

Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 24 November 2022

10:00

Oak Room, County Buildings, Stafford

The meeting will be webcast live which can be viewed at any time here:

<https://staffordshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

Note: There is an informal work programme planning session for Members at the conclusion of this meeting.

John Tradewell
Director of Corporate Services
16 November 2022

A G E N D A

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interest**
3. **Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 24 October 2022** (Pages 1 - 6)
4. **Regional Permanency Partnership and pilot project outcomes** (Pages 7 - 44)
Report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
5. **Young Carers** (Pages 45 - 52)
Report of the O&S Sub-group
6. **Work Programme** (Pages 53 - 62)
7. **Exclusion of the Public**

The Chairman to move:-

“That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act

1972 indicated below".

Part Two

(All reports in this section are exempt)

nil

Membership

Gill Burnett (Vice-Chair (Overview))	Gillian Pardesi Kath Perry, MBE
Janet Eagland	Bob Spencer (Chair)
Richard Ford (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))	Mike Wilcox Conor Wileman
Derrick Huckfield	
Johnny McMahon	

Notes for Members of the Press and Public

Filming of Meetings

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Recording by Press and Public

Recording (including by the use of social media) by the Press and Public is permitted from the public seating area provided it does not, in the opinion of the chairman, disrupt the meeting.

Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 24 October 2022

Present: Bob Spencer (Chair)

Attendance	
Gill Burnett (Vice-Chair (Overview))	Johnny McMahon
Janet Eagland	Gillian Pardesi
Richard Ford (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))	Mike Wilcox
Derrick Huckfield	Conor Wileman

Also in attendance: Victoria Wilson

Apologies: Kath Perry, MBE

PART ONE

28. Declarations of Interest

Name of Member	Nature of Association	Minute No
Bob Spencer	Personal interest, having a masters degree from Cambridge University Criminology Department and being a member of their evidence based Policing Committee.	30
Bob Spencer	Personal interest as a past member of the Police Counter Terrorism Unit serving across four forces, including Staffordshire, with responsibility for delivery of the Prevent Strategy	31

29. Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview & Scrutiny meeting of 1 September 2022

Resolved: That the minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 1 September 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

30. Report on Action to Prevent Future Deaths Following the Inquests Arising from the Deaths in the Fishmongers' Hall Terror Attack

The Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested detail on the Prevention of Future Deaths Report prepared by the Chief Coroner following the Fishmonger's Hall terror attack on 29 November 2019. Whilst the terror attack had taken place in London, the attacker had been a resident of Stafford at that time. Originally he was from Stoke-on-Trent and had been released from prison in 2018 on licence after serving a sentence for terrorist offences and was wearing an electronic tag. The Committee wanted to consider whether relevant lessons had been learnt and actions taken by appropriate agencies to prevent future similar events occurring.

The Fishmonger Hall event had been a conference to celebrate the fifth anniversary of Learning Together, a programme run by the Cambridge Institute of Criminology, to help offenders reintegrate into society following release from prison. Although the attacker had been banned from entering London under the terms of his release, he had been granted a one-day exemption to attend the event. The inquest held into the deaths of his victims had concluded that he had been insufficiently monitored, identifying contributing factors as an unreasonable belief in his rehabilitation, a lack of information sharing between agencies and inadequate security planning at the event.

The Coroner addressed his report to ten organisations that were required to provide a response to the matters of concern he had identified. Staffordshire County Council was not one of the listed organisations, however Staffordshire Police, West Midlands Police and the Probation Service were. These organisations responded to the Coroner in January 2022.

The Coroner's Report had made twenty-five recommendations regarding the matters of concern. Recommendations that had an impact on Staffordshire were around:

- a) the risk assessment process
- b) clarity over agency leadership
- c) prison actions to manage radicalisation
- d) procedural issues
- e) communications

The Scrutiny Committee considered details of changes made as a result of the Coroner's recommendations within the Probation Service, the West Midlands Counter Terrorism Unit (WMCTU) and Staffordshire Police.

Some concerns were shared that the attacker's name and heritage had been identified within the report. This detail had been reported at the time of the incident and was in the public domain on the Home Office website. However, having discussed in detail these concerns, and acknowledging that there is threat from any form of extremism, it was

agreed that the words 'Pakistani descent' would be removed from the report in future.

Members were aware there had been ten organisations found collectively responsible, with 25 recommendations made. They received detail of improvements made around these recommendations, including data sharing; changes to counter terrorism policing with clearer lines of responsibility; clearer links into the local Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA); and extensive changes to the Probation Service.

Embedding change took time and Members sought reassurance that the disruption that change can bring would not in itself create risks. Many of the changes had already been made and were working well, with assurances through Contest (the counter terrorism strategy) that these have been managed well.

Members were aware that the Local Authority (LA) had a degree of scrutiny on the work of the Commissioner through the Police, Fire and Crime Panel. They asked what level of scrutiny the LA had on the Probation Service. The Probation Service was an integral partner on the Safer and Stronger Communities Strategy Group which was chaired by the Cabinet Member for Culture and Communities and for which the Chairman and Vice Chairmen received a briefing.

Resolved: That:

- a) whilst the contents of an agenda pack cannot be changed retrospectively after the meeting has taken place, the nationality of the attacker will be removed from future reports, and
- b) the changes made in response to the Coroner's recommendations be welcomed.

31. Prevent Activity

The Prevent duty is part of the Government's overall counter-terrorism strategy known as CONTEST. The duty was introduced into law as part of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. It placed a duty on specified authorities to have due regard to prevent people being drawn into terrorism. The Prevent Duty is a statutory requirement for Staffordshire County Council.

The County Council has a co-ordinating role, with the implementation of Prevent overseen by a multi-agency Prevent Board chaired by the County Commissioner for Regulatory Services and Community Safety. The Board sits quarterly, receiving input and guidance from the Home Office Regional Advisor for Prevent, who acts as a critical friend to the Board. Members received details of the Prevent Board reporting mechanisms into the Staffordshire Contest Board, which oversaw all counter-terrorism

activity strands, as well as the Staffordshire Safer and Stronger Communities Strategy Group.

The Committee heard that priorities for the Prevent Board were informed by the annual Counter Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP), with a delivery plan setting out how partners were working together to meet the requirements of the Prevent Duty, responding to, and managing risk. They also considered the work within schools to safeguard children and young people, with schools being an integral part of the work of the Channel Panel, a multi-agency approach which identified and provided support to individuals who were at risk of being drawn into terrorism. They also considered types of training for schools.

Some concern was expressed around alienation of young people and the possibility of stigmatising individuals.

Members had particular concern over the potential danger posed by the internet, particularly outside of education setting where access may be unregulated. In particular an initiative called Common Sense Media was shared, suggesting that this should be considered for use in schools to support safer use of internet and social media. Members also heard that pre-Covid Staffordshire Libraries had a learning opportunity that supported parents in understanding how to keep their children safe on-line. Officers agreed to check whether this initiative was still available.

Resolved: That the LA's role as part of Prevent be noted.

32. Work Programme

Members noted the items scheduled for their next meeting on 24 November 2022. They asked if a summary of the Safeguarding Children's Board Annual report could be made available. It was also noted that Members had previously raised concerns around Family Improvement Board's being cancelled, particularly in East Staffs, due to vacancies. They asked that a report be brought to the November meeting addressing these concerns.

The work with Young Carers was now complete and a report on this work would be included on the November agenda.

Resolved: That the proposed additions to the agenda for 24 November be agreed.

Chairman

Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Thursday 24 November 2022

Regional Permanency Partnership and Pilot Project Outcomes

Recommendation

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Consider the information within this update report

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of Cllr Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Summary

What is the Overview and Scrutiny Committee being asked to do and why?

In July 2021 Overview and Scrutiny committee members were briefed on the new arrangements for the delivery of the Regional Adoption Agency for Staffordshire County council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.

The following report provides an update about the progress of the regional Together4Children Permanency Partnership which was launched at the end September 2020. This report draws on key headlines from the Together4Children Annual Report 2021-2022 (appendix 1) to demonstrate the outcomes of the regional arrangement over the first full annual reporting cycle.

Report

Background

1. Development activity for the Together4Children Partnership commenced in 2018 in response to the Government's 'Regionalising Adoption' agenda. This brought together 4 Partner Council's, to plan the delivery of adoption services regionally.

2. Through the development phase, we created a vision which goes beyond the delivery of Adoption Services and focuses on a broader range of activities to ensure that children entering care achieve permanency. We are working together to improve outcomes for those children who enter care and are not able to return to their birth parents.
3. Are aims are:
 - a. Make best use of our collective resources to recruit, assess and support prospective adopters across the region.
 - b. Improve the quality and speed of matching for children through better planning and by having a wider choice of adopters.
 - c. Provide high quality support to children and their families delivered through a combination of direct provision and effective partnerships.
 - d. Provide all children and their families the right support at the right time through a consistent permanency support offer across the region.

Together4Children Partnership Adoption Agency Functions, Governance, and Operational Structure

4. Whilst Together4Children has broader ambitions, the first key deliverables have been focused on our Adoption Service via a hub and spoke model – a combination of core central functions and networked regional delivery (via a Central Permanency Hub).
5. Partner Councils retain direct service delivery functions within Locality Permanence Hubs, working within the Together4Children practice framework whilst maintaining clear links to local Children & Families Services.
6. The Partnership is governed via Regional Management Board Chaired by the Executive Director of Children’s Services for Telford & Wrekin Council. Each partner council is represented on the Board by the Assistant Director (or equivalent) with responsibility for Children in Care.
7. Senior Operational leadership is provided through the Together4Children Senior Leadership Team, which is comprised of the Head of T4C, the Principal Manager for the Central Permanency Hub and the Head of Service (or equivalent) with responsibility for Adoption in each partner council.

Together4Children Partnership Legal and Financial Arrangements

8. Together4Children is underpinned by a comprehensive partnership agreement. The initial agreement was in place to the end of March 2022. Following a detailed review of arrangements, and in line with delegated

decision-making functions, the extension of the partnership arrangement has been agreed to March 2025.

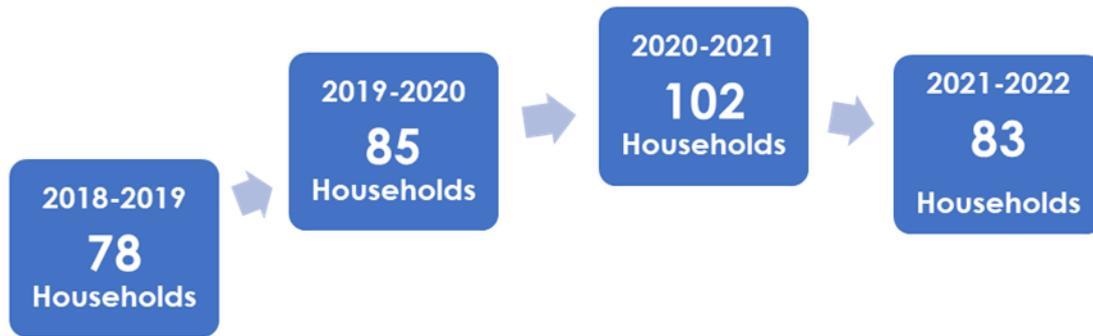
9. Regional financial arrangements were originally agreed across the 4 partner Council's Cabinets in November and December 2019. The Partnership's financial formula which was reviewed and amended in April 2022 ensures that each partner Council contributes a proportionate level of resource in line with the level of demand generated to meet the needs of children within their localities.
10. Within the governance arrangements risks (cost pressures/ overspends) are managed collectively (through a Regional Finance Board and the T4C Regional Manage Board) for centrally delivered functions, and locally for provisions that are delivered through each of our locality hubs.
11. In the financial year 2021-2022 the partnership's Central functions were delivered within budget, as were Staffordshire's locality-based functions.

Together4Children Activity & Performance 2021-2022

12. The recruitment of potential adopters for our children has been supported by strong and effective marketing activity. This has included:
 - a. Successful launch and maintenance of social media channels.
 - b. [Together4Children](#) website.
 - c. Development of downloadable digital Information Event and Microsoft Teams based Information Events.
 - d. Delivery of marketing campaigns focusing on finding adopters for children in sibling groups and other priority children.
13. This has led to strong performance in relation to enquiries and referrals through to our 3 assessment teams - 720 Enquiries for people considering adopting a child leading to 140 referrals through to our assessment teams.

Assessment & Approval of Adopters

14. Together4Children partners have been working collaboratively since 2018 to increase the number of adopter households able to provide permanent homes for children in our region. This has resulted in an overall rise in the number of families we have assessed and approved as prospective adopters over this period. This represents a positive outcome, meaning that we have been able to find more homes for children within our regional 'pool' of adopters.



15. In turn, this supports positive transitions for children and means that we can better support children and their families as they move through their adoption journeys. It also means that we avoid the costs involved in using adopters approved by other agencies and maintaining support to children and families who live at a distance.
16. On average it takes 260 days to complete our Prospective Adopter Reports (the statutory assessment that underpins the agency's decision about the suitability of people to become adopters), against an England average of 266 days.
17. We provide comprehensive training and support to those who are embarking on their adoption journeys. We deliver this support and training on a region-wide basis.
18. The feedback on our preparation training from Prospective and Approved Adopters is 99% positive.

"A very informative and useful training day helping us to reassure ourselves about our decision to adopt siblings, it has been a boost to our confidence." "

"Excellent session, the trainers were knowledgeable and passionate about Early Permanence."

Activity and Outcomes for Children

19. Like other parts of the Children's Services system, activity and outcomes for children with a plan of adoption was impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic and we are still seeing these impacts for the cohort of children within the 2021-2022 reporting period.
20. The overall number of Placement Orders (the Courts' permission to seek an adoptive placement for a child) dipped in 2020-2021 (108) but recovered during 2021-2022 (121). Correspondingly, the number of children placed for adoption has been slightly lower than the average

over the past 5 years at 101 children placed in 2020-2021 and 99 children placed in 2021-2022.

21. We know that the number of children needing an adoptive home across the region is rising in the current year and we are expecting to place approximately 120 children with adoptive families by the end of March 2023.

Finding Homes for Our Children within Our Region

22. One of the fundamental aims of Together4Children is to ensure that, where we can, we find homes for our children within our region. This supports good transitions which we know are a critical part of the adoption journey for children and adoptive parents; and helps us to support children and their families into the future.
23. During 2021-2022 93% of the children we placed for adoption went to live with a family that had been assessed and approved within the Together4Children region.
24. However, where no families are identified who can meet the particular needs of a child or children within our region, we work as fast as we can to look to other agencies across the Midlands and nationwide to ensure that we explore every possibility for finding the right families for our children.

Achieving Permanence for Children in a Timely Way

25. We know how important it is for children's outcomes to secure children's permanency through adoption in a timely way.
26. 2 Key National Performance Indicators relate to timeliness for children. Staffordshire's performance continues to be better than the England national average against both indicators.
- a. **A10:** The time it takes from a child entering care to moving into their adoptive families (measured in days)

A10 Indicator – 3-year Average	2018-2021	2019-2022
England Average	438	445
Together4Children	-	471
Staffordshire	352	352

- b. **A2:** The time from Court authority to place a child for adoption (Placement Order) to the formal match with prospective adopters (measured in days)

A2 Indicator – 3-year Average	2018-2021	2019-2022
England Average	196	196
Together4Children	-	216
Staffordshire	137	166

Children Adopted in 2021-2022

27. 104 Adoption Orders were granted for children across our region (28 children placed by Staffordshire County Council), securing their legal permanence within their new families. Of the children who were adopted:

- a. 12 children were aged over 5 years
- b. 34 children achieved permanency alongside one or more of their brothers and sisters
- c. 13 children came from ethnic backgrounds other than 'white British'
- d. 4 children placed for adoption had a disability.

28. These children represent our 'priority children' as we know that it is more challenging for us to find the right families for children with these characteristics. This mirrors the national evidence about those children who wait the longest before moving into their adopted home.

Together4Children Regional Adoption Support Delivery

29. Over the past 2 years, Together4Children have been partners in delivering Adoption UK's innovative 'TESSA' support program for adoptive families.

30. We have worked together to review and revise the intervention and make it available as part of the support offer available to our families earlier in their journeys. The TESSA support offer includes:

- a. Clinical Psychologist-led assessment and support plans, family support, and core training.
- b. Innovative group therapy, counselling, coaching, and mentoring, enhanced training, school consultation.
- c. Support in accessing statutory and voluntary provision, specialist and medical support and community groups.

d. Since TESSA went live in October 2020 50 families across the Together4Children region have received support through this provision.

31. Our 3 locality Permanency Support Teams based in Shrewsbury, Stoke and Uttoxeter have undertaken:

- a. 356 support assessments and reviews
- b. 569 applications to the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Fund for the specialist therapeutic interventions required to meet needs identified for adopted children through our assessments
- c. 2700 'Post Box' exchanges, facilitating, and supporting the exchange
- d. of information between birth families and adoptive parents.

32. Feedback from families who accessed our Adoption Support Services during 2021-2022 was overwhelmingly positive with over 90% of those providing feedback rating the timeliness and effectiveness of the service as good or outstanding.

"T' is a brilliant, warm, kind, informative social worker. She...has made a huge difference to the lives of our children"

Key Development Priorities 2022-2023

33. We are working to continually improve our service delivery and performance. We have set out the following key development priorities for the current year:

- a. Support Family Finding activity to reduce delay for children who wait the longest
- b. Develop Early Permanence practice and increase the number of children regionally who benefit from EP placements.
- c. Improve the quality of Life Story Work and Life Story Books
- d. Develop practice around moving children to adoption based on best evidence
- e. Further develop in-house delivery of Therapeutic Interventions for Children
- f. Improve on-going support for birth parents and birth families to help to maintain and develop keeping in touch arrangements where appropriate

Conclusion

34. Since going live, we have seen more of our children moving into their new families with adopters from within the T4C region with over 80% of

all children placed for adoption finding homes with families approved by our regional teams.

35. This outcome has evidenced the delivery of our core aim, to ensure that we find the right homes for children within our region where possible, so that we can continue to support those children and their families through the adoption journey.
36. By combining our resources we have also achieved significant improvements in the range of adoption support provision we have been able to offer across the whole region, including workshops with expert speakers, therapeutic parenting courses, peer group support and social events for our adopter community.
37. We are also very proud to be the first ever Local Authority Partnership to jointly launch the [Mockingbird](#) Fostering Model by working together across our four fostering services.
38. Over 2 years we have successfully delivered this innovative fostering model across 3 regional pilot sites, with the fourth and final pilot to go live in November 2022.

Link to Strategic Plan

39. Priority 5 - Offer every Staffordshire child and young person the best start in life, and the chance to achieve their potential.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

40. The Together4Children Annual Adoption Report 2021-2022 was presented to Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel on 18 October 2022

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Together4Children Annual Adoption Report 2021-2022

Contact Details

Assistant Director: Nisha Gupta, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care
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Together4Children Permanency Partnership

Adoption Agency Annual Report 2021-2022

Together4Children Partnership Model

Together4Children is a partnership between Shropshire Council, Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Telford & Wrekin Council. We are working together to improve outcomes for those children who enter care and are not able to return to their birth parents.

Our Vision is to ensure that our children achieve emotional, physical, and legal permanence; growing up in loving homes with adults who provide them with a strong sense of security, continuity, commitment, and identity.

We aim to:

- Make best use of our collective resources to recruit, assess and support prospective adopters across the region.
- Improve the quality and speed of matching for children through better planning and by having a wider choice of adopters.
- Provide high quality support to children and their families delivered through a combination of direct provision and effective partnerships.
- Provide all children and their families the right support at the right time through a consistent permanency support offer across the region.

Preface

This is the Second Annual Adoption Report produced by Together4Children since the partnership went live on 28 September 2020. It is the first report that covers the activity and performance of the Partnership over a full year cycle.

This report is produced in accordance with the adoption services regulatory requirements and Adoption National Minimum Standards (2014), which state that the executive side of the local authority shall:

- receive written reports on the management, outcomes, and financial state of the agency every six months
- monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the agency 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.

Introduction

National Context

Whilst representing a small part of the total children's social work sector, adoption continues to have a high profile politically. The programme of regionalisation which commenced in 2016 is all but complete, with 32 Regional Adoption Agencies covering virtually all Local Authorities in England.

The government launched their [Adoption Strategy: Achieving Excellence Everywhere](#) in June 2021, setting out its vision to further improve the adoption system across England with the provision of sector-led support to create national models of best-practice.

The National RAA Leaders group are working to deliver against key areas of the strategy in line with the 3 key priority areas identified in their plan for 2021-2023:

1. Adoption Recruitment
2. The Child's Journey
3. Adoption Support

Together4Children are represented at national level on the Child's Journey by our Head of Service who co-chairs this workstream and is also a member of the RAA leader's governance group.

Over the year, Together4Children and Adoption@Heart led activity bringing Agency Decision-Makers for children's plans of adoption (SHOBPA) together across the West Midlands. The workshop, which was supported by CoramBaaf has been developed further and is now being rolled out nationally.

Together4Children have recently led a bid to secure funding to work pan-regionally to develop best practice in relation to Early Permanence for children who may have a plan of adoption. The project will be delivered in 2022-23 across a collaboration of midlands-based Regional and Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

One of our Senior Practitioners has recently been appointed to a key national role, leading the work on matching. This will bring together best national practice and support the development of the information we hold about children who are waiting across England to support family finding for some of the children who would otherwise wait the longest.

Adoption UK published their annual [Adoption Barometer](#) report, in June 2021. This set out 6 key recommendations which focused predominantly on improving the quality of adoption support, with a specific focus on improving knowledge and expertise in relation to foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and attachment disorder.

The recently published [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#), along with the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory's [report](#), challenge modern adoption services to ensuring that adopted children maintain appropriate and meaningful links with their birth families.

Along with the sector-led improvements being driven pan-regionally and nationally through the Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) Leader's Group, the pace of change, and expectation in relation to modernisation and improvement across the adoption system remains very high.

In November 2021, a [ruling](#) in the Family Court against Somerset Council called into question whether local authorities routinely follow the correct procedure for agreeing to the plan of adoption. The ruling has become known as the 'Somerset Judgement'. The focus of the ruling was highly technical and related to medical information provided by the adoption agency medical advisor. The ruling had a significant impact on children at various stages of the adoption process, until the President of the Family Division issued guidance in April 2022.

Regional Context

Children's services across our region continued to experience the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic throughout 2021-2022. For Together4Children, that meant continuing to deliver a proportion of our services via remote means. As the year progressed, we have adapted to the 'new normal' of hybrid working. We have been carefully evaluating the effectiveness of remote vs in-person delivery across the range of different functions and services that we deliver.

Positively, our direct work with prospective adopters and children has been able to return to pre-pandemic practice – with all managers and practitioners recognising the vital importance of time spent face-to-face with the people we provide our services to.

At the current time, we are moving towards more in-person meetings across our workforce, whilst remaining flexible and recognising the positives that the new ways of working that developed over the Covid 19 period, have given us.

The Local Authority Partnership that delivers Together4Children has matured significantly over the past 12 months. Governance arrangements have been audited and given a reasonable level of assurance. Action has been taken to strengthen arrangements where required.

On the ground, practitioners, business support staff and managers have worked incredibly hard to deliver a good service. We have worked together to understand and address many of the issues that have presented themselves during our first 18 months of regional operations, reviewing practice, policy, and procedures to support effective service delivery.

We know that there are challenges remaining, and that building a regional adoption service that delivers consistently good outcomes across a large geographical area will take time. In March 2022 we undertook a significant review of the partnership arrangements. This identified the progress and achievements over the past 18 months, but also set out the challenges and recommended actions required to further develop the quality, consistency and scope of regional adoption and permanency services delivered through the Together4Children Partnership.

We know how important it is to secure children's permanency through adoption in a timely way. During 2021-2022 further delays across the children's system, including delays with our regional Courts and capacity pressures within our services, have continued to create challenges in achieving permanence for some children within the timescales that we would want for them.

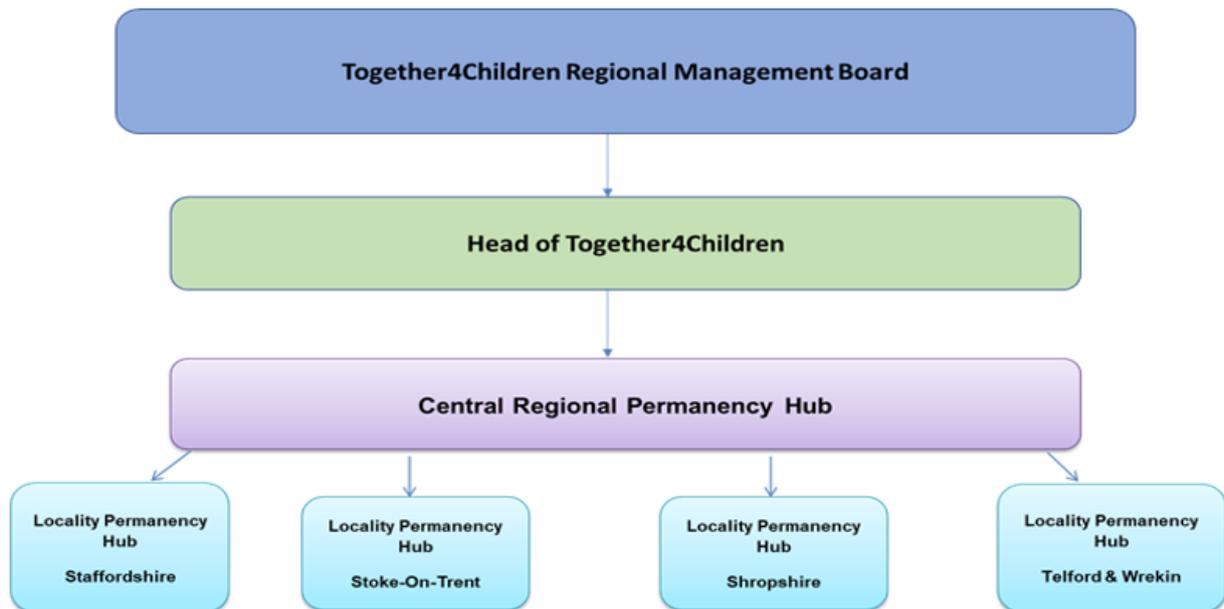
Furthermore, two Local Authorities in our region were impacted by the Somerset judgement, which created significant delays for some children in the latter part of the year. We are working hard to ensure that we can progress the plans for these children as quickly as we can.

Part 1 – Together4Children Partnership Adoption Agency Functions

Together4Children delivers the adoption service for our partner Council's via a hub and spoke model – a combination of core central functions and networked regional delivery (via a Central Permanency Hub).

Partner Council's retain direct service delivery functions within Locality Permanence Hubs, working within the Together4Children practice framework whilst maintaining clear links to local Children & Families Services.

1.1 Partnership Governance and Operational Structure



The Partnership is governed via Regional Management Board Chaired by the Director of Children's Services for Shropshire Council. Each partner council is represented on the Board by the Assistant Director (or equivalent) with responsibility for Children in Care.

Senior operational leadership is provided through the Together4Children Senior Leadership Team, which is comprised of the Head of T4C, the Principal Manager for the Central Permanency Hub and the Head of Service (or equivalent) with responsibility for Adoption in each partner council.

Further operational leadership and management is provided through the Wider Leadership Team which comprises of managers across the central and locality hub functions.

Central Permanency Hub Functions

The Central Permanency Hub has a small team of staff who provide functions and undertake activity for the whole region. The core central functions are:

- Central co-ordination of functions across the Partnership
- Adopter Recruitment
- Regional Family Finding
- Adopter Training
- Children's (Permanency) Tracking
- Adoption Panel Advice and Management
- Adoption Panel Coordination
- Agency advice and support to Agency Decision Makers

Locality Permanency Hub Functions

There are 3 Locality Hubs across the region. These are based in Stoke (City of Stoke-on-Trent), Uttoxeter (Staffordshire) and Shrewsbury (Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin).

Each Locality Hub has:

- 1 x Assessment & Support Team - undertaking adopter assessments and supporting prospective adopters through to the granting of an Adoption Order.
- 1 x Permanency Support Team – supporting adopted children and their families through a variety of activities.

Staff within these Hubs support children's social work teams in relation to permanence planning and adoption providing in-reach advice and support.

1.2 Marketing & Recruitment

Together4Children have operated a single 'front door' for adopter recruitment since September 2020. Bringing together our region's marketing activity has provided the resource to engage with potential adopters creatively, using a rich mixture of information sources. With a focus on digital marketing and recruitment, we have been able to target resources more effectively, and ensure that our messaging is current and adapted to the needs of children who require an adoptive family.



Digital media supports our telephone enquiry line - **0300 111 80444**, where potential applicants can talk to friendly and knowledgeable call takers about next steps.

Our recruitment is driven by a strong marketing and communications strategy and campaigns running across the year to target a diverse range of potential adopters, able to meet the diverse needs of our children.

1.3 Enquiries & Referrals

During the year we received 720 initial enquiries that led to either a telephone discussion and/or sharing information. This is an 18% increase on the previous 6 months of activity following our launch in September 2020 un to the end of the reporting year in March 2021.

Of these initial enquiries, a total of 232 people attended one of our Regional Information Events, where they were able to find out more about adopting a child, hear from people with experience of adoption, and talk to experienced adoption practitioners.

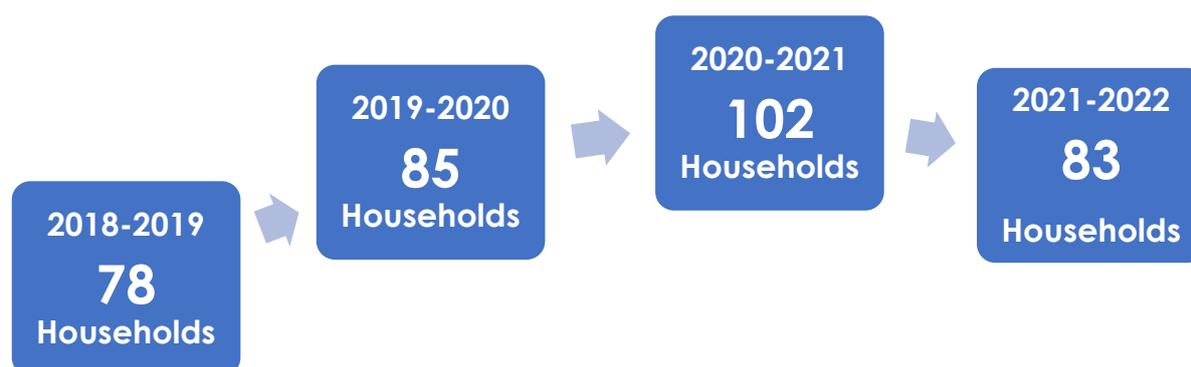
This led to 140 referrals to our Locality Hub assessment teams over the course of the year (including second-time adopters). Whilst a small proportion of those households referred through will choose not to progress following an in-depth 'information-giving meeting' with a Social Worker, the majority proceeded through to begin their adopter assessments.



1.4 Assessment and Approval of Adopters

Together4Children partners have been working collaboratively since 2018 to increase the number of adopter households able to provide permanent homes for children in our region. During this we increased the number of adopters approved from 78 in 2018-19 to 102 in 2020-21.

This year the number of approvals has fallen back to 83 households. The main reason for this is that, having commenced assessment, higher numbers of prospective adopters have chosen not to continue the process or, in a small number of cases, have not been approved. It is important to recognise that not everyone who applies and is assessed will always be found to be suitable and this reflects the strength/skills of our assessing social workers and the scrutiny of our panels in ensuring that our prospective adopters are in a position to provide permanency for our children.



It would also appear that uncertainties around employment and general instability in people's lives is becoming more of a factor in their decision-making. We are considering the learning from this year to better understand the factors that create a barrier for people continuing their adoption journeys. This is feeding back into the

conversations we have with potential adopters early in the information-giving stages of the journey.

Despite this dip in numbers of adopter household approvals this year, overall activity remains positive. Taken together, the last 2 years of strong adopter recruitment and approval activity have led to the highest proportion of children being able to move into families who have been assessed and approved by the Together4Children partnership (see section 2.1). This supports positive transitions for children and means that we can better support children and their families as they move through their adoption journeys. It also means that we avoid the costs involved in using adopters approved by other agencies.

Completing Stage 1 (gathering statutory information) of our adopter assessments within the 60-day target has remained a challenge over the year. We have only been able to achieve this for 24% of the households who we assessed. External factors such as the time it has taken for people applying to become adopters to have a medical (usually provided by their own GP) and getting safeguarding checks back from other Local Authorities outside of the T4C region continues to impact on these timescales.

31 Households
currently in Stage 2 of
assessment

However, once we have been able to gather the required information, stage 2 of the process, which involves the social work assessment, completion of the Prospective Adopter Report and presentation to Adoption Panel is completed on average in 139 days. Overall, our timescales for the assessment of our prospective adopter households are below the average for England (Provisional Q4 ASGLB Data Pack – June 2022).

Average Timescales for Completion of Prospective Adopter Assessments 2021-2022

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Overall
Target	60 days	121 days	182 days
Together4Children	121	139	260
England (RAAs)	121	146	266

1.5 Non-Agency Adoption

Together4Children provide the non-agency adoption provision for our partner local authorities. This work includes all those categories of adoption where the adoption agency and the adoption panel do not play a part in the placement of the child for adoption. These are:

- Partner adoptions (formally known as stepparent adoption)
- Anyone who has had care of the child (for any 3-year period in the past 5 years)
- Local authority foster carer(s) proceeding without the support of social care after a child has been living in their care for over 1 year.

All non-agency adoptions have similar characteristics and there is a basic format comprising referral, consultation, provision of written information, assessment, and preparation of the Annex A report for court.

Maintaining this activity within the adoption provision of the Partnership ensures that the expertise, knowledge, and experience required to undertake this specialist work under the adoption regulations is maintained.

The table below shows the level of non-agency adoption activity across the region. For 2021-2022, Together4Children received 134 referrals for non-agency adoption provisions and undertook 64 assessments. At 31/03/2022 the service had 35 assessments on-going and a further 56 assessments awaiting allocation. This statutory activity is managed alongside our adopter assessment activity, and our primary responsibilities in relation to the adoption of children from care.

Non-agency Adoption Activity 2021-2022				
	Staffs Hub	Joint Hub	Stoke Hub	T4C
Referrals received	36	69	29	134
A16's (Notification of Intent) sent out	30	62	8	100
A16's returned	23	36	6	65
Non-agency Assessments completed	27	37	0	64
Ongoing assessments @ 31/03/2022	20	10	5	35
Waiting for assessment @ 31/03/2022	8	21	27	56

1.6 Adopter Training Activity

Together4Children have delivered Regional Adopter Preparation & Training since January 2021 through our dedicated Regional Training Officers, who are supported by practitioners from across our locality teams.

During the year we have continued to develop and extended our preparation and training offer to focus on key areas. We deliver 'core' preparation training over 3 days. This enables participants to learn about the adoption journey, understand about the children we need to find families for, and learn about the support that they can access. We deliver our training using a blended face-to-face and virtual approach, ensuring that groups of prospective adopters meet and begin to form mutually supportive relationships, whilst ensuring people can access training and information in more flexible ways.

The feedback on our preparation training from Prospective and Approved Adopters is 99% positive.

"We felt it was very helpful to hear from adopters who have already been through the process"

We have strengthened the training that we offer prospective adopters considering offering a child early permanence. We have also developed our offer to support prospective adopters to consider adopting brother and sisters together. There is an expectation that most prospective adopters attend both courses to ensure that they

have considered fully different routes to adoption and the importance of maintaining sibling relationships for adopted children.

“A very informative and useful training day helping us to reassure ourselves about our decision to adopt siblings, it has been a boost to our confidence.”

Over the year we delivered 16 Adopter Preparation training courses each consisting of core content, adoption support, brothers and sisters and early permanence, with 83 prospective adopter households attending.

“Excellent session, the trainers were knowledgeable and passionate about Early Permanence.”

“We didn’t think that this would be right for us but after attending the training we have changed our minds and wish to go down the Early Permanence route.”

During the same period, we delivered 23 workshops for family and friends of prospective adopters. These are held virtually to allow as many people as possible who are in the prospective adopter’s support network to attend. Approximately 230 family members and friends attended these workshops.

“My awareness was raised about the many difficulties the child may have experienced before they are adopted.”

In addition to our core training offer, we provide a broad range of additional training for our adoption community throughout the year. During 2021-2022 we have grown this offer, delivering training and workshops to over **200 households**. We use a mix of specialist trainers and therapists, experts by experience and our own specialist and accredited practitioners to deliver our training offer. Over the year this has included:

- Caring for Yourself – self-care for adoptive parents
- Understanding Your Child – a group-based introduction to parenting children who may have experienced trauma
- Two Hands – a more in-depth group-based course to grow adoptive parents knowledge and application of therapeutic parenting approaches
- Non-Violent Resistance – accredited, evidence-based approach to responding to child to parent aggression
- Talking to Children about Adoption – helping adoptive parents to talk to their children about their adoption journey
- The Teenage Brain – support and advice for adoptive parents of teenagers.
- Internet Safety – support and advice for parents navigating the internet and social media to keep their children safe
- Moving Children on to Adoption – preparation for supporting children through their move to a new home
- When the Senses Don’t Make Sense – an introduction to supporting children with underdeveloped sensory systems

Section 2: Activity & Outcomes for Children in 2020-2021

2. Children in Care and Regional Adoption Activity

Between 2021 and 2022 the total number of children in care in our region increased by a further 6%. This follows the overall pattern of an increasing children in care population over the last 3 years across the region.

	Total CIC @ 31/03/2021	Total CIC @ 31/03/2022	% +/- Last 12 Months
Shrops	504	608	+21%
Staffs	1242	1303	+5%
Stoke	1004	1021	+2%
T&W	425	423	-1%
Total	3175	3355	+6%

Whilst the number of children adopted from care continues to fall nationally (from a peak of 5,360 children in 2015 to just 2,870 children in 2021), the number of children adopted in the T4C region has remained relatively stable over the past 5 years, averaging a little over 100 children each year.

Overall adoption activity has remained relatively consistent over the past 2 years. However, there have been some significant shifts in levels of activity between the 4 partners. Across the region, the number of children aged 0-5 years has continued to increase. Children in this age range are the most likely to have a plan of adoption.

	Total CIC Aged 0-5 @ 31/03/2021	Total CIC Aged 0-5 @ 31/03/2022	% +/- over 12 months
Shrops	158	197	+25%
Staffs	283	318	+12%
Stoke	284	277	-2%
T&W	129	121	-7%
Total	854	913	+7%

Both Shropshire and Staffordshire have seen increases in younger children in care, whilst Stoke-on-Trent and Telford & Wrekin have both experienced a relatively small decrease in numbers.

Through this, we can see that changes in children in care populations have impacted on activity levels across the partnership and between partners. Whilst most RAAs nationally have developed and launched with reducing levels of activity, Together4Children have seen no such decline, and in certain parts of the region activity levels have increased, with significant spikes in demand on our services being a feature of the past 18-months.

	T4C Region	% +/- 2021-22
ADM Plan of Adoption	158	+20%
Placement Orders	121	+12%
Children Placed	99	- 2%
Adoption Orders	104	+ 1%

The table below shows key adoption activity across the partner councils over the past 2-year reporting periods.

	2020-2021			2021-2022		
	ADM Plan of Adoption	Placement Orders	Children Placed	ADM Plan of Adoption	Placement Orders	Children Placed
Shropshire	26	15	13	28	21	20
Staffordshire	41	33	31	43	34	26
Stoke-on-Trent	34	26	29	58	42	26
Telford & Wrekin	32	34	28	26	24	27
Total	132	108	101	158	121	99

Levels of activity have increased during 2021-2022 across the whole region. Overall, more plans of adoption were agreed for children and the number of Placement Orders granted by Courts increased. The slight drop in the number of children placed for adoption over the year was caused by the delay resulting from the Somerset Judgement, meaning that we were unable to progress matching and transition arrangements for several children during the final quarter of the year. We estimate that approximately 10-15 children were delayed in moving to their adoptive homes before the end of the reporting year.

The number of Adoption Orders granted in the region remained consistent with the previous year (104 against 103 granted in 2020-2021, although this number is also likely to have been depressed by the impact of the Somerset Judgement (as Adoption Order Applications were stalled for approximately 2 months whilst Local authorities waited for the President of the Family Division's ruling on the matter).

2.1 Where we Found Homes for our Children in 2020-2021

One of the main aims of Together4Children is to ensure that, where we can, we find homes for our children within our region. This supports good transitions which we know are a critical part of the adoption journey for children and adoptive parents; and helps us to support children and their families into the future, without the need to transfer support arrangements at the statutory 3-year point, post Adoption Order.

93% of the children we placed for adoption during the year were placed with adoptive families from our region.

Where no families are identified who can meet the needs of children within our region, we will always look quickly to other agencies across the Midlands and nationwide to ensure that we explore every possibility of finding the right families for our children in a timely way.

The table below shows where the adoptive families came from for those children who moved into their new homes in 2020-2021.

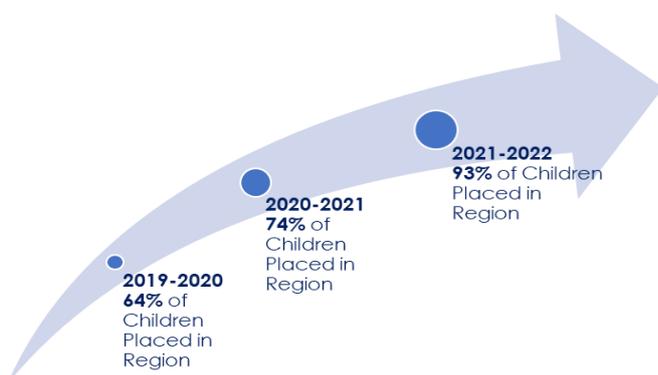
Children Placed With:	Shrops	Staffs	Stoke	T&W	Total
Own LA/T4C Adopters*	20	23	25	24	92
Other RAA/LA Adopters**	-	2	1	-	3
VAA***	-	1	-	3	4
					99
% Children Placed In-Region	100%	88%	96%	87%	93%

* Adopters approved by one of the Local Authorities within the T4C Partnership.

** Adopters approved by another Local Authority or Regional Adoption Agency.

*** Adopters approved by a Voluntary Adoption Agency

It is positive to see that we were able to identify families for over 90% of our children across the year. This builds on improvements over the last 3 years in terms of the number of children who we have been able to find an adoptive home for within our region. This increase in the use of our own region's adopters has accompanied a corresponding decrease in the use of inter-agency placements, and their associated costs, over the same period.



2.2 Early Permanence

The table below shows the number of children who were placed in 'Early Permanence' arrangements over the year.

This is usually where children are placed with approved adopters, where the Local Authority is confident that the likely outcome for the child is adoption, but before a Court has made that decision. Where the Court does decide that adoption is the right plan, the child can remain with those carers who then go on to adopt them.

	Shrops	Staffs	Stoke	T&W	Total
Children Placed	20	26	26	27	99
Early Permanence	7	3	16	5	31
% Children placed EP	35%	12%	62%	19%	31%

Early permanence means that children are placed earlier within their prospective families and that means that they experience fewer moves and changes of primary caregiver. Research evidence tells us that these are significant factors that are beneficial for children's long-term outcomes.

This practice does carry some risks for the prospective adopters, however. Occasionally children will return to their birth family, and early permanence carers need resilience and right support to help them to work with professionals to achieve the best outcome for the child.

Some of the arrangements recorded in the year resulted from the use of early permanence placements as a way of avoiding other delays (caused by, for example, the Somerset judgement). So, whilst the overall rise in the use of Early Permanence is positive (from 12% to 31% of all children placed), and does reflect real progress, the figures for this year also reflect the use of Early Permanence in some other instances to avoid delay for children.

The figure is also significantly higher than the England Average for Early Permanence placements which stands at 17% (ASGLB Q4 Data April 2021- March 2022). Although, for the reasons outlined above, this figure for the Together4Children region needs to be treated with an element of caution.

The table also shows a significant degree of variance in the use of Early Permanence arrangements across our Partners. In the current reporting year some of this variance will relate to the authorities who were directly impacted by the Somerset Judgement. However, the need to drive improvement in this area, and develop consistent practice across the region is evident. We are keen to make best use of the Pan-Regional Early Permanence funding in the current year to deliver this outcome.

	Early Permanence Placement Trend					
	2019-2020		2020-2021		2021-2022 Q1-Q3	
	Children	%	Children	%	Children	%
Shrops	0		1		7	
Staffs	3		0		3	
Stoke	4		5		16	
T&W	2		6		5	
Total	9	7%	12	12%	31	31%

2.3 Timescales for Achieving Permanency for Our Children

A10: This is a national performance indicator which measures the average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family, adjusted for foster carer adoptions.

It is reported as both an aggregated figure averaged over the preceding 3 years (to account for the fact that a child's journey to adoption will normally take longer than 1 year to achieve), and against the reporting year (for all those children whose Adoption Order was granted during the reporting period 2020-2021)

A10 Indicator – 3-year Average	2018-2021	2019-2022
Target	426 days	426 days
England Average	438	445
Together4Children	-	471
Shropshire	319	359
Staffordshire	352	352
Stoke-on-Trent	492	590
Telford & Wrekin	506	556

The most recent national measure we have for this timescale across local authorities in England is 445 days (provisional - ASGLB Q4 Data Set 3-year average Mar 2019 – Mar 2022). From the table below we can see that the overall A10 indicator for the Together4Children region is

above the target number of days (426) and national average (445) at 471 days.

Shropshire and Staffordshire continue to perform below the target for this indicator, meaning that children in these Local Authorities are placed more quickly than the target timescales (and the national average). The indicator for Stoke-on-Trent and Telford & Wrekin has declined. This reflects the increasing time it took for children from entry to care to move through the whole adoption process during 2020-2021.

By comparing year on year performance, we can see the general trend in terms of the average time it takes for a child to move in with their adoptive family.

We can see from the table below that 3 of the 4 Together4Children partner councils have seen an improvement in performance against this indicator during 2021-2022. This means that the time taken from entering care to moving into an adopted family has shortened for most children in the region compared to the previous year. We will continue to work with

partners across the region to ensure that we support practice improvements to reduce the overall time it takes for a child entering care to move in with their permanent family.

A10 Indicator 2-year Trend	2020-2021	2021-2022	Trend
Shropshire	423	406	↓
Staffordshire	372	319	↓
Stoke-on-Trent	510	665	↑
Telford & Wrekin	630	433	↓

It is important to note that performance against these indicators has declined nationally and this is attributed to Covid 19. It is also the case that the regional performance represented in these indicators will have been impacted by Covid 19 (as family finding activity for the children in this cohort would have been taking place between April 2020 and April 2021). For these children, there will have been a range of factors which have impacted on the time it has taken for them to move into their adopted families, including:

- Significant delay in Care Proceedings for children caused by capacity issues in the Family Courts.
- Delays in Care Planning for children created by, for example, extended timescale for specialist assessments due to lockdown restrictions.
- Delays in being able to place children in their new families due to restrictions and practice issues – especially during the initial national lockdown period.

A2: This is the second key national indicator and measures the average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child (Placement Order) and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family.

A2 Indicator – 3-year Average	2018-2021	2019-2022
Target	121 days	121 days
England Average	196	196
Together4Children	-	216
Shropshire	116	127
Staffordshire	137	166
Stoke-on-Trent	189	232
Telford & Wrekin	312	305

The most recent average timescale measure we have for local authorities in England is 196 days (ASGLB Q4 Data Set April 2019-March 2022). At 216 days, the overall timescales for the Together4Children region are longer than both the national target of 121 days and the England average of 196 days.

Again, it is reported as both an aggregated figure averaged over the preceding 3 years and for the 12 months of the current reporting period. This indicator is a measure of how quickly we can find the right families for children once the Court has given us authority to place for adoption. It reflects the capacity of services to 'family find' for children, and the sufficiency of adopters locally, regionally, and nationally.

A2 Indicator 2-year Trend	In Year 2020-21	In Year 2021-22	Trend
Shropshire	175	199	
Staffordshire	203	195	
Stoke-on-Trent	186	299	
Telford & Wrekin	407	233	

We know that some children wait longer than others because finding families who want to adopt older children, children in sibling groups, and children with additional needs is more difficult. It also takes longer to find families for children where there are considerations around ethnicity and faith.

Across the region we see a mixed picture in terms of this indicator. For 1 of our Local Authorities there has been a significant improvement in timeliness from a difficult position in the preceding year. One Local Authority's timescales have slipped from a strong position in the previous year and the other 2 Local Authorities have seen a relatively little change.

It is important to note that we are ambitious when it comes to finding permanent homes for our children, even when we know that it will be a challenge. This ambition for our children can also lead to drops in overall performance measures (where it has taken us longer to find a family that can meet a child's complex needs, for example). We know that 46% of the children that these timescales relate to had characteristics which evidence tells us will mean that they are likely to wait longer.

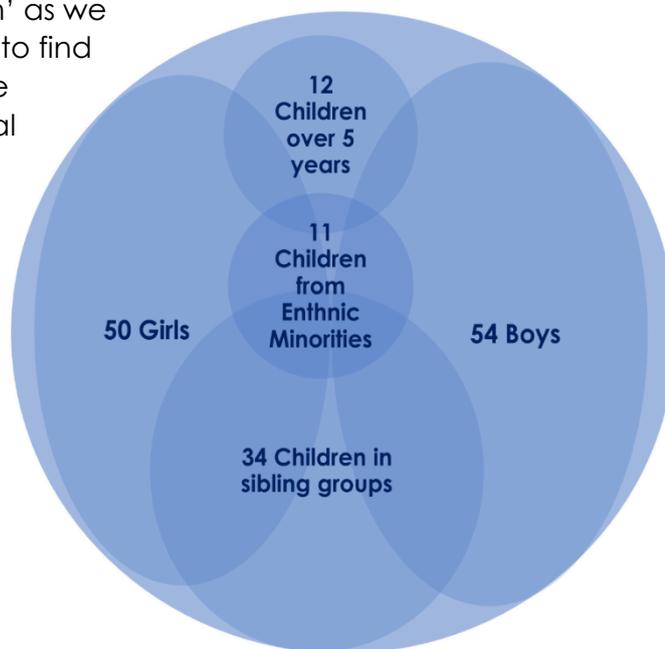
To understanding the reality behind these indicators in detail, Together4Children partners look at the unique journeys of the individual children that together, make up the cohort that this indicator relates to. This analyse is explored in more detail in the localised information in part 2 of this report.

We recognise that reducing the time it takes to find the right families for our children is a key priority for the Together4Children partnership. Other measures we are taking to reduce this timescale are outlined below.

2.4 Children Adopted During 2020-2021

104 Adoption Orders were granted for children across our region, securing their legal permanence within their new families. Of the children who were adopted, **12** children were aged over 5 years, **34** children achieved permanency alongside one or more of their brothers and sisters, **13** children came from ethnic backgrounds other than 'white British', and **4** children placed for adoption had a disability. These children represent our 'priority children' as we know that it is more challenging for us to find the right families for children with these characteristics. This mirrors the national evidence about those children who wait the longest before moving into their adopted home.

It is very positive that overall, 47 children (45% of all children adopted) were priority children. This shows good outcomes for children who may not have found adoptive homes without the dedication and ambition of practitioners across the Together4Children partnership.



2.5 Overview of Regional Family Finding Activity

Our Regional Family Finding team utilises a variety of resources to support them to find the right families for our children:

- Regional Matching Meetings.
- Linkmaker (a web-based tool used to support family finding regionally and nationally).
- Exchange days & Activity days (Regional/Pan-regional/national events where adopters can find out more about, and potentially meet children who we are family finding for).
- Use of professional relationships and networking opportunities.
- Pan-regional Family Finding arrangements (e.g., the 'Midlands Together Collaboration').

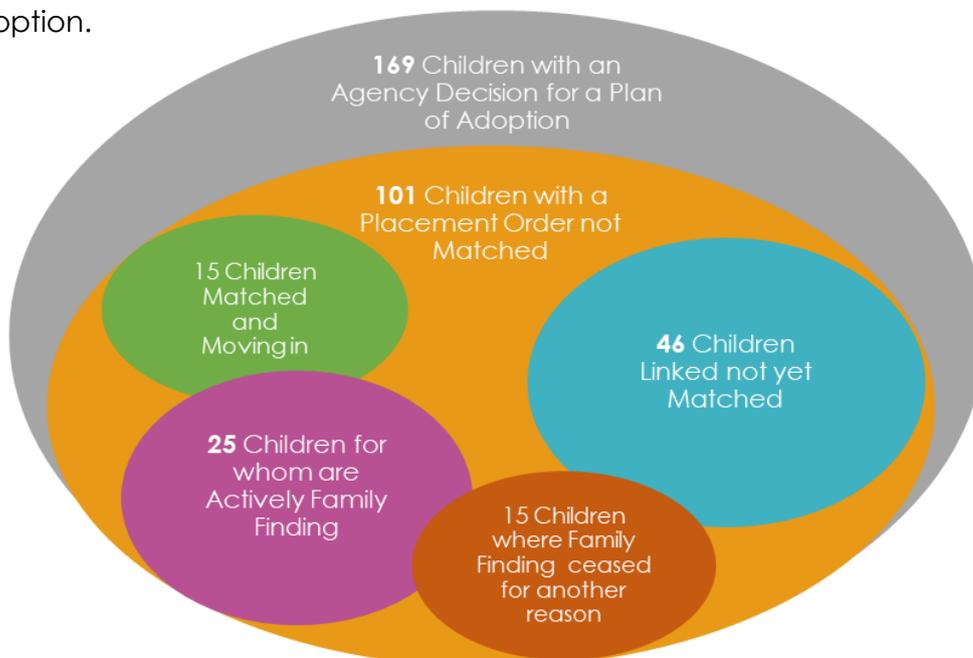
Since the launch of Together4Children we have been working hard to embed regional family finding arrangements, implement new working practices, integrate IT systems, and develop our pan-regional networks.

On the rare occasions that we are unable to find homes for children with our own approved adopters, we work across a collaboration of 5 Regional Adoption agencies and 2 Voluntary adoption agencies based in the midlands to try and identify homes for our children, before considering prospective adopters from across

the whole of the country. This means that we avoid placing children at a significant distance, which supports good transitions, and helps us to provide the right support to families in the critical early stages.

2.6 Children with a Plan of Adoption on 31 March 2022

At the end of the current reporting there were **169** children across our region where Agency Decision Maker's across our partner local authorities had decided on a plan of adoption.



Of these, **101** children had a Placement Order granted by the Court, giving their agency the authority to place them for adoption. These children had not yet been formally matched with their adoptive family (which involves an Adoption Panel making a recommendation approving the match, and an Agency Decision Maker agreeing).

Of those **101** children with a Placement Order, who had not yet been matched with their adopters, on the 31 March 2022:

- **15** children were matched and were in the process of moving to their new families.
- **36** children had been linked with their prospective family and were progressing to a match.
- **10** children were linked with their current foster carer/s or the adopters of a sibling, and assessments were on-going.
- **15** children where family finding had stopped for another reason, such as on-going assessment or change of plan away from adoption

This left **25** children for whom we were actively looking for an adoptive family.

12 of these children had only recently been granted a Placement Order and family finding was focused on finding a home within our region.

There were **13** children where we had not been able to quickly identify a home within our region and were looking for prospective adopters across the Midland's collaboration of Adoption Agencies, or nationally.

2.7 Regional Overview of Placement Disruptions

A placement disruption is defined as an adoptive placement that comes to an end before the granting of an Adoption Order. These usually occur with the first weeks or initial months following the placement of the child with their prospective adopter. Whenever an adoption disruption occurs, a meeting is conducted with all relevant parties and a disruption report is compiled by an experienced adoption manager who was either external to, or independent of, the children's services practitioners and teams involved in the Care Planning, matching and placement decisions. The learning from placement disruption is fed-back within the agency, with the adoption panel, and with the social work teams and practitioners involved.

Across the region, during 2020-2021 2 placements disrupted affecting 2 single children. Whilst we would never want children to experience a further change in their care, this represents a relatively low rate of disruption which is broadly in line with national averages.

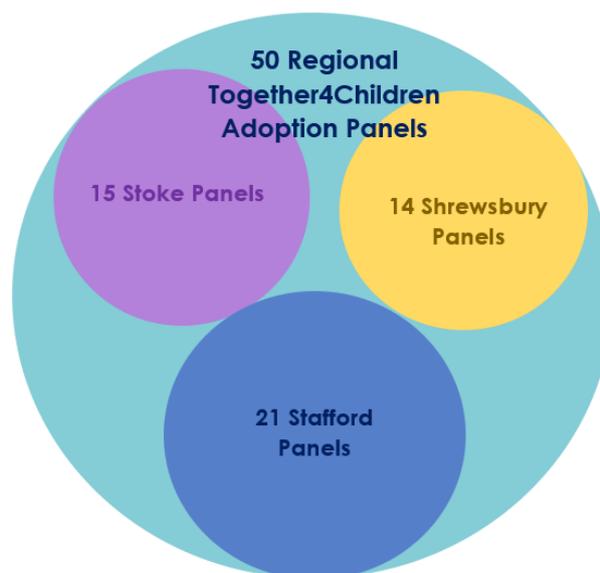
T4C Region Placement Disruptions 2020-21	T4C Adopters	Inter-Agency
No. of Placement Disruptions	1	1

3.0 Together4Children Regional Adoption Panel Activity

Our Regional Panels came together in December 2021, and we are continuing to integrate and embed activity to fully support our regional adoption arrangements.

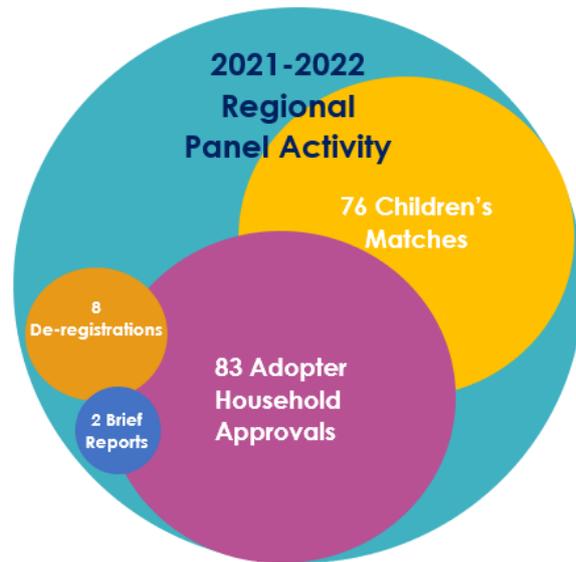
Over the year a total of 50 adoption panels have been convened across the partnership. We run 3 adoption panels which operate from Shrewsbury, Stafford and Stoke. Each Panel hears matches and approvals from across the partnership.

Over the year our panels have reviewed and made recommendations upon **76 matches** for children with their prospective adopters, **83 adopter household approvals**, 2 brief reports (second-time adopters), and 8 de-registrations.



We were pleased to appoint a new Chair for our Stoke Panel. This means that each Panel has a dedicated Adoption Agency Adviser and an independent panel chair. We have also appointed vice-chairs and new panel members across our panels.

Alongside making recommendations about the approval of prospective adopters, and matches for children with their adopters, adoption panels provide vital quality assurance feedback to the regional adoption agency. This includes whether the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met, and whether there is a thorough, rigorous, and fair approach across the service in the assessment of whether a child should be placed for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the proposed placement.

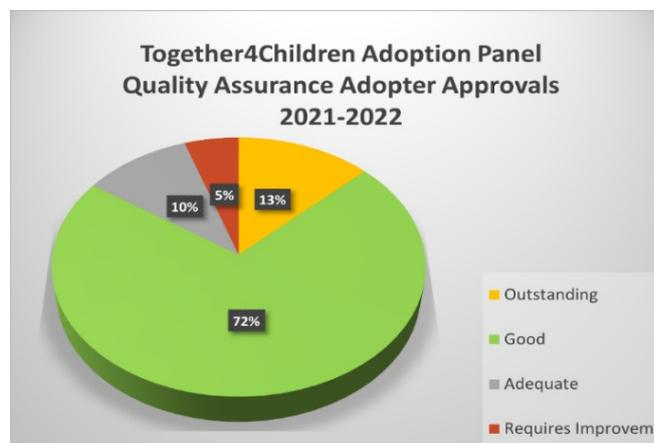


There remain some inconsistencies in the way that quality assurance feedback is gathered and collated across the region. There are also opportunities to develop this important feedback in ways that will support the oversight and assurance of the quality of practice across the partnership. This is a key part of the focus for development and improvement over the coming year.

Whilst opportunities exist to further develop this aspect of our reporting, a sample of the information collated over the year gives a strong indication of the overall quality of adoption practice across the region.

Quality Assurance feedback is obtained by Adoption Panel members after each child's matching recommendation and each adopter approval recommendation.

The following table shows a sample of panel feedback for 31 matches covering children from all 4 partner authorities and adopters from all localities. From this sample we can see that overall quality is rated as high, with 94% rated good or



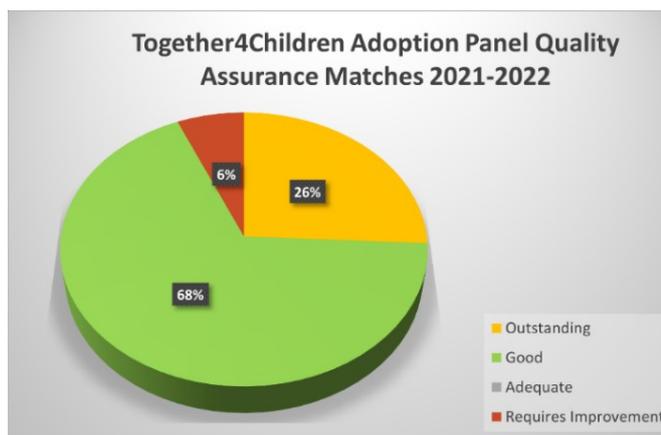
outstanding. This overall rating includes the quality of the Child Permanency Report, the Prospective Adopter Report (PAR), other matching documentation and the presentation of the Child's and Prospective Adopter's Social Workers.

Similarly for adopter approvals, feedback provides a positive picture of the standard of work presented to our regional adoption panels. The

table below shows the overall rating for PARs and Social Worker presentations with 85% being good or outstanding. This is based on a representative sample of 39 adopter approvals, covering PARs from each of our 3 locality teams.

Based on our analysis of the feedback for children's matches, a key theme identified is that the voice of the child is not always clearly represented within the documentation.

Our analysis of Prospective Adopter Reports has identified that, in some instances, issues of diversity have not been explored as fully as they could have been.



These are 2 areas of practice that we will work to address in the current year.

We are in the process of reviewing and developing our quality assurance processes for our regional adoption panels and moving to a regional system support by Microsoft Surveys. This will give us better access to a broader range of feedback which will provide a richer source of evidence and information about the quality of work presented to each of our 3 panels.

4.0 Together4Children Regional Adoption Support

We know that some of the most valued support for adopters and their children comes from other adopters. Through our core services and innovative partnerships, we aim to offer a range of peer support options so that everyone can be a part of our adopter community.

Where families need something more, we have skilled and experienced, multi-disciplinary practitioners on hand to provide specialist support. Working alongside key partners, we can support access to therapeutically trained practitioners, play therapists, social workers, clinical psychologists, and others with specific skills and qualifications.

We know that adoption is a lifelong journey, and we always aim to provide the right support for children and families at the right time.

4.1 Our Partnership Work with Adoption UK

Adoption UK is the leading charity providing support, community and advocacy for all those whose lives involve adoption, including those parenting children who cannot live with their birth families, and adopted people.



Since the inception of Together4Children, and throughout our development, we have been proud to

work in partnership with Adoption UK. Our Adopter Advisory Board is made of new and experienced adoptive parents from across the whole of our region. With the expert guidance and dedication of the Board's Chair and Vice-Chair, and the wider support of the Adoption UK organisation, our advisory board has provided advice, guidance, and critical feedback about the development and delivery of our adoption services.

This has ensured that the voice of our adoptive parents is at the heart of our service priorities, and that we have receive feedback about the quality of our services directly form the families who are reliant on them.

Throughout the course of last year, feedback from the Advisory Board has challenged us to improve the range of workshops and training available to adopters as a part of our adoption support offer and improve the information available to adopters on our website.

In the current year, feedback from our Advisory Board has driven service priority planning in respect of life story work and life story books.

4.2 Adoption UK 'TESSA' and Together4Children

Over the past 2 years, Together4Children have been partners in delivering Adoption UK's innovative 'TESSA' support program for adoptive families. Over the year, we have worked with Adoption UK to move the TESSA programme onto a sustainable footing, reducing the use of the Big Lottery Funding and bringing core elements of the provision within the criteria for the Adoption Support Fund.

We have worked together to review and revise the intervention and make it available as part of the support offer available to our families earlier in their journeys. The TESSA support offer includes:



- Clinical Psychologist-led assessment and support plans, family support, and core training.
- Innovative group therapy, counselling, coaching and mentoring, enhanced training, school consultation.
- Support in accessing statutory and voluntary provision, specialist and medical support and community groups.

Since TESSA went live in October 2020 **50 families** across the Together4Children region have received support through this provision.

Locality Permanency Support Activity

Our 3 locality Permanency Support Teams based in Shrewsbury, Stoke and Uttoxeter deliver a range of statutory and other adoption support provision across our region. These include:

- Signposting to other appropriate services
- Targeted information, advice and guidance regarding behavioural, attachment and other difficulties

- Advice and guidance via the Together4Children Virtual School Network
- Support with contact between an adopted child and his or her birth family (post-box/direct contact)
- Meetings, events, and activities to enable groups of adopters and adoptive children to get together and support each other
- Training to help adopters to meet the needs of their adoptive child
- Referral to TESSA (Therapeutic, Education & Support Services in Adoption).

Where more specific support is required, our specialist practitioners undertake an assessment of need.

Adoption Support Referrals				
	Staffs	Stoke	Joint Hub	T4C
Referrals Allocated	117	35	54	206
Reviews	101	56	102	259
Allocated Families	189	33	141	356

During the year, our teams completed **465** adoption support assessments and reviews, working directly with children and their families to identify and review their support needs and plan the right interventions.

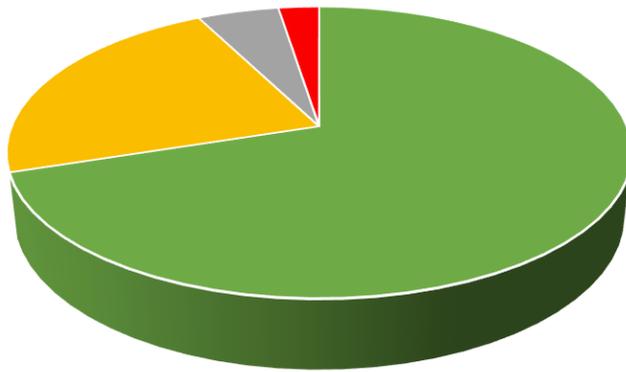
Adoption Support Fund	Staffs	Stoke	Joint Hub	T4C
New Applications Received	311	65	125	501
Applications (match funded)	7	1	3	11
Application total (inc. Internal Applications)	341	66	162	569

Our teams made **569** applications to the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Fund for the specialist therapeutic interventions required to meet needs identified for adopted children through our assessments.

“The support provided by ‘D’ has been amazing, thank you”

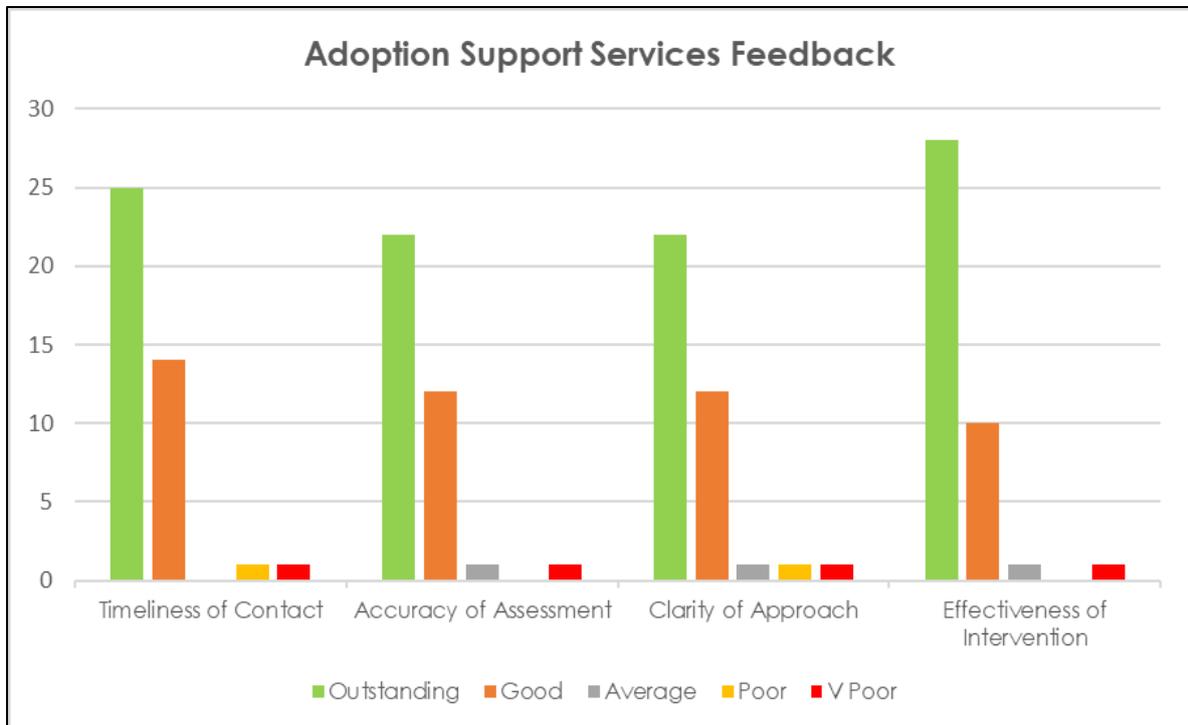
“ ‘T’ is a brilliant, warm, kind, informative social worker. She... has made a huge difference to the lives of our children ”

Adoption Support Overall Rating



■ Excellent ■ Good ■ Average ■ Poor ■ V Poor

A representative sample of feedback from over 40 families who received a service provides positive feedback about the quality of support they received, with over 90% of responses rating the service they received as either good or outstanding. Across the range of measures including timeliness of follow up following enquiry, accuracy of the social work assessment and the effectiveness of the support provided, feedback from families who responded to our questionnaire was overwhelmingly positive.



Our specialist practitioners have supported over **150** adopted people to access their adoption records and supported over **100** referrals for independent Support to Birth Relatives who have been affected by adoption.

Access to Records	Staffs	Stoke	Joint Hub	T4C
New referrals	109	17	33	159
Referrals Allocated	76	17	33	126
Intermediary Services				
New referrals	28	3	11	42
Referrals Allocated	15	3	11	29

We understand the impact that the adoption of a child has on birth parents and the wider birth family during the adoption process itself, and for life. We work hard to ensure that we offer the right support to birth families that is independent of the local authority children's social work services. Our support includes:

- Providing information about the process of adoption
- Signposting to other support services, such as housing, benefits, and counselling
- Face to face meetings or support over the phone.
- Helping birth parents and birth family members to consider information that they may wish the child to have in the future
- Delivering birth family support groups
- Support with maintaining contact

Over the year, our teams supported over **2700** 'Post Box' exchanges, facilitating, and supporting the exchange of information between birth families and adoptive parents.

Post Box	Staffs	Stoke	JAS	T4C
Post Box received	1322	830	1263	3415
Post Box exchanged	1172	643	947	2762

Throughout the year our teams have continued to deliver other important activities to support and bring together adopted children and their families including:

- Virtual Drop in Coffee Mornings
- Winter Support Event
- Toddler Groups
- Social Events and Woodland Walks

5.0 Together4Children Financial Information 2020-2021

For the second year running Together4Children have delivered the region's adoption service provision within budget. Overall expenditure on central partnership functions was £1,215,357 for the period 2020-2021. This delivered a small underspend of approximately £10,000 due, in the main, to staffing vacancies throughout the year.

	2020-21 Budget	2020-21 Outturn	Variance
Central Permanency Hub	1,225,810	1,215,357	- 10,453

During the second half of the year, we have successfully recruited to some of the vacant positions within the central hub. Some underspend against substantive staffing positions has offset higher -cost interim staffing arrangements that have been in place to cover business-critical vacancies.

Locality Permanency Hubs			
Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin	953,600	1,026,824	73,246
Staffordshire	1,272,090	1,201,500	-70,590
Stoke -on-Trent	682,330	663,808	-18,522
Total	2,908,020	2,892,154	-15,866

Costs for the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin locality hub (based in Shrewsbury) are shared across the two Councils under arrangements that preceded the Together4Children Partnership. The overspend totalling £73,246 reported for 2021-2022 relates to staffing costs and was identified as a cost pressure from the outset of the financial year. A proportion of this overspend will be offset against payment for therapeutic interventions (via the Adoption Support Fund) delivered by practitioners in the locality hub.

The underspends reported across the Staffordshire and Stoke locality hubs are due to a combination of staffing vacancies, and small savings against operational cost and staff expenses.

5.1 Inter-Agency Expenditure

Interagency Costs – reduction in use – 2018-2021 average annual cost to Partnership was £920,000. 2021-22 – £332,000 – 64% reduction representing approximate cost avoidance of £580,000/year.

Expenditure	Budget	Outturn	Variance
Inter-Agency:			
Staffordshire	227,740	32,600	- 195,140
Stoke-on-Trent	-	27,000	-
Shropshire	54,000	1,416	- 52,584
Telford & Wrekin	70,000	68,975	- 1,025

T4C Total	351,740	102,991	- 248,749
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Income	Budget	Outturn	Variance
Inter-Agency:			
Staffordshire	- 316,740	- 95,540	221,200
Stoke-on-Trent		- 57,000	57,000
Joint Hub	- 27,000	- 31,620	- 4,620
T4C Total	- 343,740	- 127,160	273,580

6.0 Annual Plan and Actions to Address Performance and Capacity Issues

Practice Development Priorities 2022-2023

Through work undertaken across the Wider Leadership Team and Senior Leadership Teams, and wider consultation with our Adopter Advisory Board, practitioners and other stakeholders, the following areas of practice development have been identified as priorities for the coming year.

i. **Support Family Finding activity to reduce delay for children who wait the longest.**

We know that some children will wait longer than others to be found adoptive families. These tend to be older children, especially older boys, brothers and sisters who need to live together, children from ethnic minority backgrounds, and children with additional needs.

We want to improve practice from the point of the agreement to a child's plan of adoption – where that child has characteristics that would put them at risk of waiting longer – by considering a range of options, for example:

- LA agreement for national search and option of Inter-Agency Placement at the outset of the plan.
- Child specific recruitment activity.
- Means tested adoption allowances (time-limited, specific to children's needs and focused on supporting the building of strong attachments).
- Enhanced settling-in allowances.
- Practical support with child-care, laundry services, loans/grants for higher cost family items.

In short, we want to be able to offer 'baked-in support' for children who may wait the longest.

ii. **Early Permanence**

In-line with the Midland's EP Project Aims, we want to:

- Identify areas of regional best practice and share learning between RAAs with more developed processes and more newly formed RAAs.

- Produce analysis and business-case in relation to potential cost-benefits of Early Permanence to Local Authorities.
- Develop the interface between VAA and RAA/LA service provision - to include analysis and development of the use of concurrent placements via current VAA provision, where appropriate.
- Identify core elements of best practice and produce a regional best practice guide - integrating these elements into regional policies and procedures.
- Develop a pan-regional suite of training materials that sit alongside the guide for Children's Social Work professionals, RAA and VAA staff, regional CAFCASS and Family Justice Boards, and prospective adopters who are considering offering Early Permanence to children.
- Deliver 2 pan-regional conference-style events for key stakeholders in Summer 2022.

iii. **Improve the quality of Life Story Work and Life Story Books**

Research with adopted young people tells us how important understanding their life story is to them. We know how critical this can be later in a child's life, as they enter adolescence, for example, and are going through important stages of identity development.

But our adopters tell us that the quality of information they receive, in the form of life story books for example, is not always of a good enough standard and does not help them to support their children.

We want to work with our adopter community and draw in regional and national expertise to improve the quality of this work.

We also want to work with Children's and Adoption social work practitioners to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to support this critical work.

iv. **Moving to Adoption**

We know from research and practice experience how important good transitions are in supporting children and prospective adopters to make strong and healthy attachments from the start.

Building on the UAE Moving to Adoption model and resources that we introduced to practitioners last year, we want to further develop and embed this practice in relation to transitions. This will involve working with Children's social workers and Foster Carers, as well as other key people.

v. **Develop in-house delivery of Therapeutic Interventions for Children**

Considering the 3-year funding announcement for the Adoption Support Fund (through to March 2025) we will review our capacity to deliver in-house interventions that are claimable against the fund.

We are already delivering some in-house interventions (although this has been difficult to sustain during Covid 19) and have recently added a therapeutic parenting course to our core offer.

We have numbers of staff with accredited levels of therapeutic training. We want to support those practitioners to further develop their expertise and ability to directly deliver interventions, using funding drawn back from the ASF to build capacity and resilience into our permanency support offer, and redressing our current reliance on independent and private sector providers for these interventions.

vi. Improve on-going support for birth parents and birth families to help to maintain and develop keeping in touch arrangements where appropriate.

We know how important it is for all involved to get arrangements for keeping in touch right. This should start at the earliest point in the planning stages of a child's journey, but support should be available when it is needed right through an adopted person's life course.

Building on our initial development principles and what we are learning from current research and practice, we want to further develop the resources and support we offer to birth families. This includes thinking about the way that birth families, adoptive parents and adopted children keep in touch with each other. We want to learn from current national pilots that are looking at innovative ways to support and enhance keeping in touch.

vii. Learning from Disruptions

We want to bring together the learning from these disruptions into a learning event for practitioners. We want to look at all factors which may have impacted on the child's placement ending, but with a focus on any impacts on practice resulting from Covid 19.

Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Thursday 24 November 2022

Young Carers

Recommendations

We recommend that the Committee:

- a. Accept the sub-group's report, particularly having regard to:
 - i. reassurances that the initial in-house assessment of young carers is robust,
 - ii. that performance data development with regard to the young carers service should more accurately evidence the types of care, ages and hours of care given, and
 - iii. more proactive signposting to the broad range of support services for young carers is being developed by the Young Carers service;
- b. Agree to become young carers service advocates, raising the profile of the services available within schools and the benefits to both schools and their pupils in taking advantage of these services;
- c. Write again on behalf of the Committee to inform the young carers of the activity resulting from this work and specifically from their meeting with us, thanking them again for the part they played; and
- d. Write to Cathryn Rayner at the Young Carers Service thanking her for the excellent work she and her team undertake in supporting young carers.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Young Carer Sub-group

Summary

1. Following the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee's inclusion of the role of young carers on their 2021/22 work programme the Committee scrutinised the issue at their April 2022 meeting and undertook further investigations, meeting with young carers to better understand the services and support they receive.

Report

Background

2. As part of their work planning in June 2021 the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee included the role of young carers in their 2021/22 work programme. Members wanted to scrutinise the support given to Staffordshire young carers and consider the level of caring roles undertaken, seeking reassurance that these were not at a level that should be provided by social care.
3. At their meeting of 21 April 2022, the Committee received a presentation on the new Together for Carers Service. A new all age strategy had been jointly developed with the five clinical commissioning groups entitled "All Together for Carers (2019-2023)". Implementation of the new service had been delayed due to the pandemic, but finally went live in April 2021, with the commissioned service to run from April 2021-March 2024, with an option to extend to March 2026.
4. N-Compass is the lead commissioned provider for the new service, providing easily accessible information advice and guidance that explains when and how to find support, as well as guidance around eligibility. It makes service referrals as appropriate, for example to the preventative support offer, an enhanced range of preventative support for carers of all ages in the community. They also provide further assessment and support planning where necessary and access to formal support to meet assessed eligible needs.
5. Under the new service arrangements, the initial support and assessment of young carers has been brought back in-house. Skilled, well-trained officers undertake the carers assessment to establish the level and types of care given and the impact on the individual young carer's wellbeing. This assessment identifies where care needs meet the statutory threshold for a referral to adult social care. The carers assessment takes account of the type of care given and the number of hours taken by these caring roles. Referrals to n-compass and the young carers service are made as part of the assessment process.
6. Details shared with the Committee from engagement activities in developing the Strategy had highlighted that:
 - a. Young Carers report their highest need is for support to help them manage at home in their caring role; and
 - b. Some felt there was a need to get better at identifying carers so that we can help to avoid carer crisis.

7. The Together For Carers Service specific performance outcome for young carers is:

“children and young people with caring responsibilities have the support they need to learn, develop, thrive and enjoy positive childhoods.”

8. The success measures for this outcome are identified as:

- a. Young carers report that they know who to speak to if they need support
- b. An increase in the number of young carers known to their school or education provider in order that appropriate support can be provided when required with the aim of improving attendance, improving emotional wellbeing and reducing risk; and
- c. 95% of young carers that want to, have been offered access to peer support and a break from their caring role.

9. Performance data shared at the 21 April meeting had given details of the number of young carers known to the service, their age range, gender and approximate number of hours support they provide for their family member per week. Performance data had been given for 125 young carers receiving services during the first three quarters of 2021-22. From this it had been reported that 43% of young carers were caring for someone with physical disabilities or sensory impairment, approximately 60% were providing between 0-10 hours of support per week and approximately 35% were providing between 11-30 hours of support per week.

10. A greater degree of detail behind these figures had been requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for future performance reporting to help identify the types of caring roles undertaken and allow identification of the age range of carers undertaking these hours of care. The Committee had concerns that, from the data given, it would not be possible to identify if a young carer between the ages of 0-5 was undertaking 30 hours of care per week. Whilst we were reassured this was not the case, a different method of data recording would help evidence this. The minutes of the 21 April Overview and Scrutiny meeting recorded the Committee’s recommendation that development of the data recording would enable a more accurate picture of the type and hours of care undertaken to be evidenced.

11. Also at the April meeting the Committee asked for the opportunity to meet with young carers to seek first hand experience of how the Strategy was working and the level of support received. Initially it was suggested that Members attend young carer respite sessions, but after further consideration it was agreed that a small group of Committee Members

would meet young carers outside of their respite sessions so that these were not disrupted.

12. Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members Bob Spencer (Chairman), Janet Eagland, Gillian Pardesi and Kath Perry met with young carers in September. The meeting was very informal and interactive, enabling honest and forthright opinions and feelings to be shared. We were awestruck by the resilience, empathy, tenacity, and confidence of the young carers we met, whose ages ranged from 8-15 years.

13. The young carers were asked to consider 5 questions:

a. Do you feel supported?

The responses were yes, overall, they did feel supported, including comments that "there's always someone around even if I don't want them and if I need them, I always know someone to text or call" and "yes, because I have a place where I can talk when it gets too much"

b. How are you supported?

Responses included "someone I trust and open up to about things that get tough", "peer support", "counsellor", "different groups", "my teacher, she helps if I have a bad day"

c. What is the thing that helps you most?

These responses included "talking about it", "music and friends", "peer support is very cool as I can talk openly in a group my own age", "no matter how much I push them away they still show they care, and they don't give up trying to help"

d. If you were struggling with your caring role, how would you get support?

Responses were talking to: friends; their counsellor; family support worker; teachers; or contacts from the young carers service.

e. If you could share one thing with people who aren't young carers, what would it be?

The comments shared were:
"It's not easy"

"You lose time to enjoy being a kid and relying on others having to make decisions and looking after someone isn't exciting or fun, it's draining"

"It may sound exciting and fun, but it isn't"

"Never ever think something is simple, you have no idea what my life is like or who I am as a person. My life made me grow up so I'm not like every other girl my age, if people think they know who you are they probably don't, so don't let them think they do."

"I had to grow up quick so I'm very mature"

"Be yourself"

14. From broader discussions with the young carers key points shared were:

15. **Immediacy of support** – concerns were shared around young carers having to wait for meetings with their social worker or family support worker. There are several issues here, there is a national as well as a local difficulty in retention of social workers. It may be that changes to social worker and/or the use of agency social workers could therefore be impactful, however, irrespective of this none of these are 24hour services. There are, however, different avenues of support which have been highlighted with us by respite care colleagues, such as the Silver Line App, which would offer out of hours support.

16. **Awareness of support** – The different support avenues should already be signposted to young carers via schools, although having listened to the feedback from young carers, Young Carer Service colleagues have identified a need to better highlight these different support avenues and are considering how best this can be achieved in a more proactive way. Raising the awareness of young carers to the range of out of hours support, help lines and websites available to them when they are not in school, or respite care activities, should help address some of the concerns around accessibility of support.

17. **School support** – the young carers shared different school experiences with us, some very positive, some negative. (It should be noted that only a few Staffordshire schools were represented from within the group of young carers we met.)

18. One individual and one school in particular were raised with us for praise by the young carers.

a. Leek First School was highlighted as a school where support for young carers wellbeing is excellent, with complete confidence in the teaching staff that support would be given appropriately whenever needed;

- b. Mrs Julie Clayton at King Edward VI High School, Stafford, who's supportive work for the wellbeing of students was shared with us as invaluable. We understand that the school structure at King Edward's supports the wellbeing work of Mrs Clayton.
19. However, some young carers had less positive experiences, with a particular concern around a lack of awareness of their unique situation amongst some staff which could result in poor support and/or have a negative impact on wellbeing and performance.
20. A set of free training is available to schools from the Young Carers Service in the form of Young Carer Aware for all staff and Carer Champion training for an individual or small group of staff. The Carer Champion training shares good practice recommendations to help appropriately support young carers, including the production of a single page profile that is owned by the young carer and shared with school staff, so they are aware of the circumstances for that individual. This profile can be regularly updated and removes the anxiety for the young carer of continually having to share their story. This is particularly important to ensure school staff understand the circumstances, can tailor support appropriately and negate the painful experience for young carers of having to suffer the distress caused through the constant re-telling of their story.
21. The Young Carers Service also provides a range of services to schools including assemblies for pupils and "we care", a course for young carers. Of the free training and wider offer available, less than 10% of Staffordshire schools have taken up this opportunity. Whilst schools themselves have had an incredibly difficult time over the pandemic years, there is a role for us as members to play in highlighting the availability of these opportunities and championing their importance within our school communities.

Conclusions

22. In undertaking this piece of work our main concern had been to ensure the roles undertaken by young carers were not at a level that should be provided by social care. We are satisfied that the in-house assessment undertaken by skilled county council staff is robust, identifying inappropriate levels of care and referring to social care services as appropriate, in line with the Care Act and the Children and Family Act 2014.
23. We have already highlighted our concerns around the performance data, suggesting that for this to effectively evidence the hours and types of

care undertaken by children of different ages there is a need to give greater detail and subdivide the current data ranges reported.

24. We were impressed with the officers we met from the young carers service. In particular Cathryn Rayner, Team Leader for the Service, who is clearly dedicated to her work and knows the young carers well. There are also a wide range of services available to support young carers and indeed to support schools in their approach to young carers. We already have reassurance from Cathryn Rayner and the Young Carers Service that they will be working towards more proactively signposting the range of support and services available to young carers, particularly those that are out of hours services. There is, however, a clear role for us as councillors, and specifically for us as members of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee in championing the importance of the free support, guidance and training available to schools from the young carers team, raising their profile and advocating the benefits of this service to both schools and their young carers.

25. We were delighted to have met with the young carers themselves and were overwhelmed by their resilience and confidence. We have written to thank them for giving up their valuable time to meet with us and for speaking so openly and frankly about their experiences. We intend to write again to explain the outcome of this work to show that their time meeting with us has created positive change.

26. We have also written to congratulate the school and staff member who were held up by the young carers as those who had helped and supported them so positively.

Link to Strategic Plan

27. Encourage good health and wellbeing, resilience and independence.

28. Offer every Staffordshire child and young person the best start in life, and the chance to achieve their potential.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

[Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda 21 April 2022](#)

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WORK PROGRAMME

Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 2022/2023

This document sets out the work programme for the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2022/2023.

The Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising: children and adults' safeguarding; community safety and Localism. The Council has three priority outcomes. This Committee is aligned to the outcome: The people of Staffordshire will feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their community.

We review our work programme at every meeting. Sometimes we change it - if something comes up during the year that we think we should investigate as a priority. Our work results in recommendations for the County Council and other organisations about how what they do can be improved, for the benefit of the people and communities of Staffordshire.

Councillor Bob Spencer

Chairman of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee

If you would like to know more about our Work Programme or how to raise issues for potential inclusion on a Work Programme, then please contact Helen Phillips, Scrutiny and Support Officer (helen.phillips@staffordshire.gov.uk)

Work Programme 2022/2023

Date of Meeting	Item	Details (Background)	Action / Outcome
Page 55	Cabinet Member: Mark Sutton Lead Officer: Kate Bullivant		complaints around SEND were likely to level off.
	Customer Feedback & Complaints Annual report – Adults Social Care Cabinet Member: Julia Jessel Lead Officer: Kate Bullivant	Report brought annually	Members welcomed the report and, in particular, commended the proactive work to identify and address future challenges from the new Social Care Act.
	Draft Early Help Strategy Cabinet Member: Mark Sutton Lead Officer: Natasha Moody	Draft Early Help Strategy for pre-decision scrutiny	The comments and concerns raised by the Committee inform the further development of the Early Help Strategy.
1 September 2022 10.00 am	Family Hub Cabinet Member: Mark Sutton Lead Officer: Ruth Blunn-Jennings	Pre-decision scrutiny	This initiative was supported and because of the importance of the proposed changes Members suggested a whole council briefing would be beneficial.
	Children’s Services Transformation Cabinet Member: Mark Sutton Lead Officer: Neelam Bhardwaja/Natasha Moody	The new Children’s Transformation went live on 1 October 2021. More than six months on this is an opportunity for Members to seek reassurance that it is delivering as intended, including on SEND.	The candid assessment and feedback of the Transformation process was welcomed. A mechanism for regular feedback on the action plan progress will be established, with a full review in 12 months.

Work Programme 2022/2023

Date of Meeting	Item	Details (Background)	Action / Outcome
Page 56	<p>MacAlister Report Cabinet Member: Mark Sutton Lead Officer: Nisha Gupta</p>	<p>Suggested at 17 June meeting – looking at the report’s proposals and how they impact on Staffordshire’s Children’s Services November date for this suggested at 3 Aug Triangulation Originally scheduled for 4 November meeting but moved back awaiting publication of the final report. Final report published on 23 May 2022</p>	<p>The Committee were pleased that much of the direction of travel proposed in the Report was reflected in the Staffordshire approach. Members now await details from central Government on the areas for implementation.</p>
	<p>Ofsted Focused Visit – improvement action plan Cabinet Member: Mark Sutton Lead Officer: Nisha Gupta</p>	<p>The Chairman attends the Children’s Improvement Board (CIB) meetings on behalf of the Committee. At the June CIB details of the Ofsted Focused Visit were discussed, including the development of an improvement action plan. The Chairman requested this plan be brought to the O&S Committee.</p>	<p>Members welcomed the improvement action plan and will look to receive details of progress with its implementation.</p>
	<p>Domestic Abuse recommissioning arrangements Cabinet Member: Victoria Wilson Lead Officer: Trish Caldwell</p>	<p>Pre-decision scrutiny item</p>	<p>The Committee raised a number of issues for Cabinet to consider before taking a decision on the Contract renewal.</p>

Work Programme 2022/2023

Date of Meeting	Item	Details (Background)	Action / Outcome
24 October 2022 10.00 am	Community Safety & the Outcome of the Fishmonger Hall Investigation Cabinet Member: Victoria Wilson Lead Officer: Trish Caldwell	Findings from the Fishmonger Hall incident showed there had been inadequate management of the assailant. Members want to satisfy themselves that changes have been made to prevent further such incidents. This also impacts on the Committee's role as the designated crime and disorder panel. This will include outcomes from the Commissioner's 28 June meeting considering Inquiry findings.	Concerns were shared around the naming of the assailant and his heritage in the report. These details will be removed from future reporting. The detailed changes made within Police, CTU and Probation were welcomed.
	The LAs role in the Prevent Partnership & Feedback from the Commissioner's 28 June meeting Cabinet Member: Victoria Wilson Lead Officer: Trish Caldwell	As part of their Crime and Disorder role the Committee wish to scrutinise the methods the LA has in addressing community safety. They also requested feedback from the Commissioner's meeting with partners around learning from the Fishmonger Hall inquest.	Overall Members recognised the importance of the Prevent work and the LA's role in this. Concerns remain around internet access, particularly outside of education settings, and how to educate individuals to ensure they can stay safe whilst using these services.
24 Nov 2022 10.00 am	Regional Permanency Partnership Cabinet Member: Mark Sutton Lead Officer: Scott Crawford & Jo Sullivan	Previously considered at 6 July 2021 O&S Committee where Members requested details of how the partnership progresses and specifically the two pilot projects TESSA and Mockingbird.	

Work Programme 2022/2023

Date of Meeting	Item	Details (Background)	Action / Outcome
	<p>Young Carers Report of the O&S sub-group</p>	<p>Report of the O&S sub-group that met with young carers to consider the support they receive and the levels of care they provide</p>	
<p>5 January 2023 10.00am</p>	<p>Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Adult Safeguarding Partnership Board (SSASPB) – Annual Report Independent Chair: John Wood Lead Officer: Helen Jones</p>	<p>Report brought annually.</p>	
	<p>Adult Social Care Transformation – update Cabinet Member – Julia Jessel Lead Officer: Jo Cowcher, Ruth Martin</p>	<p>Suggested at the 1 September Triangulation to update the Committee on developments and progress with the Transformation programme, including performance against KPI.</p>	
	<p>Staffordshire Safeguarding Children’s Board Annual Report Independent Chair: Ian Vinall Lead Officer: Lynn Milligan</p>	<p>Report brought annually</p>	
<p>16 Feb 2023 10.00 am</p>	<p>Whole Life Disabilities Strategy 2023</p>	<p>Pre-decision scrutiny</p>	

Work Programme 2022/2023

Date of Meeting	Item	Details (Background)	Action / Outcome
	Cabinet Member: Julia Jessel Lead Officer: Andy Marriot & Nicola Day		
20 April 2023 10.00 am			
tbc Page 59	Early Intervention & prevention Cabinet Member: Mark Sutton Lead Officer: Neelam Bhardwaja	Suggested by the Cabinet Member at 17 June meeting.	
tbc	Governance Model Cabinet Member: Mark Sutton Lead Officer: Neelam Bhardwaja	Suggested by the Cabinet Member at 17 June meeting. Considering how to work better together. Trying to develop a better and more effective governance model.	

Items for Consideration – Work Programme 2022/2023

Suggested Item	Details (Background)	Proposed Date of Meeting

Standing Items 2022/2023

Item	Details (Background)	Action / Outcome
<p>Crime & Disorder Cabinet Member: Victoria Wilson Lead Officer: Catherine Mann/Trish Caldwell</p>	<p>This O&S Committee is the LAs designated Crime and Disorder Panel. Following discussions with the Chairman and Officers from the PFCC and the Cabinet Member and Officers responsible for community safety, it was agreed that the Chairman and Vice Chairmen will meet with the Cabinet Member and Officers after each Safer and Stronger Communities Strategy Group (SSCSG) to gain an overview of community safety within the County and identify areas for further scrutiny as appropriate.</p>	<p>Chairman and Vice-Chairman briefings on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thursday 19 May (at the conclusion of Full Council) to brief on performance discussed at the 18 May 2022 SSCSG NB the May SSCSG was moved to 16 June and consequently the briefing was moved to 20 June Tuesday 13 September to brief on performance discussed at the 12 September 2022 SSCSG
<p>Children Improvement Board (CIB) Cabinet Member: Mark Sutton Lead Officer: Neelam Bhardwaja</p>	<p>The Chairman attends the CIB on behalf of the O&S Committee and feeds back developments to Members at each meeting as part of the work programme agenda item. CIB scheduled dates: 28.04.22; 25.05.22; 30.06.22; 20.07.22; 25.08.22; 29.09.22; 27.10.22; 24.11.22; 22.12.22</p>	
<p>Themes emerging from Serious Case Reviews Cabinet Member: Mark Sutton Lead Officer: Neelam Bhardwaja</p>	<p>Where Serious Case Reviews have taken place the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will consider any learning that can be taken from the Review</p>	<p>Some areas picked up by the DHR review process</p>

Briefing Notes / Updates / Visits 2022/2023

Date	Item	Details (Background)	Action / Outcome

Working Groups / Inquiry Days 2022/2023

Date	Item	Details (Background)	Action / Outcome
21 September 2022	Young Carer Visits	Following scrutiny of the Young Carers Service in April, Members requested the opportunity to speak first hand with young carers to consider the service they receive.	

Membership – County Councillors 2022-2023

Calendar of Committee Meetings - 2022-2023

Bob Spencer (Chairman)

Gill Burnett (Vice Chairman - Overview)

Richard Ford (Vice Chairman – Scrutiny)

Janet Eagland

Derrick Huckfield

Johnny McMahon

Gillian Pardesi

Kath Perry

Mike Wilcox

Conor Wileman

16 June 2022 at 10.00 am

19 July 2022 at 10.00 am

1 September 2022 at 10.00 am

24 October 2022 at 10.00 am

24 November 2022 at 10.00 am

5 January 2023 at 10.00 am

16 February 2023 at 10.00 am

20 April 2023 at 10.00 am

Meetings usually take place in the Oak rm, County Buildings

