educated children and how does this impact further education and employment trends?
- e) How does the LEA support and safeguard children in home education?

Intended Outcomes:

to make further recommendations regarding areas in it considered would benefit from further scrutiny or policy development.

- To understand the current numbers and whether support for Elective Home Education in Sandwell is sufficient.
- To capture young people’s perspective on education at home.
- To establish the attainment level and further education and employment trends for children educated at home.
- To raise awareness of the limitations placed on the LA and bring matters to the attention of the Secretary of State for Education.

It is intended for the session to align with the cross-cutting themes outlined in the Council’s Reset & Recovery Plan and the emerging thematic Cabinet workshops.

Officer Group (including partners):

Chris Ward
Sue Moore
Ramsey Richards
EHE Teachers

Links to Corporate Plan and Vision 2030:

Scoping undertaken by:

EHE Working Group

Council Chief Officer (or partner equivalent):

Lesley Hagger / Chris Ward

Existing data available for consideration:

Report and presentation to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board 20 July 2020.

Potential witnesses

Home schooling community representative
Parents
Young people
Head Teachers representative
DfE representative

Activities

Desk top research
Survey
Focus group(s)
Meetings