



Agenda for a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on Wednesday, 20 July 2022 at 4.30 pm in Committee Room 1 City Hall, Bradford

Members of the Committee – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Duffy Thirkill Alipoor	Pollard	Knox

Alternates:

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Humphreys Akhtar Shaheen	Smith	Naylor

Notes:

- This agenda can be made available in Braille, large print or tape format on request by contacting the Agenda contact shown below.
- The taking of photographs, filming and sound recording of the meeting is allowed except if Councillors vote to exclude the public to discuss confidential matters covered by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. Recording activity should be respectful to the conduct of the meeting and behaviour that disrupts the meeting (such as oral commentary) will not be permitted. Anyone attending the meeting who wishes to record or film the meeting's proceedings is advised to liaise with the Agenda Contact who will provide guidance and ensure that any necessary arrangements are in place. Those present who are invited to make spoken contributions to the meeting should be aware that they may be filmed or sound recorded.
- If any further information is required about any item on this agenda, please contact the officer named at the foot of that agenda item.

From:

Parveen Akhtar
City Solicitor
Agenda Contact: Jill Bell
Phone: 01274 434580
E-Mail: jill.bell@bradford.gov.uk

To:

A. PROCEDURAL ITEMS

1. ALTERNATE MEMBERS (Standing Order 34)

The City Solicitor will report the names of alternate Members who are attending the meeting in place of appointed Members.

(Jill Bell – 01274 434580)

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

(Members Code of Conduct – Part 4A of the Constitution)

To receive disclosures of interests from members and co-opted members on matters to be considered at the meeting. The disclosure must include the nature of the interest.

An interest must also be disclosed in the meeting when it becomes apparent to the member during the meeting.

Notes:

- (1) *Members must consider their interests, and act according to the following:*

Type of Interest

You must:

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Disclose the interest; not participate in the discussion or vote; and leave the meeting unless you have a dispensation.

Other Registrable Interests (Directly Related)

OR

Non-Registrable Interests (Directly Related)

Disclose the interest; speak on the item only if the public are also allowed to speak but otherwise not participate in the discussion or vote; and leave the meeting unless you have a dispensation.

Other Registrable Interests (Affects)

OR

Non-Registrable Interests (Affects)

Disclose the interest; remain in the meeting participate and vote unless the matter affects the financial interest or well-being

*(a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of a majority of inhabitants of the affected ward, and
(b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest;*

in which case speak on the item only if the public are also allowed to speak but otherwise not do not participate in the discussion or vote; and leave the meeting

unless you have a dispensation.

- (2) *Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to the Member concerned or their spouse/partner.*
- (3) *Members in arrears of Council Tax by more than two months must not vote in decisions on, or which might affect, budget calculations, and must disclose at the meeting that this restriction applies to them. A failure to comply with these requirements is a criminal offence under section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.*
- (4) *Officers must disclose interests in accordance with Council Standing Order 44.*

3. MINUTES

1 - 10

Recommended –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2022 be signed as a correct record (attached).

(Jill Bell – 01274 434580)

4. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

(Access to Information Procedure Rules – Part 3B of the Constitution)

Reports and background papers for agenda items may be inspected by contacting the person shown after each agenda item. Certain reports and background papers may be restricted.

Any request to remove the restriction on a report or background paper should be made to the relevant Strategic Director or Assistant Director whose name is shown on the front page of the report.

If that request is refused, there is a right of appeal to this meeting.

Please contact the officer shown below in advance of the meeting if you wish to appeal.

(Jill Bell - 01274 434580)

B. BUSINESS ITEMS

5. ONE ADOPTION WEST YORKSHIRE (OAWY) ANNUAL REPORT

11 - 74

The report of One Adoption West Yorkshire (**Document “A”**) provides an overview of the adoption service activity from April 2021 to March 2022.

Recommended -

That the Corporate Parenting Panel receives this report and continues to support the work of One Adoption West Yorkshire and the local authority to ensure our adopted children and families receive the best possible support.

(Michelle Rawlings – 0113 5350913 Mob: 07712 216979)

6. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT 75 - 106

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "B"**) will provide Corporate Parenting with an overview of the IRO service for 2021 – 2022.

Recommended -

The report is for information only

(Helen Cliffe 07582 10103)

7. FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT COVERING THE PERIOD OF 1ST APRIL 2021 TO MARCH 31ST 2022 107 - 156

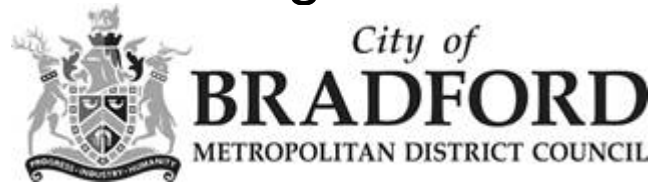
The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the Fostering Services provides written reports on the management, outcomes, and financial state of the fostering service. This Annual Fostering Service Report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to fostering services in the Bradford Council area as required by statutory guidance. The Annual Fostering Service Report must be presented to Corporate Parenting Panel.

The Strategic Director of Children's Services will submit **Document "C"** which presents the Fostering Service's annual report which provides an overview of the work of the Fostering Service and should be read in conjunction with the fostering Service Statement of Purpose (Appendix A).

Recommended -

Members are requested to note the content and actively consider and comment upon the strengths and future recommendations.

(John Heron – 07816 522073)



Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 8 June 2022 in Banqueting Hall, City Hall

Commenced 4.46 pm
Concluded 6.29 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Duffy Humphreys Thirkill	Knox

Non voting co-opted members

Sue Lowndes Bradford Council Assistant Director Schools (BC/ADS)
Jude MacDonald Bradford District Clinical Commissioning Group
Richard Paswell Wes Yorkshire Police (for Daniel Ware)

Young people

Presenters

3 presenters

Others

22 other young people

Carers (surnames recorded where given)

Dolores
Shirley Joseph
Mohammed Kafy
Anna May
Michael
Suekrane Tariq
Katrina Weston

Others

Alaia Alam Bradford Council Children's Services
Helen Cliffe Bradford Council - Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing Team
Jonathan Cooper Head, Virtual School (HT/VS)

Nicole Grant	Bradford Council Children's Services
Amandip Johal	Bradford Council Children's Services
Mick Nolan	Bradford Council Children's Services
Helen Osman	Helen Osman Governance Services (Clerk)
Emily Rhodes	Bradford Council - Participation Co-ordinator, Safeguarding and Reviewing Team
Philip Segurola	Bradford Council - Assistant Director Safeguarding and Review, Commissioning & Provider Services (AD/SRCP)

Apologies received prior to the meeting

Cllr Alipoor – sub: Cllr Julie Humphreys

Cllr Mike Pollard

Cllr Dale Smith

Daniel Ware – sub: Richard Paswell

Councillor Duffy in the Chair

25. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2022 be signed as a correct record (previously circulated)

26. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals.

27. AGENDA

5. Young Person led Corporate Parenting Panel

Action No.	Action	Person
1	Young people to let Emily Rhodes know if they are interested in being on an interview panel for social workers or managers. (see <i>Item 5.2</i>)	Young people
2	Young people to put their names down to attend the next meeting, which will be: <input type="checkbox"/> on Wednesday 31 August <input type="checkbox"/> from 1.00pm to 4.00pm	Young people

	□ at the activity centre in Baildon (see Item 5.2)	
3	Philip to follow up young people's suggestions on the new Care Leaver Entitlements document (see Item 5.3)	P Segurola
4	LA to put a clear and fair savings policy in place (see Item 5.6)	H Cliffe
5	Young people to send comments on the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy to Emily (see Item 5.6)	Young people
6	Philip to follow up on the four priority areas identified at this meeting (see Item 5.7)	P Segurola
7	Young people (15 to 19 years old) to let Emily know if they want to join the dragon boat race on 01 July 2022	Young people (15 to 19 years old)

The meeting was led by 3 young people

5.1 Introduction and welcome by Young Person

The Chairs welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending – it was great to see so many people here.

Emily said that a team of young people had been working on the presentation for tonight's meeting over the last few months, in between studying for their exams. They would welcome audience participation.

Housekeeping: Everyone was reminded to silence their mobile 'phones; move outside the room to take any urgent calls; not to talk over other people; to respect the meeting schedule and move on when the co-Chairs asked them to do so; and to speak slowly to allow time for the interpreter to translate what they said.

2 Feedback from March session led by Philip

Philip and Emily gave feedback on the three issues that they had been asked to look into at the 16 March 2022 meeting of the Young Person led Corporate Parenting Panel:

1. Overseas recruitment of social workers to be explored

Philip said that the Council is working with two agencies that specialise in recruiting social workers from outside the UK. It plans to recruit around thirty overseas social workers by the end of the year.

The Council is also working with Bradford University, which trains overseas social workers, to see whether any of their newly qualified

students would like to join Bradford's social work team.

This isn't a perfect solution, because overseas social workers tend to leave after completing a two-year contract, but it will help to reduce the turnover in social workers.

2. *Steps will be taken to re-involve children in care and care experienced young people in recruitment activity for social workers and managers*

Emily said that the Council has set up a system to let people who are recruiting social workers and managers indicate if they want to involve a panel of young people in the process. This new system has already been tried and worked well.

Philip said that this process applies to posts at all levels, including the Head of Service post which is being recruited to now. All social workers and managers need to be able to work well with young people.

Emily asked that any young people who are interested in being on an interview panel let her know at the end of this meeting.

ACTION: Young people interested in being on an interview panel to let Emily know

3. *Children's Services would confirm their position as to what age Bradford Council would allow young people a mobile phone while in care.*

Philip explained that there is no single answer to this question, though it would be unusual for a young person still at primary school to have a mobile 'phone. As with every parent, it depends on the carer's view of whether the young person is ready and their personal circumstances.

So, conversations about a young person having a mobile 'phone need to be part of the Independent Review process – young people should feed their views in through their social workers and carers.

Action from last meeting - It was suggested that the next August meeting should be held during the day and include more young people. Perhaps a sports day would be a fun setting.

Emily said that the next meeting will be held:

- ☐ At the activity centre in Baildon
- ☐ On Wednesday 31 August 2022
- ☐ From 1.00pm to 4.00pm

The meeting will include team building games, archery and discussions. Everyone is welcome.

ACTION: Young people to put their names down to attend the next meeting.

Feedback on the new Care Leaver Entitlements and suggestions for a Young Person friendly guide.

Young people presented their feedback and suggestions on the new Care Leaver Entitlements document:

- ☐ There are some good, forward-thinking new entitlements: eg holiday money, driving lessons, payments for festivals.
- ☐ The increase in some existing entitlements is welcome.

But:

- ☐ The document is confusing.
- ☐ The terms used in the document to categorise young people in care don't make sense to young people themselves, so it is hard to work out their entitlements.
- ☐ It is hard for a young person to identify what category they are in and what they should be receiving.
- ☐ Young people said that different people receive different amounts for festivals and it is hard to understand why.

Young people recommended that the Council:

- ☐ reformat the entitlements document as a flow chart to make it easier to understand;
- ☐ make the language as clear and straightforward as possible, without complex or specialist terms (such as "relevant care leaver"); and
- ☐ produce an online version of the entitlements document that lets each young person fill in their age and circumstances and then tells them their personal entitlement.

ACTION: Philip to follow up these recommendations.

Presentation on Savings Policy

The meeting split into table discussions of questions related to the savings policy. Each table gave feedback on their discussions, as follows:

Question 1: Why do we need savings as young people?

- ☐ To save for the future.
- ☐ To learn to budget and manage money effectively.
- ☐ To be able to buy nice things (supports mental wellbeing).
- ☐ To buy a house or a car.
- ☐ To cope with the unexpected: eg needing to buy things for a new baby.
- ☐ For household set-up costs and electricity, gas and water; furnishings, cooker, toiletries, curtains.
- ☐ To meet rising costs of food and fuel.
- ☐ For starting to drive.

- ☐ For holidays and travelling.

Young people also said that:

- ☐ it isn't clear why some people (eg children in foster care) receive more than others – this inconsistency is unfair on both young people and their carers.
- ☐ on pocket money, it isn't clear:
 - o what pocket money they should receive;
 - o whether it should come directly to them or to their carer;
 - o whether they can decide for themselves whether to spend it (and what they spend it on) or save it; or
 - o whether they can decide for themselves to take money out of their account.

This needs to be clarified and consistent.

- ☐ For older young people, who receive a bursary while they are in college, it isn't clear what will happen when college finishes for the summer, if they are unable to get a job.
- ☐ Young people in children's homes don't receive enough pocket money to save it.

Question 2: What do other LAs do?

Young people looked through the savings policies of Coventry, Hertfordshire, Derbyshire and Kirklees local authorities. Each table gave feedback on their discussions, as follows:

- ☐ Young people need to know that their savings are there for them when they need them.
- ☐ They need to be able to afford a few comforts, beyond the basic necessities, especially if they are parents.
- ☐ Savings give young people choices.
- ☐ Young people need to be educated in how to save, spend and manage their money.

An adult said that, when young people move into semi-independent living at the age of 15, they receive an allowance for school attendance and are supported to budget, understand the costs of living, learn how to work out a gas bill etc. The aim is to make sure that, when they leave care, young people understand all their costs, so that they can budget and not be taken by surprise when the bills arrive.

- ☐ There are big differences between the allowances and other support that different local authorities provide. For example:
 - o Some pay a top-up allowance for young people who can't manage on Universal Credit.
 - o Some pay Council Tax until the Young Person reaches 25.

- o Some decorate and fit out accommodation for care leavers (eg furnishings, TV)
- o Provision of driving lessons varies widely.
- ☐ The care leaver's allowance paid by Bradford isn't enough to pay for hygienic accommodation with basic equipment such as a washing machine.

Philip said that Bradford has no formal savings policy for looked after children. This is a huge gap, and the Council will put a clear and fair policy in place very quickly.

ACTION: Helen Cliffe

Question 3 – what is a “substantial” amount of money to leave care with?

Each table gave feedback on their discussions, as follows:

- ☐ Enough to set up home and lead a decent life.
- ☐ Enough for a house. About £3k.
- ☐ £15k.
- ☐ More than we currently get.
- ☐ £20 per month savings.
- ☐ £2k.
- ☐ £3.5k
- ☐ Young people needed to know where to get advice, for example, on where to buy necessities at a good price.

An adult said that the average appeared to be around £2k to set up home. Another adult said that the leaving care allowance was due to increase shortly.

Break

Question for discussion over refreshment break: How do we make it fair?

Discussion over sandwiches concluded that Bradford needs a clear savings policy to ensure consistency and fairness.

Discussion around effective engagement of children and young people towards the development of the Corporate Parenting Strategy

Philip said that every local authority should have a corporate parenting strategy that sets out how it will act as a good parent. His team has started work on a strategy and wants to know what young people in Bradford think about the early draft – they don't want to create a big and boring document doesn't mean anything to the people it is about. The strategy needs to work for young people as well as for the local authority.

Philip asked each table to look at the document that set out what Bradford planned to do under each of the priorities in the strategy, discuss it and then feed back their views.

Each table gave feedback on their discussions, as follows:

-

General

- ☐ The language is confusing: it needs to be simplified, condensed and not repeat itself.

-

Priority 1

- ☐ Paragraph 2 should be the priority.
- ☐ Where the paper says that young people who are placed with extended family will have the best chance in life, it would be better to say that they **should** rather than **will** have a better life, because that is not always guaranteed.

-

Priority 2

- ☐ An adult said that the young person beside him feels heard, valued and spoken to with respect. Her setting has residents' meetings, which are encouraged by the setting. She feels important, and feels it is important that young people in care have their voices heard.

-

Priority 3

No feedback.

-

Priority 4

- ☐ Some young people in their GCSE year have been out of school for several months because they can't get a placement. Young people have potential and these are the most important years, yet they are sitting at home instead of being in school. The document shouldn't say that Bradford takes education of young people seriously, because it doesn't look as though it does.

-

Priority 5

- ☐ A young person who is in home schooling said that it had taken the local authority six months to arrange formal education, and he had then received five hours of home schooling. This was useless.
- ☐ An officer said that, at another meeting today, the price of living had been identified as the top priority for young people, with education second. A young person said that, to deal with the price of living, young people needed an education.
- ☐ Young people were not sure what "a strong sense of self" means. This should be replaced with "a strong sense of who you are". This suggestion received lots of "yes" responses from the room.

Priority 6

- Access to data needs to be sorted out. Giving young people laptops is fine, but not much use if they are blocked from all the sites they need to get onto, or if the wifi connection is poor quality. Young people need this to be sorted out so that they can do their revision or other work.

There had not been time to consider Priorities 7 or 8.

Amandip asked that young people let her have any more comments before they leave, or take the document away and send comments to her or Emily.

ACTION: Young people

Take away themes

The meeting agreed that Philip and his team would take away these three priorities to work on:

- Re-write the entitlements document in clearer language and with a flow chart and/or online interactive version so young people can easily see what they are entitled to.
- Write a Bradford savings policy that is consistent across all care settings and clear about how much a young person will receive and how much control they have over saving or spending it.
- Clarify the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy priorities and language so they make sense to young people.

ACTION: Philip Segurola

The meeting the theme for the next young person-led meeting would be the educational entitlement of Bradford's looked after young people.

Helen said that a dragon boat race would take place for 15-19 year olds on 01 July 2022. Anyone interested in taking part should let Emily know. Public transport costs would be paid for and there was no need to be able to swim.

ACTION: Anyone interested in taking part should let Emily know

Chair

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER

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Report of One Adoption West Yorkshire to the meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 20th July 2022

Subject:

A

ONE ADOPTION WEST YORKSHIRE (OAWY) ANNUAL REPORT

Summary statement:

This report provides an overview of the adoption service activity from April 2021 to March 2022.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

Please see Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Impact Assessment at Appendix 4.

Michelle Rawlings
Head of Agency

Portfolio:

Children and Families

Report Contact: Michelle Rawlings
Phone: 0113 535 0913
Mob: 07712 216979
E-mail:

Michelle.rawlings@oneadoptionwy.leeds.gov.uk

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

The Corporate Parenting Panel receive this annual report from One Adoption West Yorkshire to ensure that children in need of adoption and those adopted, along with their adoptive and birth families, receive the best possible outcomes and support.

2. BACKGROUND

Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield adoption functions as specified in the partnership agreement were delegated on the 1st April 2017 to Leeds City Council & One Adoption West Yorkshire formally opened on this date.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Please see attached report.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

The 2021/22 final outturn position of OAWY was an overspend of £9.2k, which was funded from the OAWY reserve.

The current year's budget is currently on track; any further Pay Award beyond 2% will have budget implications.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

It is a regulatory requirement on the Local Authority that this report is prepared and presented to the Corporate Parenting Board of the Council. The report is linked to the corporate risk on Safeguarding Children.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

There are no legal issues arising.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

No issues arising.

7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

A The reduction in travel for staff across the region supports the greenhouse gas emissions impact in reducing the carbon footprint associated with car travel. Since March 2020 all staff have been working more frequently from home, significantly reducing the carbon footprint associated with car travel.

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

There are no community safety implications in this report.

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

There are no issues relating to human rights.

7.5 TRADE UNION

Consultation with Trade Unions takes place when required.

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

There are no ward implications

7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)

Not applicable

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Implications for children and young people are evidenced within the Annual Report.

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

There are no issues arising; all information is sufficiently anonymised.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None

9. OPTIONS

This report is for information and for the panel to note the report and continue to support the work the local authority and OAWY regarding adoptive families.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Corporate Parenting Panel receives this report and continues to support the work of One Adoption West Yorkshire and the local authority to ensure our adopted children and families receive the best possible support.

11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - OAWY Annual Report 2021/22

Appendix 2 – Voice and Influence Report 2021/22

Appendix 3 – OAWY 3 Year Plan 2021-2024

Appendix 4 – OAWY Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Impact Assessment

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Not applicable



One Adoption West Yorkshire Annual Report 2021/22

June 2022

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report sets out the developments within One Adoption West Yorkshire from April 2021 to March 2022.

2 Background information

- 2.1 Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield adoption functions as specified in the partnership agreement were delegated on the 1st of April 2017 to Leeds City Council and One Adoption West Yorkshire formally opened on this date.
- 2.2 The regionalisation of adoption services by the government as a structural reform programme is almost complete with 31 Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) and 145 local authorities (LA's) now live, with the remaining 6 local authorities likely join existing RAA's. The government is supporting the RAA's and is funding a small national team to develop and improve services and support for vulnerable children and families within the adoption system, working closely with Association of Directors of Children's services (ADCS) and others across the sector.
- 2.3 The latest figures released nationally show that there continue to be more adopters available than children with an adoption plan. However, there is a mismatch between the needs of the children requiring adoption and the adopters willing to consider these priority children. Nationally there has been a fall in the numbers of children with an adoption plan over the last three years. However, this is not being replicated in the West Yorkshire region, with numbers remaining broadly consistent.
- 2.4 The future of the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) has now been confirmed until 2025, along with funding for the National Adoption Strategic Group. Sarah Johal, National Adoption Strategic Lead, continues to bring together RAA Leaders from across the country to focus on developing and improving adoption practice in relation to adopter recruitment, matching children with adopters and the provision of adoption support services.

3 Main issues

3.1 Use of Resources

3.1.1 Staffing

There are currently several interim appointments within the management and senior management team of One Adoption West Yorkshire with Michelle Rawlings (Head of Agency), Rhian Beynon (Service Delivery Manager with a Recruitment and Assessment Lead) and Nicola Steele (Service Manager with a Family Finding Lead) all being in temporary posts until the Autumn. Permanent recruitment to posts is being explored as the impact of uncertainty is acknowledged.

- 3.1.2 There have been several changes over the year as some experienced staff have retired and others have moved on to new roles or reduced hours for a better work life balance. This has caused pressures at different times in parts of the service, but as we move into 2022/23, we have successfully recruited to most vacant posts.
- 3.1.3 Morale for staff has continued to fluctuate, with this being impacted by both work pressures and external factors. Wellbeing was a focus of the staff Winter Conference and of mid-year appraisal discussions. Leadership check ins have been introduced for staff to communicate directly with the Head of Agency regarding queries or concerns. Discussions are underway with staff regarding retuning to offices to ensure an appropriate balance between home and office working.
- 3.1.4 Sickness levels have remained low in comparison to children's social care.

3.1.5 Duty System

The duty and advice service has continued to run as before on a remote basis, with duty managers overseeing a daily check in each morning where tasks are able to be allocated and workers keeping in touch with one another throughout the day via MS Teams messaging. The number of calls to duty has remained consistent, there were a higher number of calls relating to letterbox in the first part of the year, but these have subsequently levelled off as the backlog of letterbox exchanges was cleared.

- 3.1.6 The 'choice' system for callers has continued to be in place, however the line 2 option (letterbox) has continued to be suspended to allow business support colleagues to concentrate on the actual exchanges and put a 'post-pandemic' system

in place for managing these going forward. As before, this has meant that line option 3 (the main duty line) has responded to all calls other than those enquiring about becoming an adopter. We are planning to start to utilise line option 2 again in May 2022.

- 3.1.7 The total number of calls to the duty and advice line for the second half of the year is 1764, with an annual total of 3,626. This averages at 69.7 calls per week or 13.9 calls per day. 309 calls (8.5%) related to people enquiring about adoption; 3317 calls (91.5%) were relating to support and letterbox.

3.1.8 Accommodation & service delivery

Staff are continuing to work predominantly from home, though some teams are beginning to work from the office more regularly. Workspace is now available in all 5 of our partner local authorities for teams to come together. This space is more limited than prior to the Covid 19 pandemic and systems are in place to ensure workers can have a workspace when travelling into an office. In most areas current workspaces are temporary with exploration ongoing in relation to future office use. Discussions are taking place with staff teams regarding future working patterns and service delivery by One Adoption West Yorkshire.

- 3.1.9 Results from the LCC Future Working Arrangements Survey showed 61% of OAWY respondents would like to work from home 'most or all of the time' and that 0% would like to work from the office all the time. This suggests staff have found working from home beneficial. There is no indication that home working has impacted upon service delivery, though there is a recognition of the importance of peer support and practice development from time spent together.

3.2 Partnership working

3.2.1 Operational Leads Meetings

Over the last year this group has continued to meet to discuss children's care planning in relation to adoption and the interface between the West Yorkshire Children's Services teams and One Adoption West Yorkshire. Discussions have taken place regarding joint auditing of children's adoption permanence plans and adoption related training for children's social workers and foster carers. Discussions have taken place regarding arrangements in relation to Foster Carer adoptions, where there is often evidence of delay in achieving permanence.

3.2.2 Multidisciplinary Team

Over the last year there has been considerable change in the team staffing, with two Clinical Psychologists and a Speech and Language Therapist being appointed in the summer of 2021. A Social Work team manager and senior therapeutic social worker were recruited to replace team members who left due to retirement and finding work opportunities outside OAWY. The Clinical Psychology Lead also left the team in early 2022 and a new Psychology Lead has been successfully appointed at a consultant grade. This change has allowed the opportunity for restructuring the Multidisciplinary team, with the Social Work team manager, managing the MDT service as MDT Team Manager, alongside the Consultant Psychologist to ensure a coherent service.

- 3.2.3 With all staffing in place, this has allowed the team the opportunity to continue to develop their service and develop a clear clinical model which embeds the MDT within OAWY. The model builds upon and supports the core adoption support offer, making MDT more accessible to families and OAWY staff. Key areas of development include supporting OAWY Social Workers in using and developing their skills in Theraplay, DDP and Life story work through supervision and developing and expanding the Therapeutic groups for families to access through ASF, ensuring that this support is provided equally across all the regions.

3.2.4 Agency Medical Advisors and GP's

Medical advisors have continued to work hard during the Covid 19 pandemic to ensure that they provide medical information for children in a timely way for their adoption plans to progress and to offer support to our adoption panels. We have continued to run 8 panels per month and have secured a medical advisor from Wakefield for the 8th panel. One of our Leeds Medical Advisors is due to retire soon, and we anticipate a smooth handover to her replacement. We have reviewed and updated the medical protocol in July this year with input from the medical advisors and local authority operational leads. GP capacity for undertaking medical assessments of adopters has increased over the year and we no longer face significant delays. We do however continue to face some challenges from a small number of GP's who have refused to carry out medicals regarding prospective adopters, have set their own fees or who request OAWY pay the CCG Fees. In these cases, issues have been escalated within the Clinical Commissioning Groups locally.

3.2.5 Virtual school heads (VSH)

Our Education Lead continues to meet with the Virtual School Heads on a termly basis. At the last meeting there was a particular focus on the increase in the number of pupils being excluded – both officially and un-officially; a plan is being drafted as to how we can support parents to manage the situation when this is the case.

3.2.6 The Education Advice line continues to be well used by parents and professionals alike. It is evident that the Virtual Schools across the region are gathering momentum in supporting their schools to become more attachment and trauma informed, understanding this is key in being able to further support schools across the region. Kinship also attends the meetings and will be included in any planning.

3.2.7 Special Guardianship Regional Work

Financial support - the financial offer is being implemented in 4/5 of the local authorities. Wakefield have decided not to proceed with implementing the regional approach and will continue with their current offer to special guardians. The implementation of the financial support policy has stalled due to issues around the waiving of the means test for non-agency SGOs where the carer is in receipt of means tested benefits. Policy and legal advice indicate that the means test cannot be waived where children were not previously looked after, and Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit must be deducted unless the child was previously looked after. Local Authorities will need to complete calculations to gauge the amount of child element in Universal Credit in these cases. We are awaiting further advice from Counsel before meeting with leaders in Leeds and Kirklees to reach a point of agreement on this issue. At that stage the Leeds policy is ready to be implemented. This will be used as a template within the other 3 local authorities.

3.2.8 The Kinship (formerly Grandparents Plus) project is progressing well with the contract having been renewed for a further two years until March 2024. There remain three project workers offering 1:1 Support to kinship carers in the region, alongside support groups and access to telephone advice. Between January and March 2022 166 carers accessed the advice line, 5 accessed peer mentoring, 54 accessed support groups and project workers secured 21 grants totalling £8142 for West Yorkshire carers. Over the year Kinship have given 1:1 support to 122 carers.

3.2.9 The Kinship regional Facebook group now has over 284 very active members. This allows us to connect with many Special Guardians in the region and hear their views. There has been a marked increase in the number of younger carers engaging with Kinship. The emerging themes from Special Guardians this quarter have been Education, Finances, Diagnosis Pathways and Mental Health. The cost-of-living increases have been an additional pressure on many low-income families, pushing them further into poverty. There remains a significant Covid backlog for medical assessments resulting in significant delays in children receiving diagnosis or support and there has been an increase in Special Guardians presenting with mental health difficulties due to the prolonged Covid situation. The support groups run by Kinship have been a lifeline for Special Guardians during the last 6 months and have provided training and support:

- *“Lovely to meet you all today, what a lovely group of people, so glad I came to the meeting.”*
- *“After our meeting, my daughter said that you were lovely and the type of person who we should be working with”.*
- *“Thank you so much, this is the sort of thing I was looking for”.*

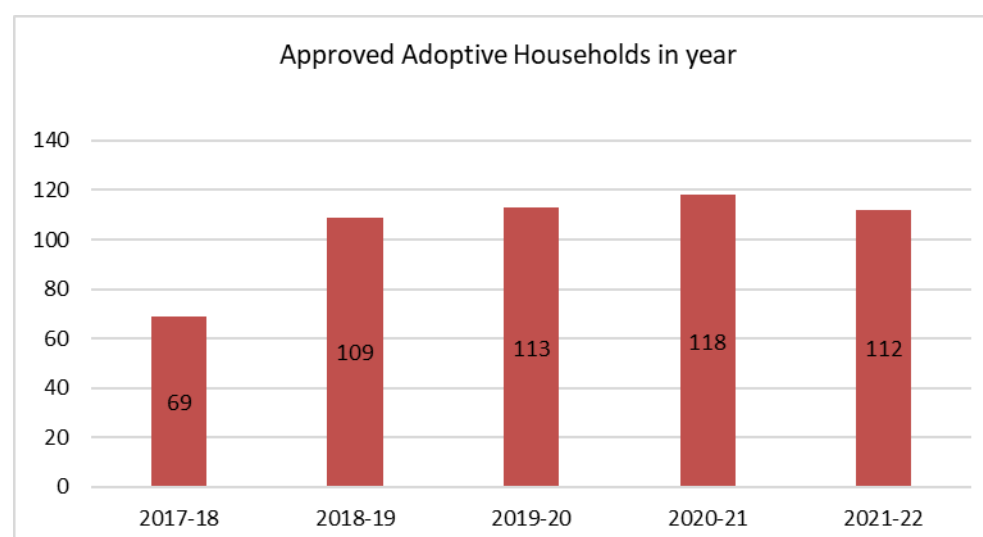
3.2.10 Guiding Guardians has continued to run over the October to April period with 19 families attending programs in October, January and April. OAWY made the group applications to the fund on behalf of the region.

- *“I thought the program was amazing and feel I’ve come away from it with answers and a great understanding which can only help me so much. So happy I could be part of it thank you”.*
- *“Really good, thoughtful examples as to approaches and how to respond went a long way beyond previous courses and reading; it really helped to reshape my understanding of ‘therapeutic parenting’.”*
- *“This programme is invaluable to anybody who is a Special Guardian and struggling to support children who are trying to deal with things they have had to deal with earlier in their lives.”*

3.2.11 Rhian Beynon’s co-ordination role has now finished. OAWY will continue to manage and oversee the Kinship contract and Rhian will support the implementation of the Leeds policy following advice from counsel. Kirklees will facilitate the Guiding Guardians programme going forward and support regular regional practice meetings.

3.3 Performance Management

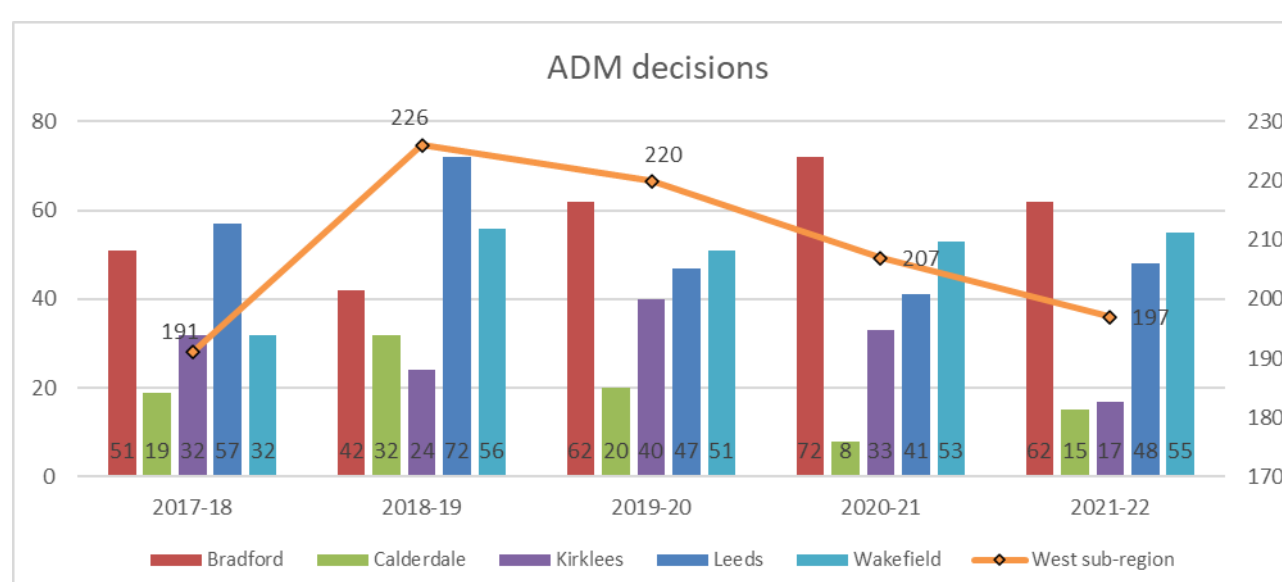
3.3.1 The agency provides quarterly reports to the management board. This data provided has developed over the last 5 years and is gathered to ensure that we are aware of how much work is undertaken, how well it was undertaken and if anyone is any better off.



A) Sufficiency: Are enough of the right kind of adopters being recruited and approved to meet the needs of the children waiting:

3.3.2 The children with a plan ratified for adoption during 2021/22

Between April 2021 and March 2022, 197 children had a plan for adoption ratified by the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities Agency Decision Makers. Of the 197 children with a plan for adoption, there were 98 female and 99 male children. In total, this is a reduction of 10 from last year's full year figure of 207 children from across the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities.



3.3.3 Ethnicity

Of the 197 children with a plan for adoption ratified this year, 134 (83%) children were from white British backgrounds (including information not obtained) and 33 children (17%) were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, including children from eastern European, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds.

3.3.4 Placement with Siblings

As a general principle, siblings will be placed together; however, due to the individual needs of children, this is not always appropriate and cannot always be achieved. It is essential that sibling assessments are carried out to ensure good quality decision making and support plans are evidence based if children are placed together or apart. Of the 74 individual siblings placed during the year, 31 individual children were placed apart, for which 29 the plan was to be placed apart.

3.3.5 Adopter recruitment

112 adoptive households were approved during the year, this is a slight decrease compared to the previous two years.

3.3.6 Within the 112 households, 206 individuals were approved throughout 2021-22. Of these, 20 (10%) are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds (last year was also 10%). We need to improve our percentage of BAME carers and keep a focus on ensuring that we approve a full range of adoptive families to meet the range of children requiring placement, while at the same time not relying on matching children with families of the same ethnicity, but rather a family who can meet their holistic needs. We continue to work with the national recruitment campaign, and it's work on recruiting adopters who can reflect the heritage of all our children.

3.3.7 Households approved for sibling groups has increased by 3 this year with 27 households approved for sibling groups, all 27 for 2 children. The Sibling Adopter training course has helped to shift thinking of those prospective adopters in being able to have the confidence to consider adopting brothers and sisters together. 19 households approved were open to an Early Permanence Placement. This has reduced but has, nevertheless, exceeded the demands for these placements over the year.

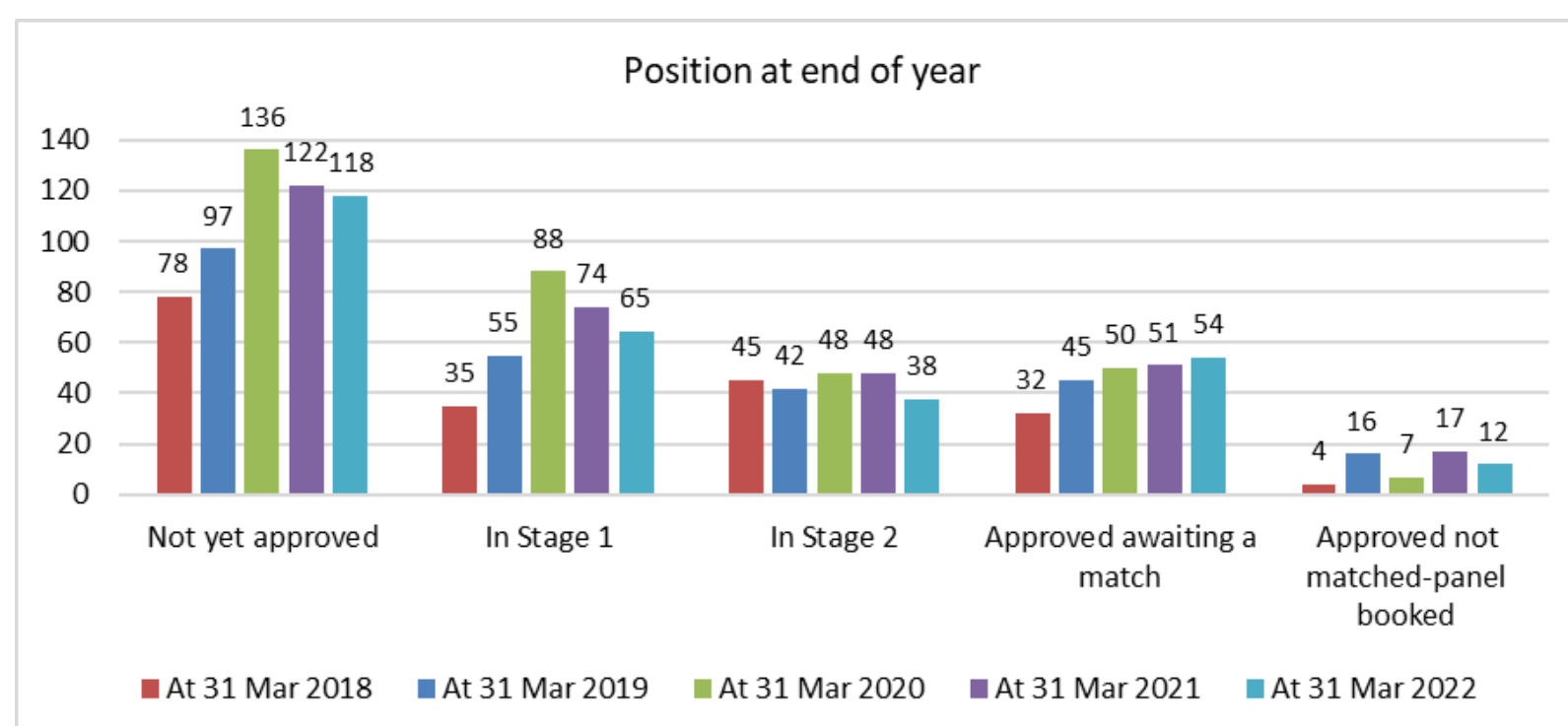
3.3.8 Children currently with an adoption plan

As of the end of March 2022 there are 143 children with a plan for adoption, and have a Placement Order, from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities not currently placed and requiring adopters. 85 children out of the 143 are 0 - 2 years, 37 are between 2 and 4 years and 21 children are 5 years of age or older.

3.3.9 From the children waiting for a placement there are 65 girls and 78 boys, and 20% are children from BME backgrounds (including children from eastern European, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds). 71 children are from sibling groups. The plans for these children are actively reviewed with the local authorities with clear monitoring and tracking systems to understand the range of family finding activity going on for these children and whether adoption remains the right plan for each child. The delays for these children are related primarily to the needs of the children; the need to place siblings together, the age of the children or their special needs or complexity.

3.3.10 Adopters available

As of the end of March 2021, there are 54 approved adoptive households that have not been matched and 5 are in the process of looking and are in discussions about considering placements and 12 have a panel date booked.



3.3.11 On the 31st of March 2022 118 adopters are in the process of assessment (in stage 1 or 2, or on hold pre-approval) although these will take several months to become approved. This is a positive picture, however, a more nuanced approach to recruitment and approval is required to ensure that we have adopters who can meet the needs of children with a plan for adoption and particularly the children we know who wait longer. This will be discussed later in the report.

B) Timeliness: Are children being matched and placed without delay including those children who wait longer?

3.3.12 Children matched in the year for adoption

Between April 2021 and March 2022, 182 children from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities were matched with families at adoption panels; this has remained stable compared to last year from across the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities and is positive given the pandemic. From April 2021 to March 2022, 18% (33) of the children matched were from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and this is extremely positive news as these children often wait longer to be placed.

- 133 of the children matched were 0 to 2 years old.
- 34 children matched were 2 to 4 years old.
- 15 children were aged 5 years or older.
- 80 children were part of a sibling group (of the 182 matched).
- 49 children (of the 182 matched) were placed and are part of a sibling group of which 21 were placed apart, the plan for 20 of the 21 children was to be placed apart due to their individual needs.

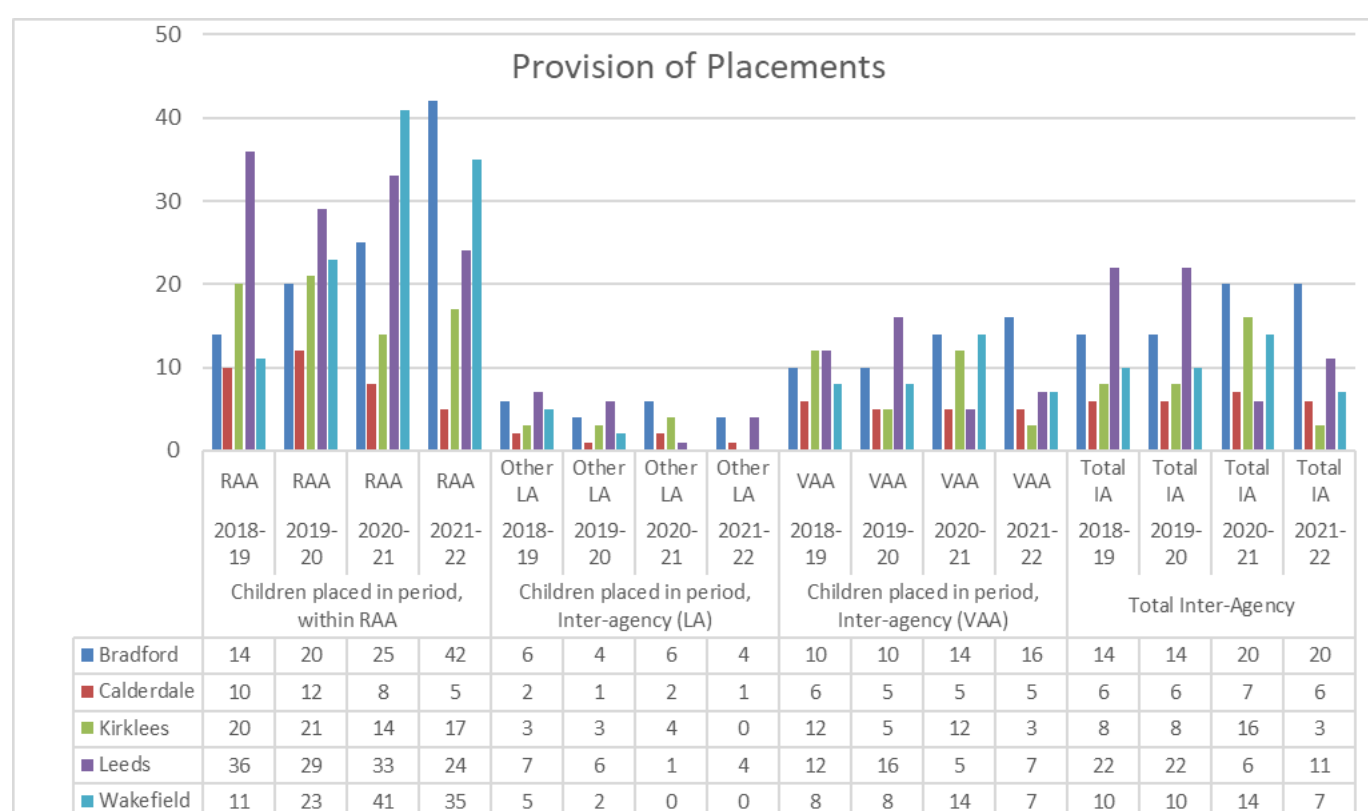
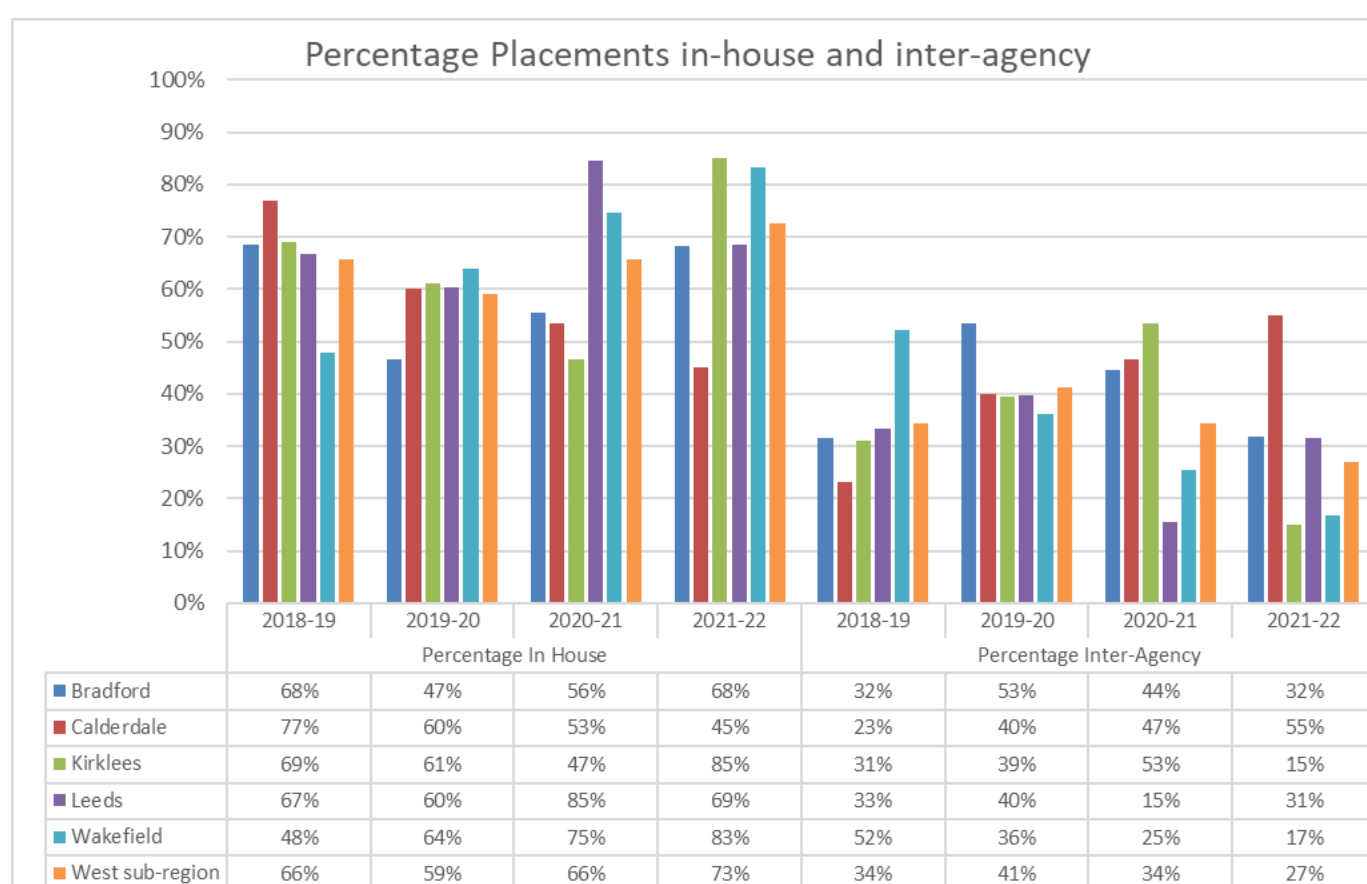
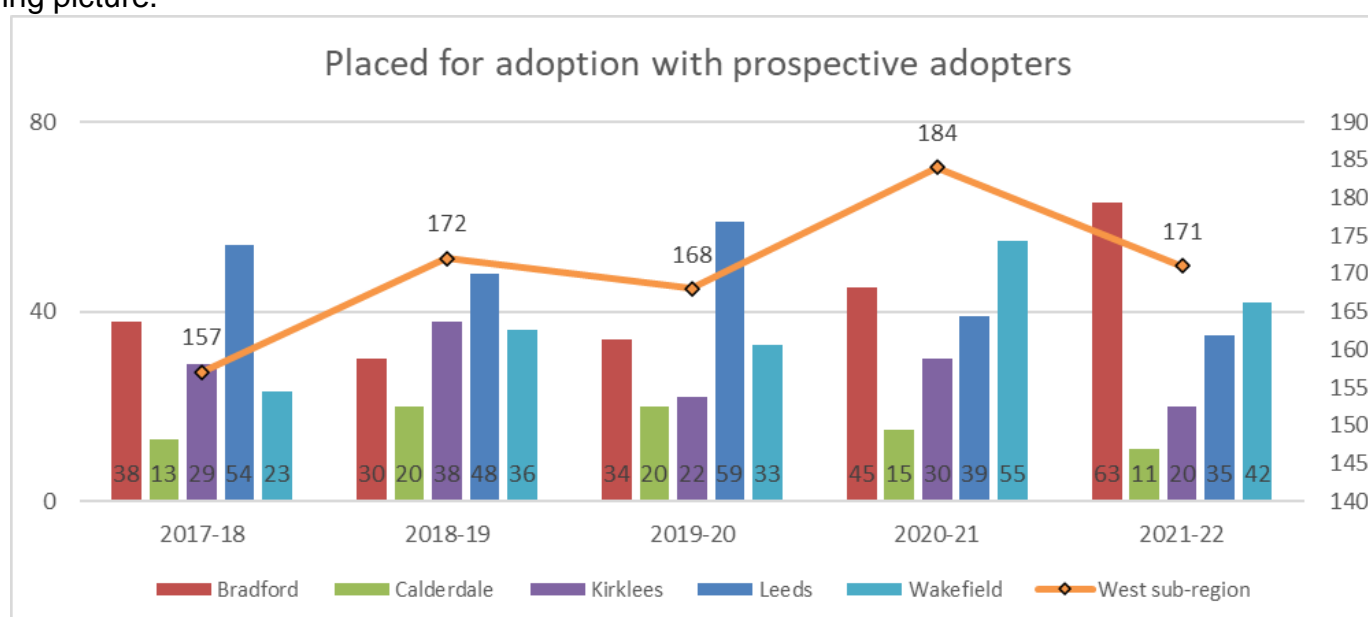
- 15 children (of the 182 matched) had been previously placed in early permanence placements (7 placed EPP during the year); 7 of these 15 children have been adopted in the year.

3.3.13 Provision of Placements

171 children were placed this year. The percentage of placements provided in-house within the region has again increased significantly this year.

- 124 children within OAWY.
- 9 children with other local authorities or other Regional Adoption Agencies.
- 38 children with Voluntary Adoption Agencies

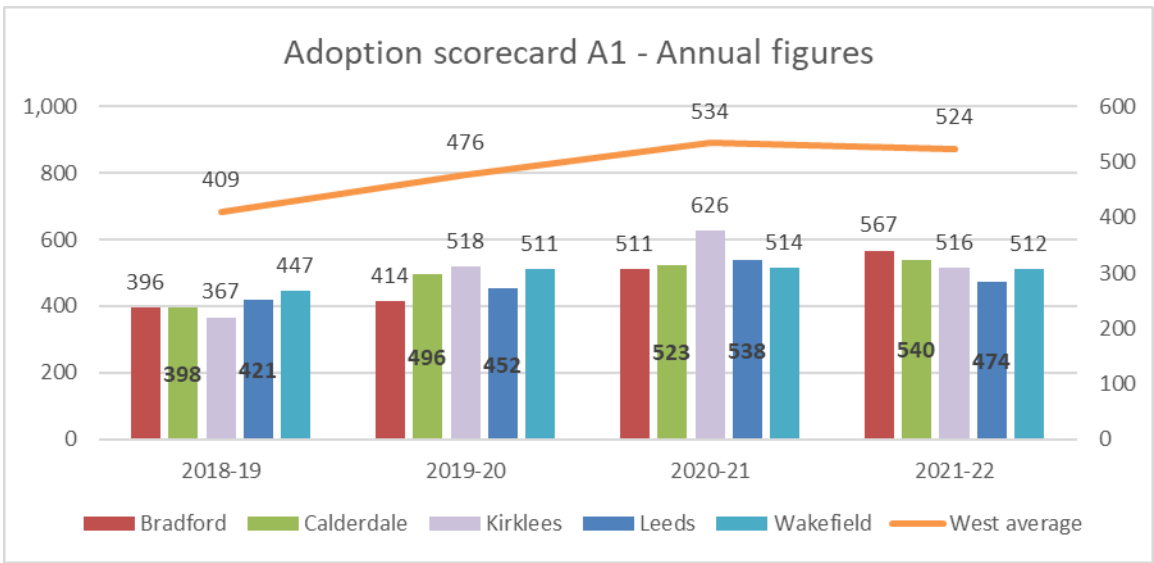
The percentage this year was 73% in house and 27% interagency. Last year it was 66% in house and 34% interagency and is an improving picture.



3.3.14 Adoption Scorecards

A1 indicator

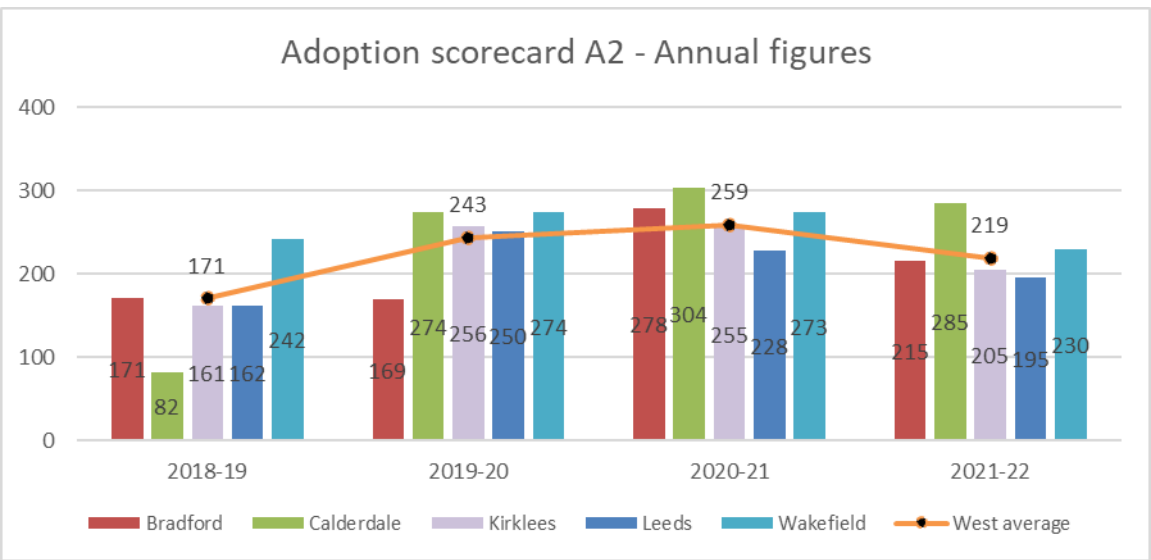
The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (indicator A1) for children in West Yorkshire is 524 days, the National Indicator target is 426 days.



- 21 of the 167 children adopted entered care more than 3 years ago.
- 112 of the 167 children adopted were hard to place children.
- 71 of the 167 children adopted took more than 500 days between entering care and being placed,
- Of the 71 children that took more than 500 days 54 of the 71 were hard to place children with 27 having 2 or more characteristics

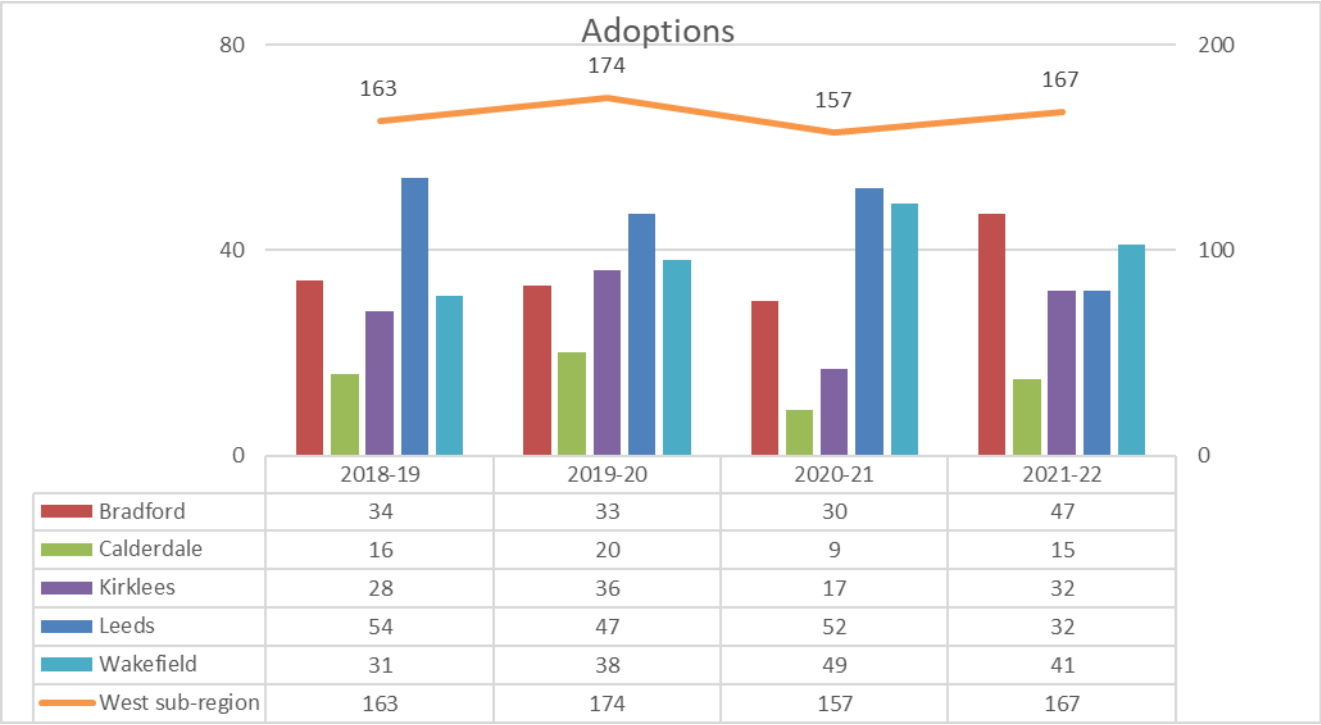
3.3.15 **A2 indicator**

The average time for those children adopted in the period, between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (Indicator A2) for children in West Yorkshire has decreased to 219 days, the National indicator target is 121 days. This is above the national indicator and reflects an issue of a disconnect between the matching criteria of adopters available and the complexity of children waiting for adoption. However, as discussed in the above paragraph the cohort of these children adopted is important to note and the fact that children have secured permanence and an adoptive family is positive for each of these individual children.



3.3.16 Children adopted from care

The number of children who have been formally adopted has increased by 10 (167) with 13.6% of children leaving care being adopted across the region. The National average is 12%.



3.4 Practice, quality of provision and management oversight

3.4.1 Recruitment and Assessment

We have approved 112 adoptive families over the course of this year and matched 106 families with children, all of these being children from the West Yorkshire region. We have had fewer enquiries in 2021/22 than we did last year but the number of these proceeding to an initial visit has remained similar. We no longer have a backlog of families waiting for assessment and families are allocated at the point they are ready for assessment. We are increasing our online marketing activity to encourage enquiries and our social media presence has improved significantly this year. The numbers of families entering stage 2 have stayed consistent. We have continued to use sessional workers to support capacity in the service and ensure timeliness, though more recently we are managing to allocate far more of our assessments to OAWY workers. Following retirement, we no longer have the additional three recruitment and assessment social work posts.

3.4.2 The feedback from adopters regarding their experience has overall been very positive. Feedback from the 2021 annual adopter survey:

- *Really quickly managed to get help and support in place. Very much appreciate having N (OAWY social worker) in our lives.*
- *R our support worker has been amazing.*
- *T our social worker has been more than brilliant at supporting us. Without her I really think our daughter may not have remained with us.*
- *Very helpful social worker who has helped us with some tricky issues as a family.*
- *Our adoption support team is brilliant.*

3.4.3 Feedback from a Bradford IRO:

- *"N and J wanted it to be noted that the support they have received from T (OAWY) and S (SW) is exceptional and that they wanted to thank them for all the support they have provided to them as adopters and to the children. It's clear that the consistency in workers for these children, along with the day-to-day support given, has enabled N and J to feel well supported, which in turn has ensured the children are very well cared for and settled."*

3.4.4 Further feedback from S and K, prospective adopters (EPP):

- *"There is so much support, it has been absolutely fantastic. The professional support has helped us be more realistic". The couple also said that they would love to "pay back" the support they have received by providing it to other prospective adopters.*

3.4.5 Feedback from a colleague in children's services:

- *"You have made my first adoption experience less difficult than I thought it would be! Thank you for supporting me with this, it's been a pleasure."*

3.4.6 Our training offer has continued to develop. 112 households attended the preparing to adopt training in 2021/22, 61 households have attended our Adopting Siblings training, 127 have attended our connected by adoption training, 54 have attended EPP training, 33 have attended our Experienced Adopter training, and 21 have attended our Foster Carer Adopting training. Some feedback from the Preparing to Adopt training:

- *"It was thought provoking and challenged some of my pre-existing assumptions. I came away with a much greater understanding of adoption. Also, great to meet other potential adopters and have first-hand knowledge from an adoptee and an adoptive parent."*
- *"I feel like I gained a lot of insight, knowledge and confidence from the training. It was great to hear from others on the same journey and begin to build a network of friends who can relate to possible experiences I might go through."*
- *"I learned so much and have so much more to think about but know that me and much partner are on the right path and excited to carry on our journey. I also didn't realise we would make the connection we did with other prospective adopters."*

3.4.7 We have been working on reintroducing the Birth Parent workshop and plan going to run classroom training 6 times in 2022/23 in addition to some online training. We have commissioned Adoption UK to provide all our new adopters with access to the Adopter Passport, where they can access many resources, webinars and videos and complete modules on different areas of adoption. We have also delivered Brain Based Parenting online to many of our stage 2 adopters:

- *“It was very useful and explained in a very clear and practical way - even though I have read a lot about this, it is fantastic to have a clear reminder and practical tips. It will really help me explain my younger son's reactions to my older son - who struggles with the way we try to therapeutically parent our younger son - and my husband, who tends to revert to traditional parenting”*
- *“We attended the training last night and thought it was a really interesting and well-presented session which was really informative that we enjoyed. We are approved adopters but looking for a match now, so always happy to have resources available that would help us when we start our actual parenting journey.”*

3.4.8 The Stage 1 restructure has been in place for 12 months now. A recent audit of stage one work has shown greater consistency in decision making and good evidence of management oversight, along with a bespoke approach to meeting the needs of the enquirers; arranging interpreters, rearranging video visits to face to face, and meeting to provide information even when it was known an enquiry could not progress. This evidences a responsiveness to individual need and good customer service. A recent Mystery Shopper exercise gave very positive feedback about our helpful and open approach to enquirers:

- *“The advisor was quite dynamic, quite friendly. They showed a willingness to help further. Most of the time they sounded quite positive, suggesting solutions and expressing support.”*
- *“The advisor was dynamic and positive. They were helpful, I appreciated their offer to email further information and the invite to attend a meeting.”*
- *“The staff member was engaged, positive and really was keen to help me overcome what I saw as issues. They explained that the stability and length of the relationship was all that mattered and they didn't seem at all put off by the fact we were a same sex couple. They just emphasised that a strong relationship was all they were looking for.”*
- *“I thought the Agency came across as really understanding and seeking to remove as many barriers as possible while ensuring the child was getting the best possible options.”*

3.4.9 Having a strong management focus on the front end of the recruitment service did lead us to decrease the amount of time taken between enquiries, initial visits and receiving and accepting a registration of interest in the first half of the year. In the second half of the year our stage one timescales have been impacted by a shortage of adoption advisors due to staff moving on to study or take up new roles. We have now recruited and will be fully staffed in June. We have also increased the forms embedded in the OAWY website to reduce reliance on post and email, which should reduce delays further. We continue to experience delays at all stages of the process due to GPs being unable to prioritise medical appointments and reports.

3.4.10 We continue to take steps to increase the number of adopter enquiries through our marketing strategy for priority children, and through increasing the possible number of attendees at online information events, which take place twice per month. A key priority for us is recruiting families who can provide a home for siblings. Throughout 2021/22 27 households were approved for sibling groups, an increase of 3 households from the previous year. 61 households attended our sibling training which runs every two months, and we have held a sibling specific profile day for families across the country. Discussions are ongoing regarding our strategy to increase further the number of sibling adopters and a focus group with adoptive families is due to take place in early July to consider recruitment strategy and the support provided post placement. We continue to support the national recruitment campaign and it's work on recruiting adopters for siblings.

3.4.11 A priority for the next year is to increase Early Permanence placements in the region. 19 households approved in 2021/22 were open to Early Permanence Placements, which is 5 fewer households than in the previous year. The number exceeds the number of children identified in the year to be placed via Early Permanence. However, we have still had to place two children externally due to not having families that could meet their needs in the timescales. Numbers of children identified for EPP remain low across the region. One Adoption were successful in a pan regional bid for funding to develop Early Permanence in West Yorkshire and have appointed a project lead to take this forward.

3.4.12 Advertising and marketing

Over the next six months we will be significantly increasing our marketing output, with a combination of paid and free campaigns across our social and digital channels. General brand awareness campaigns to attract top-of-the-funnel audiences will be interspersed with more focused campaigns to help recruit more adopters for sibling groups, children of Black and mixed-Black heritage and older children. We will continue to promote our information events but will have greater focus on our adoption support offer and what makes our offer unique. Social and digital channels will continue to be the key platforms used however we will consider out-of-home and/or radio campaigns later in the year if recruitment numbers remain low. Internal resource to support our social media campaigns will be increased to help deliver more strategic and coordinated messaging.

3.4.13 We are developing a suite of mobile-only landing pages on the website, to improve the overall user experience for people who find our website through a search engine. These pages will be designed to respond to specific search terms used and

will offer a more focused response to individual queries. The improved speed and relevance to search terms will help our Google Ads perform better, which will in turn mean better value for money.

3.4.14 Adoption Panels

Panels are still being run virtually via zoom and this continues to operate well. We hold 8 panels per month and capacity has been less of a challenge in recent months. Bridget Puddepha and Michaela Bass have joined as Panel Chairs bringing the number of Panel Chairs to 4, which has been helpful in managing capacity and covering leave. The panel chairs provide a biannual report for the adoption agency and this feedback is discussed with the local authority adoption leads and decision makers regularly. Lois Highton continues in her role as panel advisor and the consistency and scrutiny she provides has contributed to the smooth running of our panels and an improvement in the quality of paperwork being presented to panel due to the feedback she provides to workers. The business support teams are central to the effective running of panels and the feedback regarding the quality of the organisation of these and minutes are very positive.

3.4.15 Panel Members access their paperwork and join panels either via iPads or their own equipment with SharePoint/secure email providing a secure platform for panel members to read their paperwork. This has helped us with improving diversity of our panels with panel members being able to join from other areas of the country. We are looking to move more panel members to accessing their paperwork via SharePoint as this is more user friendly and plan to use PAR accounts with multi factor authentication to make this happen in the coming months.

3.4.16 Family Finding

197 children have received a should be placed for adoption decision this year, this is down slightly on the previous year of 207 children. 183 children have been matched with their adopters in this year, 171 of which have been placed for adoption. The number of children regionally leaving care through adoption has increased in the last year and is above the national average.

3.4.17 The family finding teams have worked creatively to undertake family finding and achieve matches for children. There have been additional pressures on all the teams in family finding; the complexities of transitions during the pandemic have remained challenging, this has meant an increase in the work required to ensure effective planning to ensure transitions can be undertaken safely as well as a higher level of support needed for both adopters and foster carers. Over the last few months of the year, we have moved to more face-to-face meetings and visits, and some of the additional pressures that came with the covid pandemic have reduced.

3.4.18 There has been an increase in the percentage of children placed with One Adoption West Yorkshire families during 2021/22, from 66% (during 2020/21) to 73% of children placed. This has been possible due to the number of adopters that progressed through for approval in the last 2 years. As a service we are working hard to ensure that children are matched with adoptive families within or close to the West Yorkshire area. The OAWY commissioned contract with the Voluntary Alliance entered its second year and we exceeded the number of 30 adoptive placements for West Yorkshire children. As this contract enters its third and final year analysis will be completed regarding whether the contract has met the aims and objectives and if a further contract should be commissioned. Alongside the various family finding methodologies that we utilised this year we have invited 2 VAA adopters to be featured at each of our internal linking meetings twice a month. This gives family finders an opportunity to find out more information about VAA adopters living in or close to West Yorkshire before other RAAs and for links to be made for our children who are waiting longest.

3.4.19 Workers from the Local Authorities have continued to value the support of the family finders in OAWY with positive feedback from Local Authority Social Workers being received:

- I just wanted the opportunity to praise one of your workers. I have been in social work many years, but new to the adoption/ family finding process. She has gone above and beyond to advise me on the processes and what to expect now and moving on. She has ensured that all documentation has been processed in a timely manner to avoid drift and delay and is already ready to look at going to an internal matching panel on Thursday. I would just like it noted my praise, as in social work as we all know, good work can often go unrecognised.*
- I just wanted to raise with you how helpful she has been during this last week with my EPP case. It's my first EPP case and she's really taken the time to explain everything to me which I really appreciate. It was also clear that she had really taken the time to read the case files in great detail before the linking meeting and she has done an amazing job with the EPP paperwork, she has kindly taken the lead on this and done the majority of the paperwork which I really appreciate, and I just cannot thank her enough for this!*

3.4.20 Profiling events have continued to be delivered virtually with five events taking place over the year. We have changed the format of events, moving from 'live' Skype events to pre-recorded weekend events where adopters can log in and view children's profiles over a longer timeframe. This change was made following feedback from adopters regarding the online profiling events and has enabled the service to significantly increase the number of adopters viewing the profiles from One Adoption West Yorkshire. The events have engaged adopters nationally with a particular focus on engaging adopters approved or in Stage Two of the assessment process within OAWY or with local VAAs. These events take a great deal of

organisation, and the business support staff are key in ensuring the booking system works well and that the technology is working to manage such big events. One of these events specifically focused on profiling children part of a sibling group and two sibling groups were matched from this targeted event. The children featured at these events are children who wait longer for an adoptive family and 75 children have been profiled at the events (some children will have been featured at more than one event). 670 adoptive families have attended the events, with 103 expressions of interest being made in West Yorkshire Children. 6 linking visits with adopters have taken place and 4 matches have been made with the other 2 progressing to panel. Since moving to weekend pre-recorded events the number of adopters in attendance and the expression of interests have risen significantly. There is a plan to continue to run our online profiling events with the next one scheduled for April 2022.

3.4.21 We received the following feedback from adopters who attended the online profiling events:

- *“Fantastic presentation, very good detail, absolutely loved the event in its shape!”*
- *“I found it particularly helpful to see and hear the family finders talking about the children”*

3.4.22 Our first fun day since the start of the pandemic took place in October 2021 and 9 children attended (5 single children and 4 children part of a sibling group) and 31 adopters. This event was kept small due to needing to continue to navigate the continued risks associated with COVID 19. 16 expressions of interest were made at this event and 1 of these has progressed to a match. There is a plan to run a further three fun days next year with the first event scheduled for May 2022.

3.4.23 We received feedback from one social worker following the fun day that said, *“two of my adopters are now considering matches they wouldn’t have before the event, it was a very well-run event”*.

3.4.24 OAWY is utilising Link Maker to profile children to OAWY approved families as well as being able to use the system to profile children to a wider reach of adopters, including targeted profiling to adopters through the contract with the Voluntary Adoption Alliance and nationally where needed. Internal linking meetings continue to be practitioner led with both family finding and adoption social workers profiling the children and families they are family finding for. We have included the profiling of targeted adopters from voluntary adoption agencies who are part of the VAA contract since November 2021 at our internal linking meetings. We are planning to strengthen our connections with other local RAAs in the year ahead, namely those in other areas of Yorkshire as at times they have surplus adopters. We will be inviting them to feature their adopters at our internal linking meeting from May 2022 and exploring hosting fun days pan regionally. We continue to have several family finding methodologies to support children being matched with adoptive families.

3.4.25 Adoption Support

a) **Adoption support:** Do children and families have timely access to high quality support services?

The teams have continued to work mostly from home as their base but with increasing numbers of contacts with families or other professionals being carried out face to face; we have recognised that there are occasions (for ease or to make best use of time) that a virtual response is appropriate. The teams are benefitting from spending time together in office bases working as a team and having face to face team meetings. Discussions are taking place about what the future work pattern will look like; how often teams will work in the office base (once a week, for example), and this will form our future hybrid model of working along with the face to face and virtual approaches detailed above.

3.4.26 Some feedback from adopters about the work undertaken by OAWY staff in the last 6 months include:

- *I just wanted to thank you personally for all the support you have given us as a family over the years. It made all the difference to us to know you were there to reach out to.*
- *F had empathy and understood as well from the point of view of adoption and Muslim culture as well.*
- *JW has given our family such tremendous support. For our girls she is so caring and nurturing and has brought out the best in both even in times of great difficulty....She has been able to be the voice of reason with other professionals at the table who perhaps would hear G and I as "just" the parents.....She's gone above and beyond every single time*
- *Just listened to this (podcast from an adopter experiencing difficulties) and it made me so grateful for all your support over the last couple of years. Thanks for all the training and help for C. It really has made a massive difference*
- *It is not possible to convey how much JE has supported and helped us over the past 18 months. She has been on the end of the phone and email, checking in when I've been at breaking point, and to generally checking in the whole time. She has helped me fight for services locally and highlight H's needs. She has helped find appropriate support and assessments and we would not have coped with out her support*
- *You probably won't see M working day to day with adopters so I thought that I should let you know that she is INCREDIBLY good at her job. P and I feel very supported by her....always manages to decipher what is going on and give us really useful advice. She has been brilliant with school and very diligent in contacting people for us and writing up meetings etc. As you know, she is a lovely person too and always makes us feel better!*
- *Thank you so much K for your help and the information you gave me on Thursday and the email you sent me (duty caller)*

3.4.27 We have continued to make full use of the Adoption Support Fund to commission therapeutic work for families, children and young people. Most, if not all, therapy appointments are taking place face to face now although some providers have maintained virtual working as an option if that meets the needs of the young person better. This year in total we have had 624 applications to the fund approved resulting in £2,544,704.43 being awarded. Of this £59,283.81 was generated income

where we had provided services in-house and were able to charge for these from the ASF. Local authorities in the region agreed to £51,091.38 match funding for therapy.

- 3.4.28 Our Stay and Play groups are now back up and running inside venues across the region. We have lately made the difficult decision to cease provision in the Hebden Bridge area of Calderdale due to dwindling take up; we will review this again in future if indicators are that there is a level of need in that area. The Bradford 'Tweens' group continues to run, and we continue to work on setting up 'tweens' and teens provision in the other areas with new groups planning to be launched in the Leeds/Wakefield boundary area at the end of summer. Kirklees/Calderdale planning is also in the pipeline.
- 3.4.29 We now have an established offer of 4 adopter support groups running online per month: Adopter Chat (general support group), Single Adopters, Dads Group and TRECS (trans-racial/ethnic/cultural adopter group). They are incrementally building in size, with the slight exception of the Single Adopters group which we plan to refresh and relaunch in the coming months. The opportunity to attend TRECS group was also offered to colleagues in One Adoption North and Humber as well as One Adoption South Yorkshire and we are pleased to have a couple of families from South Yorkshire who have attend the group.
- 3.4.30 As before, we have continued to offer a programme of evening workshops for families on topics ranging from: Brain Based Parenting, Education workshops in relation to transitions to a new school and SEND, and our new workshop around contact and identity. We have identified in the last few months that there seems to be less appetite from families to attend group parenting programmes; planned groups for Underdeveloped Systems (US), NVR and Persevering Parents have all had to be either abandoned or offered on a 1:1 basis to a couple of families (in the case of NVR) due to a lack of take-up. We are monitoring the need for this provision and are well placed to provide these programmes again when required.
- 3.4.31 We have continued to offer attendance at all our online events to families who live beyond the confines of West Yorkshire and recognise these now as part of our core offer of support to families outside the region who have adopted a child/ren from West Yorkshire.
- 3.4.32 Access to records work is recovering from the impacts of Covid, and we are increasingly moving towards a position of 'business as usual'. We continue to have a dedicated Business Support Officer to deal with these requests, who has received the following feedback from a partner agency:
- ... (name of manager in partner agency) *mentioned to me how amazing the work is that you do around accessing files – they commented that out of all the RAAs and LAs they have a contract to work with (which will be pretty much the whole north of England at least, I should imagine) – you are the best person to deal with.*
- 3.4.33 And specifically, a birth parent was very complimentary about the work undertaken to provide her with letters and pictures of her children that had sat on file for several years, not able to be passed on at the time. The Business Support Officer went over and above in collating some additional non-identifying information about her children and which siblings they had been placed with, which was a comfort to the birth mum to know even several years after the event.
- 3.4.34 In total, we received 330 requests for access to records in the year – averaging 27.5 requests per month. Requests are mostly received from adopted adults, birth family members, adoption support agencies, social workers and police.
- 3.4.35 Commissioned Contracts: Adoption UK and PAC/UK
- Adoption UK: Peer Mentoring
- There are currently 20 active peer mentors supporting 55 families across the region via the 1:1 support service, 27 via WhatsApp groups and 28 via 1:1 support. Furthermore, there are 9 families who are accessing enhanced support via the transitions service.
- 3.4.36 Here are some comments from those accessing the mentoring service:
- Mentee – *“No matter what you’re struggling with there is always someone on hand to help you with their life experiences through adoption. It’s about having someone who understands and who can provide guidance and support to you. It’s about them saying you’re doing a good job and we don’t always get everything right but things will get better and to keep on going. It’s about having that person that has the same thing in common with you and you don’t have to check in on them because they check in on you. It’s just overall brilliant and the value you get from it is priceless.”*
 - Mentor – *“Having previously used the mentoring service when going through the adoption process myself, I found the service invaluable. To have somebody who people can talk to who has “lived” the adoption process and offer real life experiences is really useful to the mentees. As mentors you are offering a completely different perspective to the professionals and one that is as vitally important.”*

- WhatsApp participant – *“the support group and our mentor have been an amazing help for us. No question is too big, too small or too stupid.... a great help through the process and made everything seem possible and easy to get through.”*
- WhatsApp participant – *“reassuring knowing there’s others in the group where we can seek support, people who understand what we are going through. It’s a safe space where we can ask anything and know we will get an honest answer. E.g. buying nursery furniture, to someone else outside adoption it would seem trivial but to us was a big step and the group get it!”*
- Transition Service User – *“Best adoption service we have ever used – learned so much, looking at things differently now, better than any training course!”*

3.4.37 Adoption UK: Adopter Engagement

The Adopter Engagement provision has been active in One Adoption West Yorkshire in the following work:

- Prep training
- Sibling training
- Pre-matching training
- Experienced parent training
- Experienced adopter training
- EPP training

3.4.38 In addition Facebook groups run by Adopter Engagement coordinators across the whole of the Yorkshire and Humber region have reported the following activity:

- Adopter Voice, Facebook group, 911 members.
- Early years and primary school, Facebook group, 284 members.
- Secondary and further education, Facebook group, 149 members.
- EPP, Facebook group, 40 members.

3.4.39 PAC-UK: adults work

PAC-UK have dealt with 461 calls to their advice line and worked with 167 service users (existing and new) across the year. These services are provided for all adults affected by adoption but most of the work is undertaken with birth parents and adopted adults. A total of 655 appointments were offered across the year to service users.

3.4.40 PAC-UK: Adopteens service

81 young people from West Yorkshire have been involved in Adopteens during the year. Additionally, 6 of the members of the Adopteens Youth Council are from West Yorkshire.

3.4.41 Non-Agency Adoption

One Adoption West Yorkshire undertakes non-agency adoption on behalf of Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield councils; Bradford and Leeds councils undertake their own. Due to the pandemic this work was suspended and reopened on the 1st of April 2021. Throughout the year we have received 27 Notifications of Intention to Adopt (NOIs).

3.4.42 Over the last 12 months there were a total of 81 enquiries/ briefing session registrations received for non-agency adoption. 28% (23) of enquiries were from families living in Calderdale, 27% (22) were from families living in Kirklees and 44% (36) were from families living in Wakefield.

3.4.43 Over the past 12 months there were 9 non-agency adoption orders granted, 22% (2) were for families from Calderdale, 33% (3) were for families from Kirklees and 44% (4) were for families from Wakefield.

3.3.44 2021 saw the introduction of virtual briefings which started in July. Those interested in non-agency adoption book onto an online briefing session. Sessions are delivered every 5 weeks in the evening. Attendees can learn about the process and can ask questions, leaving them equipped to make an informed decision about proceeding.

3.4.45 Disruptions

There were 8 children who had an adoption disruption (preadoption order) during 2021/22 which relates to 6 placements. This is an increase from last year. The children part of a sibling group was aged 3 and 4, and 2 and 6 at the time of the disruption.

The single children were aged 4,2,3 and 7 at the time of their disruption. 3 of the placements were internal adoptive placements and 3 of the adoptive placements were external.

3.4.46 Quality Assurance

One Adoption West Yorkshire has developed a practice improvement framework and is committed to an improvement culture of learning. The principal sources of feedback are:

- Views of Children and Families, including the views and experiences of children & young adults.
- Performance Data: statistical data that helps us judge the quality and effectiveness of our professional practice.
- Practice Wisdom & Knowledge: practice wisdom of those staff who work with children, young people and families, adoption panels and learning from disruptions.
- The findings of external and internal inspections, audits and evaluations of our practice.

3.4.47 A Quality Assurance mechanism for panel work is used as a matter of course and has found that 98% of prospective adopter reports were of a good or outstanding standard (1% outstanding, 97% good, 2% requiring improvement) this is an improvement on last year's figure of 93%.

3.4.48 In relation to Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) provided by local authority social workers 95% were considered good or outstanding (1% outstanding, 94% good, 4% requiring improvement and 1% not recorded) this is an improvement on last year figure of 85%. OAWY continue to work with the 5 local authorities to raise the quality of CPRs and support them with training and development work. More detailed feedback is provided for each local authority.

3.4.49 There have been 49 responses to the panel survey in 2021/22. Attendees were asked to rate their overall experience of attending adoption panel, the responses were:

- Very good – 42 (85.71%).
- Good – 5 (10.20%).
- Neither good nor poor - 2 (4.08%).

3.4.50 Between 01 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 the Customer Relations Service logged twenty complaints for One Adoption West Yorkshire. The types of complaint were as follows:

Breakdown in adoption process	5
Access to or breach of information	5
Post adoption support	4
Staff attitude	2
Correspondence not answered	2
Contact not adhered to	1
Challenge assessment	1

3.4.51 One complaint was escalated to stage two. This concerned a mother who was unhappy that she was not given access to information about her child's sibling at the time of adoption as it may have changed her decision to adopt them both. A full explanation was given as to the reasons for the decisions made at the time. The customer relations team continue to report a good working relationship with managers from One Adoption West Yorkshire and complaints are responded to in a timely manner.

3.4.52 Case File Audits

41 audits were completed across the service during 2021/22 by Service & Team managers. The result of each audit is recorded as either excellent, good, satisfactory or requires improvement. Any actions identified from the audits are fed-back to the worker to support improvement. Of the 41 audits:

- 5 (12.2%) were excellent.
- 20 (48.78%) were good.
- 11 (26.83%) were satisfactory.
- 5 (12.2%) required improvement.

3.4.53 Joint audits were completed across the region, 7 in total, between a OAWY Service Manager and an LA lead during 2021/22. OAWY recorded the result of each audit as either excellent, good, satisfactory or requires improvement. Of the 7 audits:

- Good – 4 (57.14).
- Satisfactory – 2 (28.57%).
- Requires improvement – 1 (14.29%).

3.4.54 Compliance Audits

Compliance audits are system generated reports that identify missing and/ or incorrectly entered data and were introduced in Q2. Anomalies identified are forwarded to the worker and/ or team manager for investigation with support provided by the performance team. The aim is to reduce the number of anomalies and the time taken to resolve them. Here are the results of the 2021/22 Compliance Audits:

	No. identified	No. (%) resolved
Children	1,166	686 (59%)
Adopters	591	211 (36%)
Adoption support	1,068	97 (9%)

3.4.55 Work is underway to improve the speed in which anomalies are resolved, improvements are expected in 2022/23.

3.4.56 Thematic audits

Two thematic audits have been carried out during 2021/22 to look at specific areas of practice:

3.4.57 Families who left the adoption process following the initial visit - 62 files were audited, 33 (53%) families withdrew, and 29 (47%) families were not recommended. Of the 29 households that were not recommended:

- 5 were enquiring relating to specific children and joint decisions were made with the local authority not to progress to application.
- 22 were given advice and support in relation to returning to the process later and addressing vulnerabilities.
- 2 were informed that the level of risk was such that adoption with OAWY could not be progressed.

3.4.58 Children allocated to family finders post Adoption Order - 43 files were audited looking specifically at date since adoption order, workflows (in particular the existence of a contact workflow) and case records. Of the 43 case files audited:

- 11 were of a good standard.
- 12 files require updates to case records. There was a particular theme in relation to a lack of recording post-match to evidence the transition period and support to the child and family post placement prior to the adoption order.
- 16 files require a contact workflow adding to evidence plans for future contact between the child and their birth family.
- 8 files needed workflows updated, for example supervision workflows closed and trackers closed.
- 15 files were identified as being ready for closure, either immediately or following update, being over 12 months post adoption order.
- 2 files had ongoing adoption support or ASF applications which should be on a new file in the child's adopted name.
- 7 cases were considered closed but have open workflows or allocations which require ending before the case is fully closed.
- 1 case has been closed since the report was run.

3.4.59 Interactive audits

We are planning to introduce interactive audits in 2022/23. The process is currently being developed and a pilot will take place before we go live in Autumn 2022.

3.4.60 Voice and Influence of Children, Young People and Adopters

Appendix 1 provides the Voice and Influence of Children, Young People and Adopters report card. This highlights examples of work undertaken to capture the views of service users to help develop and shape the service.

3.5 **Continuous Professional and Service Development**

3.5.1 Staff development and support

An all-staff event was held in June which provided an update from each service area and featured an introduction to the Cultural Cohesion Quality Mark (CCQM) with related activities. A second event was held in November where the focus was the OAWY 3 Year Plan, wellbeing, key achievements, values and changes. Racism in adoption and a CCQM update also featured.

3.5.2 Training

A skills review of all social work staff was completed in 2020/21. The skills review allowed OAWY to develop a plan which prioritised training based upon the needs of the service. Here is an update of the training delivered and scheduled:

- Theraplay Level 1 – 22 workers completed training in February '22.
- Theraplay Group Work – 11 workers completed training in February '22.
- Theraplay Level 2 – 12 workers are booked on for April '22.
- DDP Level 1 – 24 workers are booked on for May and 24 workers for July '22.
- DDP Level 2 – 24 workers are booked on for November '22.

3.5.3 1 member of staff has been trained in therapeutic life story work and 3 more will be training in 2022/23.

3.5.4 All staff in the agency continue to work towards achieving the Cultural Cohesion Quality Mark.

3.5.5 Strategic issues and forward plans

OAWY's 3-year plan (Appendix 2) outlines the vision, mission, outcomes, and priorities up to 2024. Activities linked to the delivery of the 3-year plan are tracked through the OAWY Service Improvement Plan (Appendix 3).

Corporate Considerations

4.1 **Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 There has been ongoing engagement with staff over the year. Two all staff events have been held, one in June and one in November which covered; strategic and service area updates, wellbeing, Adoption UK delivered a presentation on the Adoption Passport and the Cultural Cohesion Quality Mark (CCQM) team also delivered a presentation. There were facilitated team exercises were with a focus on the CCQM.

4.1.2 Quarterly newsletters are in place to keep staff updated as well as email bulletins if needed. Ongoing engagement with adopters, young people through Adopteens, adopted adults and birth parents is an integral part to co-develop and co deliver the services provided for children and families in the region.

4.1.3 The OAWY annual staff survey was emailed to all staff in Q2; 46% of staff completed it. 85% of staff enjoy working for OAWY (10% indifferent) and 89% of staff are proud to work for OAWY (6% indifferent).

4.1.4 When asked: What do you think we do well? The themes from the responses were:

- Support children and families.
- Work well together – friendly, helpful & supportive.
- Innovative, creative and forward thinking.

4.1.5 When asked: What do you think we could improve on? The themes from the responses were:

Theme	Action
Relevant/ specific training & career development.	<p>Theraplay level 1, Theraplay level 2, Theraplay group work, DDP1, DDP2, Therapeutic life story work and CCQM training are being delivered throughout 2022.</p> <p>OAWY have developed a bespoke CPD internal experience pathway that allows staff to shadow and experience key elements of other roles within the agency.</p>
Communication - SLT/ general updates, new starters.	<p>OAWY's 2022/23 SIP (Appendix 3) has a specific action to 'Identify and implement ways to collaborate across the agency'. This includes seeking and reviewing staff feedback to factor into the internal communication strategy.</p> <p>Email updates to team managers following SLT are now in place. TMs then cascade the information accordingly.</p> <p>Three weekly leadership check-ins started in April 2022. These are for optional online meetings where OAWY HOS provides updates and answers questions/ addresses issues raised by staff. They are intended to improve lines of communication by offering an alternative to email updates and provide an opportunity for staff to ask questions.</p>

4.2 Equality and Diversity/ Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 The OAWY Equality Impact assessment was reviewed and updated March 2022 and can be found at Appendix 4. Actions from this are fed into the annual service improvement plan and tracked throughout the year.

4.3 Resources and value for money

4.3.1 The final 2021/22 outturn position for OAWY was an overspend of £9.2k which was funded from OAWY's earmarked reserve. The main pressure on the 2021/22 budget was a £162k shortfall of Inter Agency income, a £60k overspend on Inter-Agency placements, and a £32k overspend on commissioned contracts. This was offset by additional income generated through support of the National Grant work. The backdated pay award resulted in an overspend of staffing costs, however an additional partner contribution was made to offset this. A further point to note is that a total of £2.34m of expenditure was attributed to the ASF and this was offset by corresponding ASF income received in year.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has continued to present challenges for the service and impacted on staff wellbeing. Consultation is ongoing regarding the future balance between home and office working to ensure that we continue to deliver a high-quality adoption service alongside staff having a good work life balance. I am continually impressed by the passion and enthusiasm of the staff team and how they adapt to changes despite the pressures they face. As a result, we have over the last year recruited and assessed a diverse range of adopters and matched them with West Yorkshire children with an adoption plan. We have been proactive and creative in finding families for children, utilising a wide range of resources. We have also provided an ever-increasing range of training and support to our adoptive families. Our service delivery and development continue to be influenced by those impacted directly by adoption, with independent support offered to birth families and adoptees.

One Adoption West Yorkshire



Voice and Influence of Adopters, Children & Young People report card April 2021 to March 2022

Outcome: Children and adoptive families to have an influence over decisions affecting their families' lives and the services we provide.



Best ideas - what has worked?

Annual Adopter Survey

The One Adoption West Yorkshire 2021 adopter survey was emailed to adopters in October and completed by 108 adopters.

When asked 'What do you think we do well? The themes from the comments were:

- Support: education, groups, events, resources & training
- Social workers – genuine, understanding, helpful.

When asked 'What do you think we could improve on? The themes from the comments were:

- Support and timeliness of it.
- Communication – speed and what's available.
- Staff – consistency, retention and more of.
- Support for older children.

Here are some of the positive comments received:

"Best social workers ever"

"TM our social worker has been more than brilliant at supporting us.

Without her I really think our daughter may not have remained with us."

"Our adoption support team is brilliant, but under-resourced. They go above and beyond in terms of supporting us and our adoptive family."

"We've been impressed with the support at a very stressful time.

Really quickly managed to get help and support in place. Very much appreciate having N in our lives."



National profiling event

One Adoption West Yorkshire facilitated a national virtual profiling event in September. Regional adoption agencies from across England joined to profile children of Black African/Caribbean heritage and mixed Black African/Caribbean heritage who they were actively family finding for. The event was an opportunity for approved adopters to view information about a range of children across the country waiting for adoption. Profiles were created by Family Finding social workers via pre-recorded videos which were available to be viewed over one weekend, hosted on the One Adoption website.

Prospective adopters were able to submit questions about the children or expressions of interest after they had watched the presentations in their own time. 56 adopters registered to attend represented by 35 different adoption agencies.

19 children were profiled including 4 sibling groups of 2. We received 13 expressions of interest with 2 links being explored.

Here are some comments from those who attended:

"We thought it was an excellent event and find it a lot more personal than link maker."

"We really appreciated hearing from the children's social workers directly and getting a clearer picture of each child."

"We did like hearing from the foster carer and seeing a few extra photos and videos."



Local profiling events

One Adoption West Yorkshire held six profiling events in 2021/22 with one of the events being sibling specific. Across all the events:

- 99 profiles were presented (70 part of a sibling group and 29 individual).
- 109 expressions of interest received.
- There have been 3 linking meetings for sibling groups of 2.
- 2 sets of siblings (2x groups of 2) have been matched and now placed for adoption.
- 694 families registered for these events. 54 have been OAWY families and the rest external.

Here are some comments from those who attended the events:

"The accessibility of this event, being able to hear information and revisit at your own pace was a huge positive."

"It was very helpful to have more information about children compared to their Link Maker profile, without having to travel."

"It's great that I can attend at any time over the weekend so I can fit it into my schedule and look at the profiles at my leisure."

"Fantastic really. We appreciate the effort everyone put into this so much!"

"This was our first online event for family finding and found this to be a positive experience."

"The event was well run and organised."



TRECS Support Group

TRECS group – the trans-racial, trans-cultural, trans-ethnic adoption support group was formed in January and is for parents who have adopted children from a different race, ethnicity and/ or culture to their own.

The group meet monthly to discuss the importance of racial and cultural identity for adopted children, with sessions supported by OAWY social work staff.

The group meet online but plan to hold some sessions face to face when people feel safe to do so. OAWY offer the group to OASY and OANH and we have had adopters from Sheffield also attending. There is no formal feedback mechanism in place yet, but one parent emailed to say:

“Sincere thanks for all you're doing it's a really fantastic group.”



Partnership with Adoption UK

Adoption UK have supported many families in One Adoption West Yorkshire through the mentoring service they run, and have also helped support families around transitions in education. Adoption UK will be continuing to provide these services for any families in West Yorkshire in the future.



Partnership with PAC-UK

ADOPTTEENS
FORMERLY KNOWN AS AT-ID

Adopteens 'Voices of Adopted Teens' film was released publicly just before Christmas and has received positive feedback on social media. It is available to watch on the [PAC-UK YouTube channel here](#).

Filling the Gap 18 – 25 Therapeutic Group

This 1-year pilot group started in September and runs monthly at the PAC-UK Leeds office. The group consists of a diverse group of young, adopted adults from the region.

The themes have varied while the group has been running but has highlighted consistently the need for such groups to bring young adults together at a time in their lives where support is probably at its most crucial.

Themes that have emerged as part of the group include:

- Access to records.
- Contact arrangements (support pre 18 and what happens post 18).
- Age of adopters and impact this has on their growing children.
- Experience of therapy.
- Life story work.
- Varying experience of social workers/social work support.

Feedback from participants has been excellent:

"Really helpful to be able to discuss with adopted young people."

"Having the young adults there giving their real-life experiences added so much more to the workshop".

"The focus on the lived experience of adoption was great and thought provoking."

"The Adopted for Life workshop was excellent; it was so powerful to hear the adopted adults speak and hear their experiences of accessing adoption support. Lots of thinking to do about how we can better meet the needs of our young people – thank you."

"The workshops were amazing, particularly the adopted for life with the Adopteens – really powerful."



Best ideas - what's next?

Fun Days

Fun days will be relaunched during 2022/23. The first of which will be a regional Fun Day, led by OAWY held in May. Children and families from North, South and east Yorkshire will be in attendance.



Increase adopter engagement

In 2022/23 we will be looking to increase adopter engagement with our core offer of support services at the point of enquiry.

Improving help and support for teenagers and young adults who are moving towards independence.

We will be producing a clear core offer for the website for 18+ year olds and collaborating with LAs for pathways to services for those not able to live with their families.



Letter swap – contact pilot

Link maker have developed a new system, Letter swap, that supports a broader and more flexible range of contact between adoptive and birth families. One Adoption West Yorkshire will be piloting this new system for nine months with 10 families.

Improve participation and voice and influence in service development and delivery

We will:

- Review the surveys we send to prospective adopters.
- Review the voice of the child and birth family in life appreciation days.
- Review the feedback mechanism following work with children.
- Implement an interactive audit tool.
- Develop systems for communicating with birth family members and share their feedback.

Involving adoptive parents

As part of OAWYs review of EPP we will be involving adoptive parents by linking with Adoption UK.



Voice and influence of the child

To enhance the voice and influence of the child we will be exploring ways for them to 'inspect' and feedback on our service.

Rebuild group provision

We will be focusing on rebuilding the group provision for teens and tweens that was ceased during the pandemic. In addition to the existing Bradford group, we are looking to set up groups covering Calderdale/ Kirklees and Leeds/ Wakefield.

Adopteens

Activity days – Adopteens have the following activity days planned for the West in 2022:

- Zoom cheesecake making.
- Wreath making workshop.





One Adoption West Yorkshire's plan 2021 – 2024

What we'll do...

Our vision

To be a flagship adoption agency that develops and promotes best practice, improving adoption standards nationally.

Our mission

To find loving families who can meet the needs of children and offer an innovative and supportive approach to all those affected by adoption.

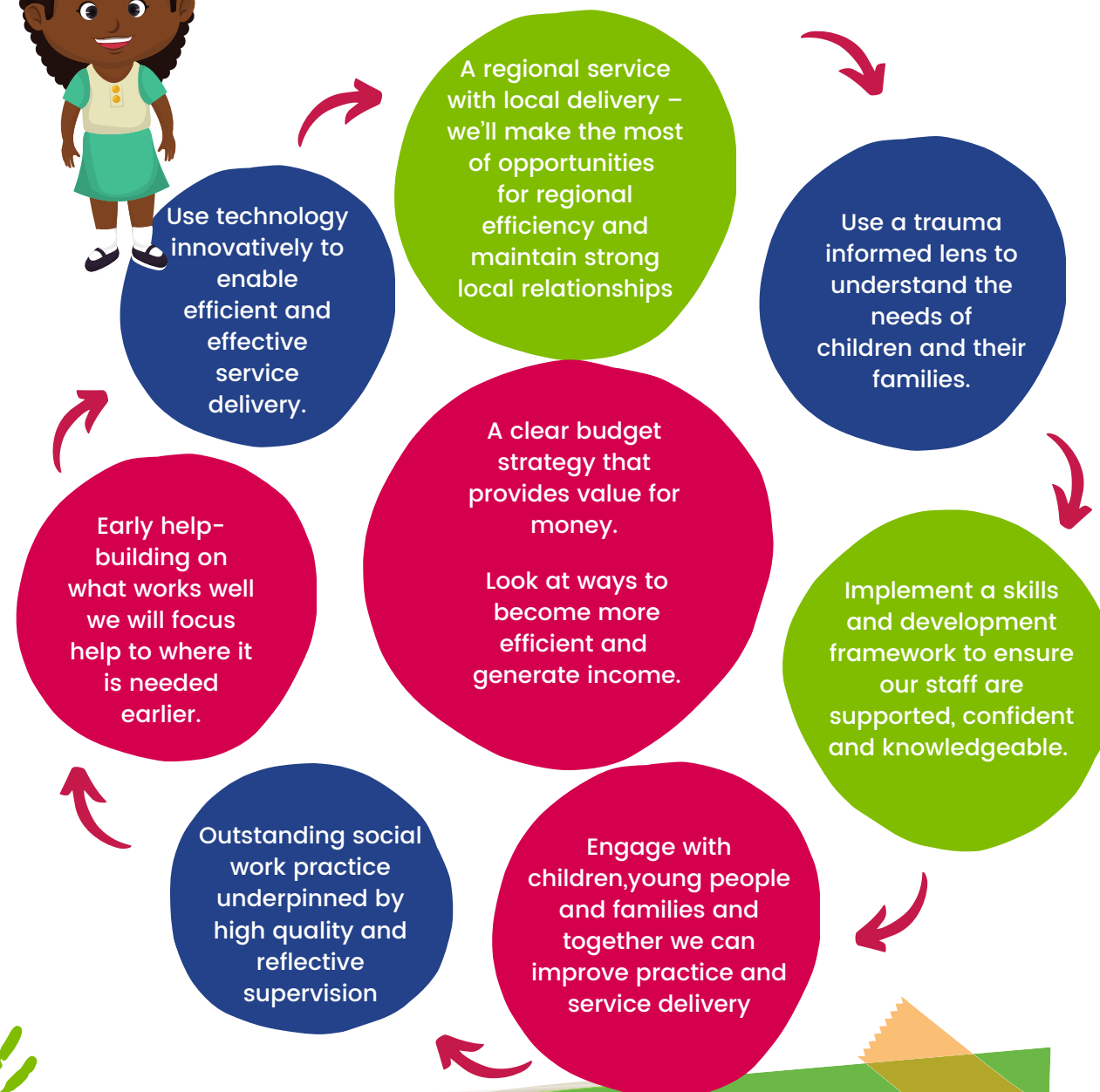
4 outcomes

- 1 Children move in with their adoptive family without unnecessary delay.
- 2 Families get help and support at every stage of the adoption journey.
- 3 Children have good quality care, a good understanding of their identity, a sense of belonging and stability within their adoptive family.
- 4 Children, adoptive and birth parents and adopted adults feel they have a voice and influence.

7 priorities:

- 1 To meet the needs of the children we will recruit and assess a diverse range of adopters.
- 2 Work with local authorities and partners to: improve the early identification of children needing adoption; the use of early permanence and; to promote children remaining within or close to West Yorkshire.
- 3 To improve the timeliness, accessibility and flexibility of adoption support provision across in the region.
- 4 To implement a multi-disciplinary model of adoption support to help parents support their children and build strong relationships.
- 5 To collaborate with local authorities to improve the help and support for teenagers and young adults who are moving towards independence.
- 6 To achieve the Cultural Cohesion Quality Mark.
- 7 To work collaboratively with partners to Improve the flexibility, variety and quality of contact arrangements.

How we'll do it...



How we'll know if we've made a difference

Increased diversity of adopters approved and matched.

High level of family stability.

Improved outcomes from evidenced based evaluations.

Reduced timescale in which children move in with their adoptive family.

Positive service user feedback.

An increase in the frequency and type of contact between families.

Three behaviours which underpin everything:

1. Listening and responding to the voice of the child.
2. Using restorative practice: Doing with, not for, or to.
3. Using Outcomes Based Accountability: 'Is anyone better off?'



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OAWY STRATEGIC 2022/23 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Action No.	Source	Specific action	Measurable outcome/ impact	Lead person(s)	Support	Planned start date	Due date	Milestones	Milestone due date	Status	Update/ comments
1	DfE Adoption Strategy 2021 APPG Strengthening Families Report 2021 AUK Barometer 2021	Develop family finding practice in relation to children who wait longer.	Reduced timescales for children placed (A2 and A10). Reduce the distance travelled to place children considered by the DfE as harder to place. Increased number of pre-order ASF applications.	NS	FF TMs, MDT, APs, LAs	01/02/2022	31/03/2023	1 - Produce a written strategy on how we identify children likely to wait longest in early tracking process and devise family finding strategy. 2 - Develop the pathway in collaboration with LAs and the MDT for early assessment of children's health and development needs. 3 - Work with local authorities to build tailored financial support packages. 4 - Deliver 3x Fun Days in 2022/23.	30/09/2022 30/09/2022 31/03/2023 31/03/2023	On target	
2	DfE Adoption Strategy 2021 Black Lives Matter Action Plan 2021	Increase the number of adopters able to meet the needs of children who wait longer.	An increase in the number/ proportion of adopters able to meet the needs of children who wait longer. A2 and A10 timescales are reduced for children who wait longer. Children who are classed by the DfE as harder to place do not wait longer to be matched with an adoptive family.	RB	R&A TMs, EG	01/04/2022	31/03/2023	1) Use regional demographic data to target potential adopters. 2) Produce marketing strategy for 2022/23 that focuses on recruiting adopters for children who wait longer. 3) Produce a series of accessible webinars and podcasts on parenting a child with FASD, neurodiversity, substance abuse in utero	31/04/2022 31/04/2022 31/03/2023	On target	
3	DfE Adoption Strategy 2021	Increase adopter engagement with the core offer of support services from the point of enquiry.	Increase in the number of adopters accessing support services. Reduction in the number of referrals for adoption support services for children under 10 years old within 2 years of a case being closed.	RB	AS TMs, MDT, EG	01/04/2022	31/03/2023	1) Increase uptake on adopters accessing website, support and newsletter by: a) reviewing the mailing list. b) publicise support groups with Adopter Voice. c) celebrate & communicate what's gone well. 2) Review how and when information is shared with adopters about the core offer. 3) Following review create & implement engagement strategy.	30/04/2022 31/03/2023 31/03/2023 30/06/2022 30/09/2022	On target	
4	Adopter Survey 2021; 3 Year Plan - Priority 3 & Outcome 2	Improve the timeliness, accessibility and flexibility of post order adoption support provision across the region working collaboratively with the MDT.	Reduced number of families waiting for service. Reduced time between enquiry and ASA or service delivery. Improved levels of satisfaction from adopters.	JC	AS TMs, MDT	01/04/2021	31/03/2023	1) Establish annual programme of ongoing support groups and training offer. 2) Set-up virtual worker process. 3) Embed referral process with MDT. 4) Review model of working so we have a more defined, tiered approach. 5) Extend triage pilot.	31/08/2022 30/09/2022 30/09/2022 31/12/2022 31/03/2023	On target	
5	3 Year Plan - Priority 5 & Outcome 2	Improve the help and support for teenagers and young adults who are moving towards independence.	Clear pathways for young people to access services within their home LA.	JC	LAs, EG	01/04/2022	31/12/2022	1) Produce a clear core offer for website for 18+ year olds. 2) Collaborate with LA for pathways to services for those people who are not able to live with their families.	30/06/2022 31/12/2022	On target	
6	3 Year Plan - Priority 2 & Outcome 1	Work with local authorities and partners to improve the use of early permanence by conducting a 12 month regional review of EPP.	Increased use of EPP improving outcomes for children. Increased number of adopters open to EPP placements.	RB & NS	LAs, KR, APs	01/04/2022	31/03/2023	1 - Podcast regarding EP for the website. 2 - Improve the understanding of the experience of birth families. 3 - Deliver training to LA social workers, (R&A APs) prospective adopters & partners with a role in EPP i.e. judiciary. 4 - Peer support to EPP carers. 5 - Improve data collection and analysis.	30/09/2022 31/10/2022 31/03/2023 31/03/2023 31/03/2023	On target	

7	3 Year Plan - Priority 7 & Outcome 3 AUK Barometer 2021	Work collaboratively with partners to improve the flexibility, variety & quality of contact arrangements.	Positive feedback from adoptees, birth and adoptive family and staff. New contact system and process implemented. Improved number and range of contact arrangements evidencing bespoke, child centred planning.	JC	RS	01/04/2022	31/03/2023	1) Review existing contact data available and determine what is needed moving forward. 2) Ensure systems are in place to capture data in relation to all types of contact. 2) Contact worker to work proactively where contact plans need to be reviewed. 3) Contact worker to work collaboratively with partner agencies who work with birth families to inform and shape services. 4) Look at OAWY staff development in relation to contact. 5) Pilot Letter Swap system - include user feedback. 6) Explore with operational leads in LA arrangements for supporting direct contact.	30/04/2022 30/06/2022 30/06/2022 30/06/2022 31/01/2023 31/03/2023	Complete	
8	DfE Adoption Strategy 2021	Improve participation and voice and influence in service development and delivery.	Increased satisfaction with services. Meaningful and equitable engagement with adoptees, adopters and birth families in shaping adoption services.	MR	SLT TMs VAs	01/04/2022	31/09/2022	1) Review surveys to prospective adopters regarding services they access from OAWY. 2 - Review the voice of the child and birth family in life appreciation days. 3 - Establish feedback mechanism following work with children and feed into reporting framework. 4) Implement and embed interactive audit tool. 5 - Develop systems for communicating effectively with birth family members and sharing their feedback. Link with PAC-UK.	31/05/2022 30/06/2022 30/06/2022 30/09/2022 30/09/2022	On target	
9	3 Year Plan - How we'll do it	Review development opportunities for staff.	Skilled staff able to meet the needs of children and families.	MR	SLT	01/04/2022	31/03/2023	1) Review skills analysis & implement development pathway. 2) Therapeutic life story work training delivered. 3) Theraplay & DDP training delivered. 4) Supervision from MDT. 5) Review success of training delivered - is it being utilised? And update training strategy. 6) Achieve CCQM.	31/05/2022 31/08/2022 30/11/2022 30/11/2022 31/03/2023 31/03/2023	On target	
10	SLT	Identify and implement ways to collaborate across the agency.	Information is shared across the service reducing the negative effect of silo working.	EG	Mrob, SLT, TMs	01/04/2022	31/03/2023	1) Seek and review staff feedback and factor in to internal comms strategy. 2) Deliver 2x in person staff events (mixed groups). 3) Provide regular service development updates at all manager meetings.	30/09/2022 30/11/2022 31/03/2023	On target	
11	3 Year Plan - How we'll do it	Identify ways to generate income.	Increased level of income to OAWY.	MR	SLT	01/04/2022	31/12/2022	1) Agree content for all workshops. 2) Deliver workshops: - Rhian B - Brain based parenting - FF - online profiling events - how to and/ or join ours - MDT - Child development - MDT - Attachment and trauma - MDT - FASD - MDT - Life Story & Transitions 3) Generate increased ASF income through provision of therapeutic support. 4) Deliver pan-regional fun day.	30/06/2022 31/12/2022 31/03/2023	On target	

KEY	
Complete	Action complete.

On target	Action on target for completion by due date (though milestones may have slipped).
Off target	Action not completed or at risk of not being completed by due date.
Cancelled	Action cancelled.
Not started	Action not yet started.
In development	Action, milestones, allocation to be refined and/ or agreed.

Complete
On target
Off target
Cancelled
Not started
In development

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As a public authority we need to ensure that all our strategies, policies, service and functions, both current and proposed have given proper consideration to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration. In all appropriate instances we will need to carry out an equality, diversity, cohesion and integration impact assessment.

This form:

- can be used to prompt discussion when carrying out your impact assessment
- should be completed either during the assessment process or following completion of the assessment
- should include a brief explanation where a section is not applicable

Directorate: Children & Families	Service area: One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY)
Lead person: Michelle Rawlings	Contact number: 07712 216 979
Date of the equality, diversity, cohesion and integration impact assessment: March 2022	

1. Title: One Adoption West Yorkshire			
Is this a:			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy /Policy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Service / Function
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	Other
If other, please specify			

2. Members of the assessment team:

Name	Organisation	Role on assessment team e.g., service user, manager of service, specialist
Michelle Rawlings	OAWY	Head of Service
Rhian Beynon	OAWY	Service Delivery Manager
Julie Chew	OAWY	Service Delivery Manager
Nicola Steele	OAWY	Service Delivery Manager
Richard Stevenson	OAWY	Practice Improvement & Development Manager

<p>3. Summary of strategy, policy, service or function that was assessed:</p> <p>OAWY was the first Regional Adoption Agency to go-live on the 1st of April 2017. OAWY is made up of the 5 separate Local Authority adoption teams which provided adoption services for West Yorkshire; Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, and Wakefield and is the largest adoption agency in the North of England.</p> <p>OAWY is designed to offer an innovative and adopter friendly approach to adoption recruitment, adoption support, and family finding for children and prospective adopters as well as high quality training.</p> <p>By working together, we will provide even higher levels of expertise and support to our adoptive families at all stages of the adoption process and with the inspiration and direction provided by our adoptive parents we will ensure that we provide the kind of support that families want and need.</p> <p>We want every child to have a family to grow up in and we need more adoptive parents to play a vital role in fulfilling this vision. Adoption is an exciting and challenging experience for everyone involved. We are seeking adoptive parents from all walks of life to reflect the range of children we have who are looking for a secure home with patience, understanding and loving kindness.</p> <p>This Assessment looks at how OAWY considers Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration throughout the adoption process. It will also highlight areas that need to be improved and the actions that will be taken to address them.</p>
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<p>4. Scope of the equality, diversity, cohesion and integration impact assessment (Complete - 4a. if you are assessing a strategy, policy or plan and 4b. if you are assessing a service, function or event)</p>
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<p>4a. Strategy, policy or plan (Please tick the appropriate box below)</p>	
The vision and themes, objectives or outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>
The vision and themes, objectives or outcomes and the supporting guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>
A specific section within the strategy, policy or plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Please provide detail:</p>	

<p>4b. Service, function, event please tick the appropriate box below</p>	
The whole service (Including service provision and employment)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

A specific part of the service (Including service provision or employment or a specific section of the service)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Procuring of a service (By contract or grant)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please provide detail: This assessment will cover the three core elements of service delivery; Recruitment and Assessment, Family Finding and Adoption Support and the services users; the child/ adopted person, prospective adopters, adopters, birth parent and staff.	

5. Fact finding – what do we already know

Make a note here of all information you will be using to carry out this assessment. This could include previous consultation, involvement, research, results from perception surveys, equality monitoring and customer/ staff feedback.

(Priority should be given to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration related information)

There are no restrictions to adoptive applicants regardless of age, religion/ belief/ faith, disability, gender, sexual orientation or race provided they are deemed able to meet the needs of the child/ children who have a plan for adoption.

Adopters need resilience, skills and openness to parenting in a therapeutic way, regardless of age, gender, religion, sex etc.

Children who wait longer to be adopted generally have one of more of the following characteristics: they are older (5+ years old), BME, have a disability or are part of a sibling group.

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Age	Legally you must be at least 21 years old to adopt. Age restrictions for people that age or above applying to adopt are flexible provided they meet all the relevant criteria and can meet the needs of the children with a plan for adoption.	There is a shortage of adopters for older children. The lack of placements could have a negative impact on this group as these children may be placed out of their local area which in turn may impact on their continued contact with their family and local support structures (see section 12, action 1 & 2).
Religion/ Belief / Faith	OAWY accepts adoption applicants of all religions/ beliefs/ faiths provided they meet all the relevant criteria and can meet the needs of the children with a plan for adoption. This ensures there is potential for a wide range of	There are not always adequate numbers of potential adopters or children to meet the religious/ belief/ faith needs of either party (see section 12, action 1 & 2).

	adopters recruited to meet the range of children needing placement.	
Disability	<p>Adopters with a disability can adopt. The services of the medical advisor are used to ensure decision making is always done to prevent discrimination, whilst ensuring the needs of the child are paramount.</p> <p>OAWY offers a range of key services virtually (i.e., information events, training and support) throughout the adoption journey. This means people who may struggle or be unable to travel to events still have access.</p>	<p>Potentially some adoptive applicants with a disability may view this as negatively impacting upon their right to adopt. For example, the issue of mental health or a life limiting health issue/ disability can be a limiting factor when deciding someone is suitable to adopt a child. However, the needs of the children to have stability and care throughout their childhood must remain the primary focus and therefore some applicants may feel they have been discriminated against.</p> <p>Some children, because of their complex needs, often wait longer for permanent placements. There is a need for more Adopters to offer a permanent home for disabled children. In particular children on the Autistic spectrum are particularly hard to place and consideration needs to be given to recruiting and supporting adopters who have the skills to look after these children (see section 12, action 1 & 2).</p>
Gender	<p>Gender identity does not impact a person's ability to adopt provided they meet all the relevant criteria and are able to meet the needs of the children with a plan for adoption.</p> <p>Although there are no gender considerations in recruiting Adopters and the service operates according to our own anti-discriminatory practice the main carer within the household within adoption is often female. A negative impact of this may be that there is a potential for male adopters (Dads) to feel isolated. Therefore, we have a regional support group for dads.</p> <p>Gender variance training delivered by New Family Social (NFS) to 75 social work staff in 2021/22. Staff can also access free webinars offered by NFS through our membership which focus on</p>	<p>Single adopters at times are not aware they can adopt on their own and applicants from single males are few. However, our marketing does make clear it is not an issue (No action required).</p>

	gender, sexuality and relationships. There is also introductory training on PAL through LCC.	
Sexual Orientation	<p>OAWY recruitment procedures are anti-discriminatory and welcome applicants who are LGBT+ provided they meet all the relevant criteria and can meet the needs of the children with a plan for adoption.</p> <p>The assessment process for adopters conforms to the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (Coram BAAF) guidance.</p> <p>Some OAWY social workers have been trained in assessing gay and lesbian adopters.</p> <p>OAWY attends regional Pride events annually to promote adoption.</p>	<p>OAWY are successful in recruiting gay and lesbian adopters however there may still be perceived barriers for this group. OAWY's marketing promotes adoption to members of the LGBT+ community and actively supports LGBT+ national events and campaigns (No specific action required).</p>
Race	<p>Adopters from any racial background are recruited by OAWY, provided they meet all the relevant criteria and can meet the needs of the children with a plan for adoption.</p> <p>There is a transracial support group for adopters.</p> <p>The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement led to OAWY forming a BLM working group and action plan for 2021/22. This plan includes actions on access to services and support, training for adopters and staff, recruitment and representation. The OAWY BAME staff group will decide if a specific BLM action plan is needed for 2022/23 or if actions should be added to the strategic SIP.</p>	<p>Recruiting adopters for children from non-white British backgrounds particularly children with mixed heritage remains a challenge. Resources are available to purchase appropriate adoptive placements for children and we have a growing number of out of authority placements that reflect this (see section 12, action 1 & 2).</p>
<p>Are there any gaps in equality and diversity information? Please provide detail:</p> <p>N/A.</p>		
<p>Action required:</p>		

See section 12.

6. Wider involvement – have you involved groups of people who are most likely to be affected or interested

☒

Yes

☐

No

Please provide detail:

This document was emailed to Sam Parkin at Adoption UK for review and comment.
Feedback received March 2022.

Action required:

N/A

7. Who may be affected by this activity?

please tick all relevant and significant equality characteristics, stakeholders and barriers that apply to your strategy, policy, service or function

Equality characteristics

☒

Age

☐

Carers

☒

Disability

☒

Gender reassignment

☒

Race

☒

Religion
or Belief

☒

Sex (male or female)

☒

Sexual orientation

☐

Other

(Other can include – marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, and those areas that impact on or relate to equality: tackling poverty and improving health and well-being)

Please specify: n/a

Stakeholders

☒

Services users

☒

Employees

☐

Trade Unions

☒

Partners

☒

Members

☐

Suppliers

☐

Other please specify

Potential barriers.

<input type="checkbox"/> Built environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Location of premises and services
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information and communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Customer care
<input type="checkbox"/> Timing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Stereotypes and assumptions
<input type="checkbox"/> Cost	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consultation and involvement
<input type="checkbox"/> Financial exclusion	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Employment and training
<input type="checkbox"/> specific barriers to the strategy, policy, services or function	

Please specify

8. Positive and negative impact

Think about what you are assessing (scope), the fact-finding information, the potential positive and negative impact on equality characteristics, stakeholders and the effect of the barriers

8a. Positive impact:

Recruitment & Assessment of Adopters

1. The OAWY website signposts prospective adopters to Information Events which are held virtually. Events being held virtually means that prospective adopters don't have any issues with the access limitations some building, and locations may have.
2. OAWY accepts and actively recruit adopters regardless of age, religion/ belief/ faith, disability, gender, sexual orientation or race if they are deemed to be able to meet the needs of the child/ children who have a plan for adoption.
3. The service focuses on effective partnership working to continue the improvement of services to children affected by adoption irrespective of age, religion/ belief/ faith, disability, gender, sexual orientation or race. Our website uses positive images to promote our approach to equality within our advertising, see Appendix A.
4. OAWY have approved a diverse range of adopters, including same sex couples and single people. We have undertaken specific LGBT+ recruitment for adoptive families.
5. Adopter preparation events are held at virtually or at venues which can meet the needs of adopters with a disability.

Family Finding for Children

6. Profiling Events, which are aimed at approved adopters and adopters in assessment, are held virtually making them accessible to both internal and external adopters. This enables people to obtain information early about the reality of the children OAWY are seeking to place.
7. Fun days (post Covid-19) will be held in an accessible and child friendly locations – taking place at least 4 times per year aimed at approved adopters and adopters in assessment. Fun days allow a focused event for children who are deemed harder to place, typically older (5+ years old), BME, have a disability or are part of a sibling group. These events are designed to give children a greater chance of a timely match.
8. OAWY has a robust approach to ensuring that children's religious and cultural needs are met through effective matching meetings identifying need and support plans.
9. OAWY seeks to identify and meet any additional support needs adopters may have to care for children from different ethnic, cultural and religious groups and children with disabilities.
10. OAWY uses Link Maker to identify placements for those children who wait longer.
11. OAWY attends national exchange days and activity days (when they are held). These events allow OAWY to identify adopters who can meet the specific needs of the child with a plan for adoption.

Adoption Support

12. OAWY provides generic support services to all affected by adoption (birth relations, adopters and adoptees).
13. Adoption Support Assessments are based upon the individual needs of the person/people.
14. Initial advice and information are free, and most services are free to access.
15. Adoption Support is provided via a range of accessible means.

Adopters

16. Adopter Voice are an adopter led group that work with OAWY to 'challenge, support and input into the development of adoption services at local, regional and national levels so that they are adopter led'. Adopter Voice is available to all adopters and encourages adopters to become involved and/ or access support on-line.
17. A Peer Mentor service is available to OAWY adopters.
18. A support group for dads has been in place since June 2021.
19. A transracial adopter's support group has been in place since January 2022.
20. Adoption UK provides an arena for all adopters to access information and advice -

<https://www.adoptionuk.org/>

21. We are members of New Family social, a LGBT+ group who offer specific support to the LGBT+ community of adopters. There are support groups across the region for single adopters.

22. We run a number of monthly online support groups for adoptive parents including specific ones for single adopters, dads and adopters who adopt a child of different race or culture to themselves.

Birth Parent Groups

23. OAWY work with PAC-UK (the country's largest independent Adoption Support Agency) to learn from feedback from birth parents - <http://www.pac-uk.org/>

Adopted Teens

24. OAWY work with ADOPTTEENS (adopted teens identity) to learn from feedback from adopted teenagers. ADOPTTEENS is a project that was originally set up by the Yorkshire & Humber adoption consortium (a group of local authority adoption teams and voluntary adoption agencies) back in 2014. Their vision is to offer adopted teenagers their own space online and as part of a group that has the power to speak out and make a difference! - <https://www.adopteens.org.uk/>

Tweens (9 to 12 years old)

25. OAWY runs a range of Tween support groups aimed at children aged 9 to 12 years.

Staffing

26. OAW have diverse interview panels when possible.

27. Social workers are trained regarding equality and diversity issues in their degree in social work.

28. All staff events are held at least twice a year which often have a training element to them i.e., unconscious bias, cultural awareness/ understanding, BLM.

29. All staff at the agency are working toward the Cultural Cohesion Quality Mark.

Specialist Advice

30. We commission a service for Inter Country Adoption from the Yorkshire adoption agency. All inter country adopters attend specialist training specific to adopting from overseas provided by this agency.

Action required:

See section 12.

8b. Negative impact:
<p><u>Recruitment and Assessment of Adopters</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There are insufficient adopters with a diverse background coming forward to adopt (see section 12, action 1 & 2). 2. OAWY have a high level of interest from the south Asian communities to adopt full Asian babies rather than older children of mixed ethnicity (see section 12, action 1 & 2). <p>*Please note: Work has been undertaken with My Adoption Family to ensure that the messaging around adoption is clear regarding the needs of children waiting in England for adoption. Asking adopters to consider children of mixed heritage and older children and sibling groups is a key priority when working with the faith and community organisations to ensure that those coming forward are clear about the need for the service to prioritise those who can consider a range of children.</p> <p><u>Family Finding for Children</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. There can be unconscious bias from Children's Social Workers regarding considering single females and males for sibling groups they have waiting (see section 12, action 4). 4. Children cannot always be matched with families that meet their own cultural heritage and social workers are not always willing to consider families with a different heritage from the child's (see section 12, action 1 and 2). <p><u>Adoption Support</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The feedback from 2020 adopter survey highlighted a need for more flexibility in the training and support we offer in terms of timings and day delivered. This would improve access for full-time parents and/ or working parents (see section 12, action 5).
Action Required
See section 12.

9. Will this activity promote strong and positive relationships between the groups/communities identified?
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> No </div> </div> <p>Please provide detail:</p> <p>OAWY will always work to build and maintain positive and open relationships for people aiming to or being involved in the adoption process.</p> <p>Action required:</p> <p>None.</p>

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10. Does this activity bring groups/communities into increased contact with each other? (e.g., in schools, neighbourhood, workplace)
<div><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</div> <div><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</div>
Please provide detail:
Action required: None.

11. Could this activity be perceived as benefiting one group at the expense of another? (e.g., where your activity/decision is aimed at adults could it have an impact on children and young people)
<div><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> No</div>
Please provide detail: There could be the perception that certain groups are less likely to adopt than others. OAWY will always promote that this is not the case. The primary focus of OAWY will always be the child. The decision to place a child will be based upon the individual's ability to meet the child's ongoing needs and not based upon any of their diversity characteristics.
Action required: None.

12. Equality, diversity, cohesion and integration action plan

(Insert all your actions from your assessment here, set timescales, measures and identify a lead person for each action)

Action	Timescale	Measure	Lead person
Action 1 - Develop an innovative & bespoke family finding/ matching process for children who wait longer. *Project underway, started 2019/20.	31/03/2022	A new approach to reduce waiting time for children who wait longer piloted.	Nicola Steele
Action 2 – Recruit and assess a diverse range of adopters to meet the needs of the children. *Covered in the 2022/23 SIP	31/03/2022	Improved wait times for children from diverse backgrounds.	Michelle Rawlings
Action 3 – Implement Black Lives Matter action plan, see Appendix B.	31/03/2022	BLM action plan actions created, assigned and monitored.	BLM working group
Action 4 – Identify and deliver appropriate training on unconscious bias for OAWY staff and children’s social workers. *Covered in the 2022/23 SIP (CCQM)	31/03/2022	Training delivered to staff.	SLT
Action 5 – Review existing support and training offer and identify which can be made more accessible in terms of times/ days delivered. *Covered in the 2022/23 SIP	31/03/2022	Support/ training offered with a wider variety of times/ days.	Julie Chew

13. Governance, ownership and approval

State here who has approved the actions and outcomes from the equality, diversity, cohesion and integration impact assessment

Name	Job Title	Date
Michelle Rawlings	Head of OAWY	March 2022
Date impact assessment completed		March 2022

14. Monitoring progress for equality, diversity, cohesion and integration actions (please tick)
☒

As part of Service Planning performance monitoring

☒

As part of Project monitoring

☐

Update report will be agreed and provided to the appropriate board
Please specify which board

☐

Other (please specify)

15. Publishing

Though **all** key decisions are required to give due regard to equality the council **only** publishes those related to **Executive Board, Full Council, Key Delegated Decisions** or a **Significant Operational Decision**.

A copy of this equality impact assessment should be attached as an appendix to the decision-making report:

- Governance Services will publish those relating to Executive Board and Full Council.
- The appropriate directorate will publish those relating to Delegated Decisions and Significant Operational Decisions.
- A copy of all other equality impact assessments that are not to be published should be sent to equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk for record.

Complete the appropriate section below with the date the report and attached assessment was sent:

For Executive Board or Full Council – sent to Governance Services	Date sent: TBC
For Delegated Decisions or Significant Operational Decisions – sent to appropriate Directorate	Date sent: TBC
All other decisions – sent to equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk	Date sent: TBC



Who can adopt



Steps to adoption



The children



Events



Support



About One Adoption



Information and support for
first parents and relatives



Information for people who
have been adopted



Partner or step parent
adoption

Children from African, Caribbean, mixed ethnicity and Gypsy Roma backgrounds

In the West Yorkshire area especially we have a shortage of prospective adopters coming forward who can meet the needs of children from African, Caribbean, mixed ethnicity and Gypsy Roma backgrounds. If you are considering adoption and feel you can meet the needs of these children, please get in touch.



Children with unknown health needs or additional needs

All children need secure and loving homes. We are looking for adopters willing to help meet the needs of children with additional health needs or disabilities. Sometimes we do not know what the likely health or developmental outcomes may be for a child, for example if they have a chromosome abnormality. We need adopters who are willing to accept and understand these uncertainties and help the child develop and succeed at their own pace. With the right support and training, we aim to help every child reach their full potential.



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Highlight Report on Performance for the Board

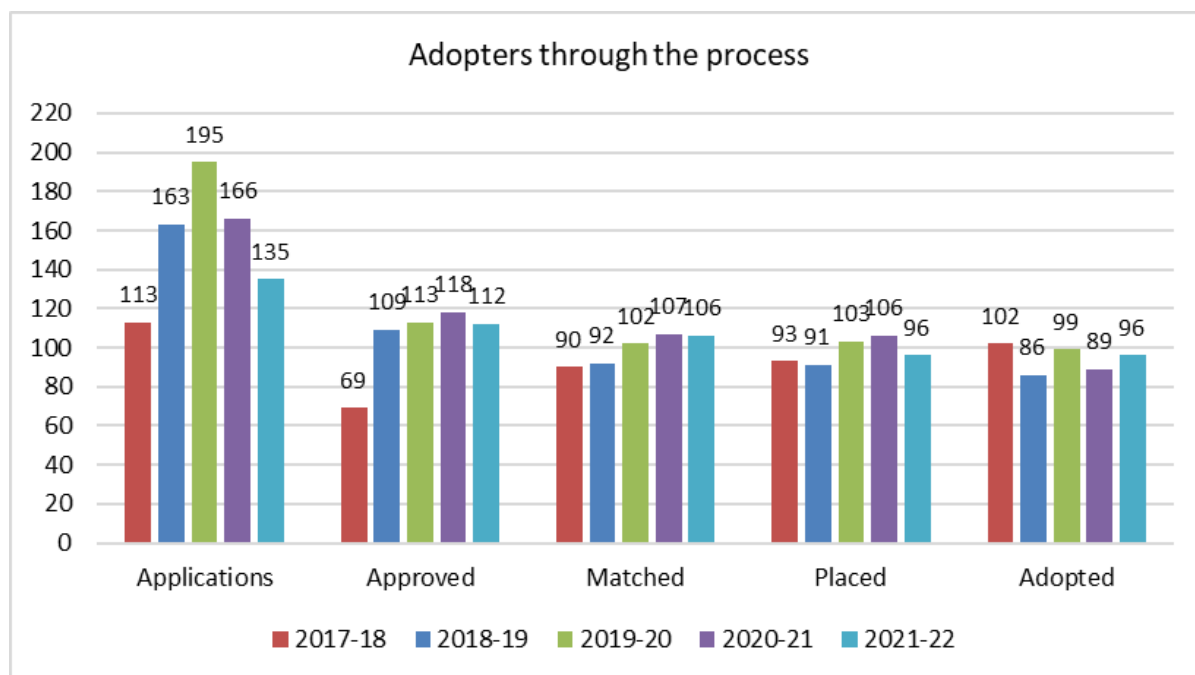
2021-22 Full Year

Bradford

Sufficiency: Are enough of the right kind of adopters being recruited and approved to meet the needs of the children waiting:

Adopter recruitment

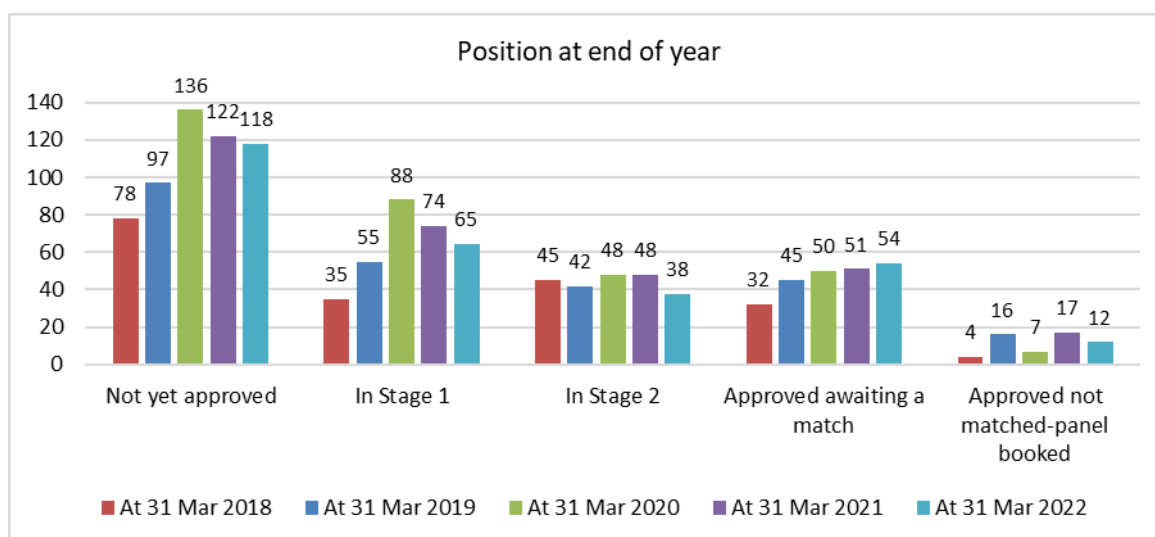
As at 31/3/22, 112 adoptive families have been approved, 106 families have been matched with children, all of these being with children from the West Yorkshire region.



Within the 112 households, 206 individuals were approved. Of these, 20 (10%) are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. This reflects the 2020/21 figures and indicates a continuing need to increase the diversity of adopters recruited to meet the needs of the children across West Yorkshire with an adoption plan.

27 households were approved for sibling groups, an increase of 3 households from the previous year. 61 households attended our sibling training which runs every two months, and we have held a sibling specific profile day for families across the country. Discussions are ongoing regarding our strategy to increase further the number of sibling adopters and a focus group with adoptive families is due to take place in early July to consider recruitment strategy and the support provided post placement. We continue to support the national recruitment campaign and work with link maker to ensure we use the platform in the best way. We are exploring featuring children on the website with a view to child specific recruitment.

19 households approved were open to Early Permanence Placements, which is 5 fewer households than in the previous year. The number still exceeds the number of children identified in the year to be placed via Early Permanence. However, we have still had to place two children externally due to not having families that could meet their needs in the timescales. Numbers of children identified for EPP remain low across the region. One Adoption were successful in a pan regional bid for funding to develop Early Permanence in West Yorkshire and have appointed a project lead to take this forward.



Of the 139 adoptive families who ended Stage One in 2021/22, the average time in stage one was 4 months; 34% were completed within the 2 month timescale, an improvement on last year.

Of the 112 adoptive families who ended Stage Two (Approved) in 2021/22, the average time in stage two was 4 months; 79% were completed within the 4 month timescale, an improvement on last year.

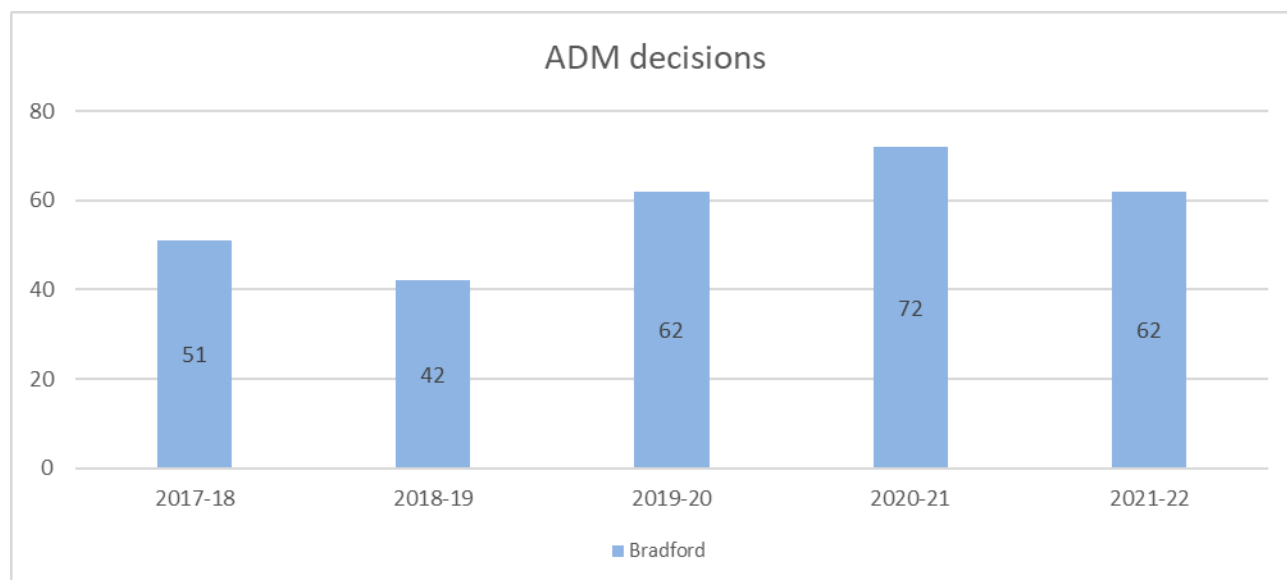
Our stage one timescales have been impacted by a shortage of adoption advisors due to staff moving on to study or take up new roles. We have now recruited and will be fully staffed next month. We continue to experience delays at all stages of the process due to GPs being unable to prioritise medical appointments and reports.

Following retirement, we no longer have the additional three recruitment and assessment social work posts. We continue use of sessional workers to increase our capacity as needed.

At the end 2021/22 there are 118 families who are not yet approved, 65 of these families are in stage 1 of the assessment process and 38 are in stage 2. 15 families are currently on hold pre-approval

The children with a plan for adoption during 2021-22

Between 1/4/21 and 31/3/22, 62 children had a plan for adoption ratified by Bradford Agency Decision Makers. 18 of these children had their adoption plan ratified during the final quarter of 2021/22. Of the 62 children, there were 34 female and 28 male children.



Ethnicity

Of the 62 children with a plan for adoption ratified so far this year, 79% were from White British backgrounds (including information not obtained) and 13 children (21%) were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

Placement with Siblings

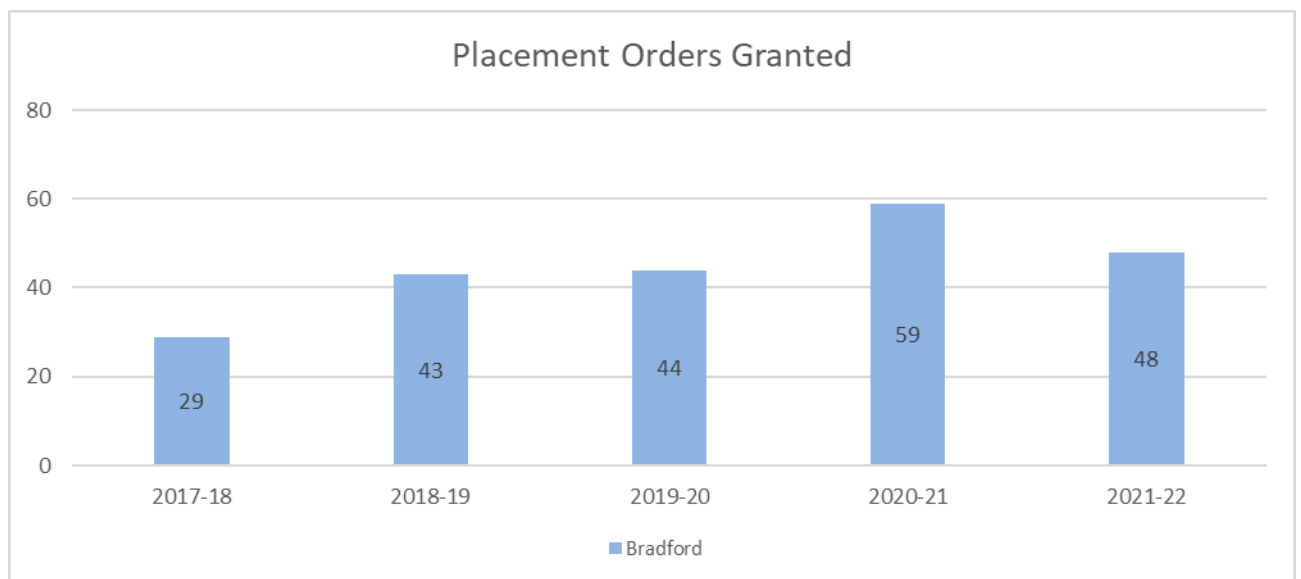
As a general principle, siblings will be placed together; however, due to the individual needs of children, this is not always appropriate and cannot always be achieved. It is essential that sibling assessments are carried out to ensure good quality decision making and support plans are evidence based if children are placed together or apart. The numbers of children requiring adoption in sibling groups at the end of the year is 55 children (this includes those with a match and/ or placed). Of the 27 children placed from this cohort during 2021/22, 11 were placed apart from their siblings, which reflects the care plan for each child.

Children with an adoption plan

As of the end of March 2022 there are 58 children with a plan for adoption from Bradford not currently placed and requiring adopters. 25 children out of the 58 are under 2 years, 26 are between 2 and 4 years and 7 children are 5 years of age or older. 4 of these 58 children have a potential match identified of which 3 have a panel booked and links are being pursued for the other children.

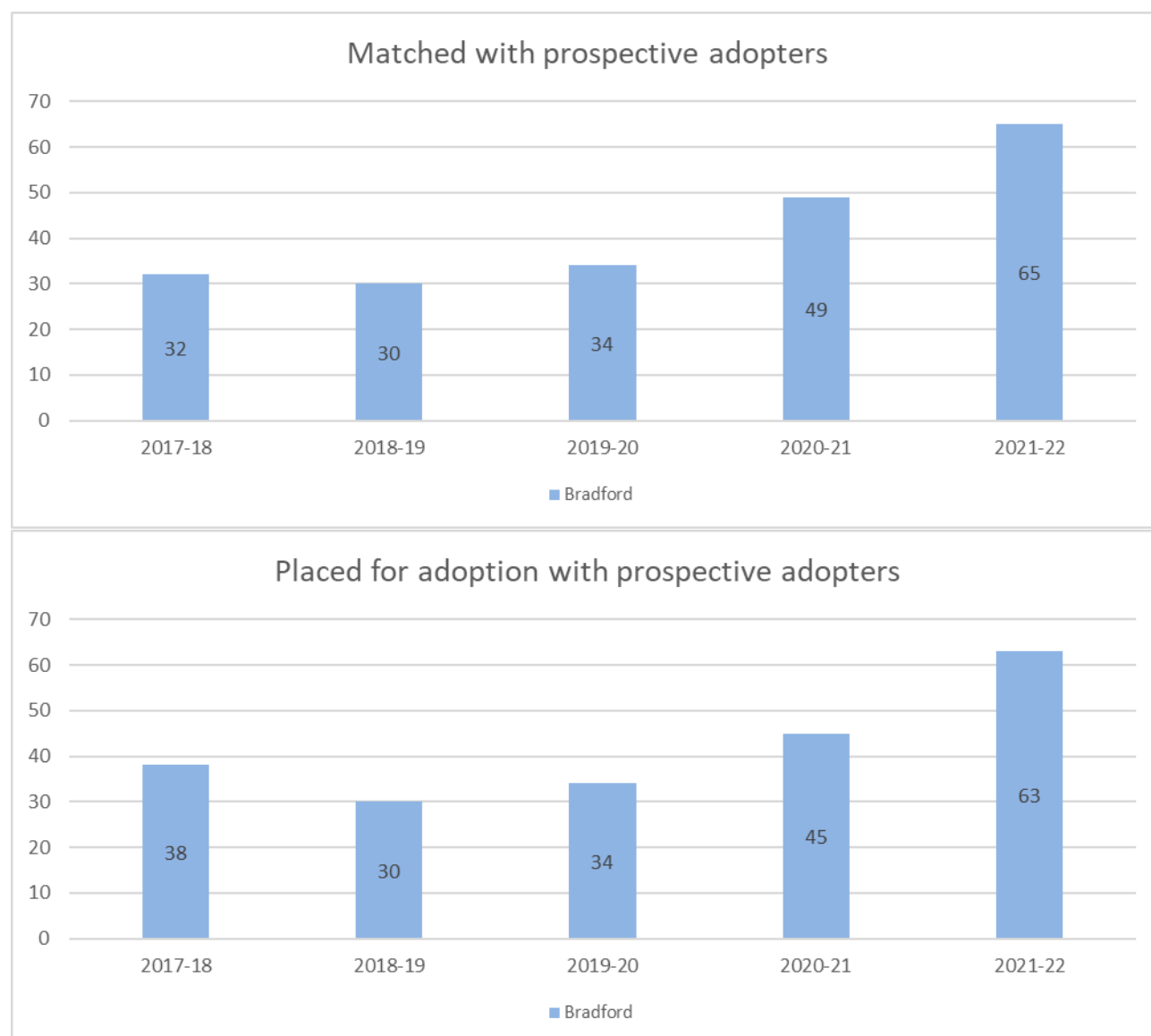
From the children with an adoption plan there are 30 girls and 28 boys, and 16% are children from BAME backgrounds. There are 26 children part of a sibling group.

18 of the 58 children do not yet have a Placement Order, giving Court authority to place them for adoption.



Over the course of 2021/22 the number of Placement Orders made in respect of Bradford children has decreased slightly on last year.

Timeliness: Are children being matched and placed without delay including those children who wait longer?



During 2021/22 65 children have been matched and 63 children have been placed with prospective adopters.

Of the children placed 12 children were from BAME backgrounds, 33 children were placed as part of a sibling group and 4 children were aged 5 or over.

Timeliness (children adopted)

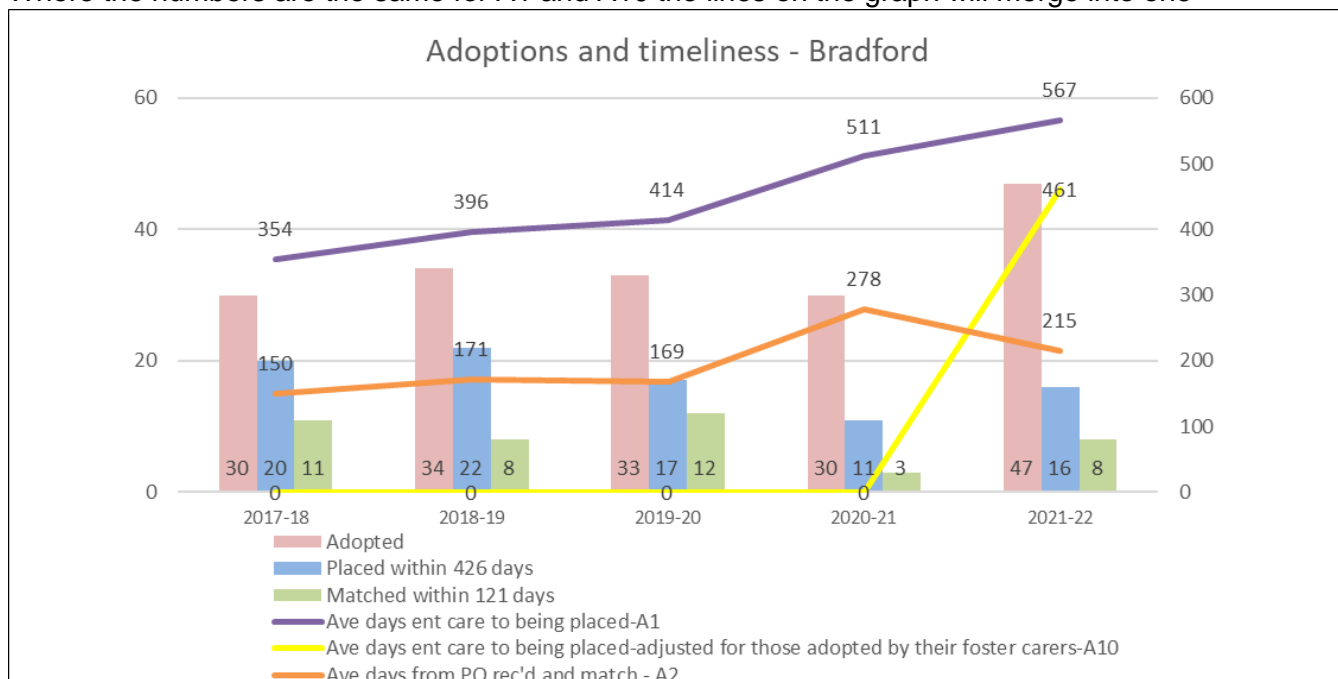
The graph below is with regard to children adopted in the period, showing A1, A10 and A2 indicators:

A1 indicator - Average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family

A10 indicator - Average time (in days) between a child entering care to being placed-adjusted for those adopted by their foster carers or placed in EPP (from 2021/22 only)

A2 indicator – Average time (in days) between local authority receiving a placement order and child being matched

Where the numbers are the same for A1 and A10 the lines on the graph will merge into one



The A1 scorecard indicator of children adopted is 567 days and above the national indicator of 426 days.

The A10 scorecard indicator of children adopted is 461 days which is still above the national indicator of 426 days.

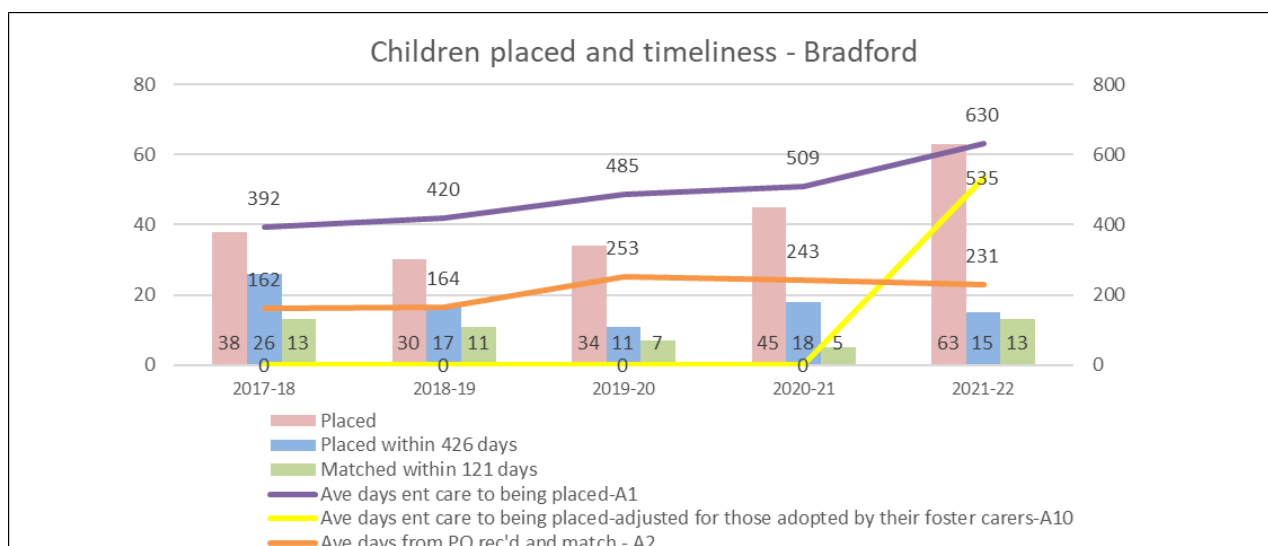
The A2 scorecard indicator for children adopted is 215 days, which is above the national indicator of 121 days.

Of the 47 children adopted in 2021/22, 31 of these were classed as a children who wait longer to match; 22 of these 31 children took more than 500 days from entering care to being placed, this affects the overall average timeliness. Without these 22 children the A1 average is 375 days.

Of the 31 children who wait longer to match, 26 took more than 121 days from Placement Order, without these 26 children the A2 average is 162.

Timeliness (children placed)

The graph below is with regard to children placed in the period, showing the same indicators as in the above graph.



Of the 63 children placed in 2021/22, 39 children had more than 500 days between entering care and being placed making the average 630 days, without these 39 children it brings the average down to 374 days, well within the 426 day indicator.

Of the 39 children, 30 were children who wait longer (e.g. classed by the DfE as harder to place children):

- 8 were aged 5+ years;
- 24 were part of a sibling group;
- 7 were Black and minority ethnic (BAME).
- 1 was a child with a disability

A2 indicator of the children placed:

47 of the 63 children placed in 2021/22 took more than 121 days from Placement Order to match.

27 of the 47 children were part of a sibling group, 8 were from BAME backgrounds and 7 were aged 5+ years these children often wait longer to be placed with adoptive families.

At the end of March 2022 there are 25 children who have been waiting for at least 18 months since entering care and are not yet placed for adoption:

19 are classed as "hard to place" children (5+years old, sibling group, disability, BAME), of which 6 have more than one of these characteristics. 6 of the 25 children are, however, not classed as hard to place.

Of these 6 children, one had a match break down in introductions and subsequently the foster carer has been assessed and a match booked. One had a family identified within 2 months of the Placement Order and was matched in February. A long process of introductions is taking place due to her complex emotional and development needs. One did not receive a Placement Order until March 2022 due to assessment of a family member and has a match identified. One had complex health and development needs which meant we were unable to identify a family and the plan changed to long-term fostering. One had a Placement Order in February 2022 the foster carer has asked to be assessed to adopt, and one had a prospective adopter withdraw just prior to match in February so family finding has restarted.

Support: Is the right kind of support being provided?

At the end of March 2022 there were 156 cases allocated to the Adoption Support Service from Bradford who have an Adoption Support Plan and are in receipt of or are awaiting therapeutic support via the Adoption Support Fund. This is an increase of 19 from last year.

Between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022, 156 successful applications have been made to the Adoption Support Fund in respect of adopted children in Bradford accessing £538,218.97 for therapeutic support. This is an increase of 53 applications and an additional £171,626 claimed.

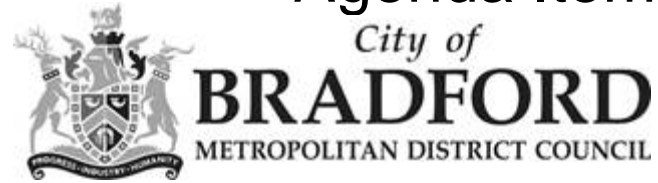
There were 34 families from Bradford awaiting allocation at the end of March 2022. This is due to a significant rise in demand for support. In the interim all the families continue to have access to the Core Support Services and some are accessing these. We hold monthly tracking and allocation meetings to ensure those families who are waiting are discussed routinely and progress to allocation is monitored. We are developing a 'virtual worker' system to allow specific pieces of 1:1 support and ASF applications to be made on cases with no allocated worker.

There are currently 358 letterbox contact plans facilitated for Bradford children and young people by One Adoption West Yorkshire, with 476 exchanges received and 407 exchanges sent out between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022. Again, this is a significant increase on the 276 contact plans facilitated last year.

Between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022, 167 referrals were made to PAC-UK for families inclusive of adult adoptees, birth parents/relatives across West Yorkshire. 33 (20%) were families living in Bradford.

Between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022, 330 access to records requests were received. 64 (19%) of which related to accessing Bradford records.

At 31st March 2021 there were 20 active peer mentors across the region, 5 of whom were in Bradford. Throughout the year 10 Bradford families accessed 1:1 peer support, 1 family accessed 1:1 transitions support and 5 families accessed online group support via WhatsApp.



Report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services to the meeting of Corporate Parent to be held on 20 July 2022

Subject:

B

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report

Summary statement:

To provide Corporate Parenting with an overview of the IRO service for 2021 - 2022

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

There is no requirement for an impact assessment, there are no changes to policy, the report provides an overview of services to Children in Care via the IRO team.

Some of this captures the ethnicity of children placed in care in Bradford, but it is a holistic overview of the IRO service.

Marium Haque
Strategic Director – Children's Services

Portfolio:

Children and Families

Report Contact: Helen Cliffe
Helen.cliffe@bradford.gov.uk
07582 101 083

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

The attached report provides Corporate Parenting with an overview of the IRO service for 2021 - 2022

2. BACKGROUND

See attached report

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

None

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

None

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

None

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

None

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

None

7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

None

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

None

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

None

7.5 TRADE UNION

None

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

None

7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)

None

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The report supports the members of the panel to discharge their Corporate Parenting Responsibility in respect of children in care.

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

None

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None

9. OPTIONS

The report is for information only

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

The report is for information only

11. APPENDICES

Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

N/A

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Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report

Reporting Period	01.04.2021 – 31.03.2022
Reporting to	Corporate Parenting Panel and The Bradford Partnership
Report authors	Helen Cliffe (Service Manager)
Date of report:	06.06.2022

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5. Participation in Reviews Children in Care Age 4+	19 – 20
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1. Introduction

This Annual report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the Independent Reviewing Service in Bradford as required by statutory guidance.

The Independent Reviewing Officers' (IRO) Annual Report must be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board and Bradford Partnership.

The IRO service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the review process to a wider overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for children in care and for challenging drift and delay.

This report provides an opportunity to highlight areas of good practice and areas for improvement, identify themes and trends and report on work undertaken to date and to outline the developmental priorities for the next twelve months.

2. Profile of the IRO team

The IRO Service sits within the Safeguarding and Reviewing Unit with its core functions consisting of reviewing plans for children in care and monitoring the Local Authority in respect of its corporate parenting and safeguarding responsibilities.

The IRO Service in Bradford currently consists of

- Head of Service
- Service Manager
- Two IRO Team Managers
- 15 FTE Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)
- 3 FTE Fixed Term 2 year contracts (IROs)
- 3 FTE Foster Care Independent Reviewing Officers (FIRO's)

The Head of Service reports directly to the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Review, Commissioning and Provider Services in order to assure line management separation of IROs from the Social Work Service.

The two IRO teams are comprised slightly differently. One team has 8.6 FTE IROs and 3 FTE Fixed Term 2 year contracts and the other team has 6.4 FTE IROs in addition to the 3 FIRO's. This split has been established to ensure management consistency of the FIRO to develop and embed their side of the service.

The IRO Team Managers role has been stable for one team, but there has been changes in other team due to staff sickness. Initially this post was overseen by an IRO who stepped up temporarily, later achieving success in progressing to the role of Child Protection Team Manager; more recently the role has been supported by an agency IRO Team Manager.

The last twelve months has continued the development of the teams staffing structure and service delivery which has the longer term aim of improving stability, oversight and continued development of the service.

There is stability within the workforce with 6 IROs who have over 4 years' service in the IRO team providing consistency to a significant number of our children in care.

However, in the last twelve months there have been some staffing changes. There has been the creation of posts as well as recruitment to 2 permanent posts that were being supported by agency staff. We had two IROs leave the service in 2021 and another IRO role became vacant due to the initial step up into IRO management and later successful recruitment to the role of CP Team Manager.

By the end of March 2022 we had adverts out for the 3 Fixed term contracts, which will replace the Covid Recovery posts which are covered by agency IROs and a permanent IRO role to replace an IRO who will be retiring in June 2022. Otherwise we are fully staffed by permanent IROs.

The same IRO will review all the children within a sibling group, regardless of the time each sibling enters care; unless there is a conflict of interest, which maintains continuity for children and parents.

The ethnic and gender balance of the team has seen some changes. The service is predominantly staffed by females, However, we remain a relatively diverse team with IROs of different ethnicity and nationality.

All IROs have at least 5 years post qualifying experience as social workers and are registered as Social Workers with Social Work England. Several have held manager roles in other services.

2.1 Statutory responsibilities and Additional responsibilities of the IROs

The statutory requirements for an IRO are

- a) To chair the first child in care review within 20 working days.
- b) To chair the second review (usually the permanency decision-making review) within 3 months of the first review.
- c) To chairs reviews every 6 months thereafter.
- d) Outcomes of review meetings should be available within 5 working days of the meeting.

- e) The minutes of the review should be completed within 15 working days and disseminated within 20 working days.
- f) IROs should monitor the child's case on an ongoing basis and have oversight of any changes to care planning; deciding whether an earlier review needs to take place.
- g) The IRO should consult with children and young people before their review and ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority.
- h) The IRO should ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child.

IROs additional duties in Bradford include:

IROs chair all first Supervision Order Reviews for children who conclude Care Proceedings with a Supervision Order, embedding the plan before stepping down fully to the social work team. IROs chair reviews for children subject to Interim Supervision Orders, when there is a sibling within the proceedings who is subject to an Interim Care Order.

IROs facilitate training workshops for ASYE's as well as routinely participate in working parties to develop aspects of the service and recruitment fayre's.

To support and promote learning, IROs facilitate reflective practice sessions (case based) within the team alongside experienced IROs supporting newly appointed IROs with mentoring, offering advice and support around the role.

IROs also attend working parties to develop the service, this includes but is not exhaustive to developing the Mockingbird Model and developing the Family Time model.

Additionally, some IROs are completing their Practice Educator Award to support students 'long arm' in Social Care teams.

2.2 What's changed within the last twelve months

In the last twelve months there was the recruitment of a second Service Manager. Originally the role of the Service Manager had oversight of Child Protection Coordinator's, Independent Reviewing Officers, Foster Care Independent Reviewing Officers, Quality Assurance Managers (Reg 44), Local Authority Designated Officers (LADO), Participation service and a Business Support Team. From September 2021, a second Service Manager role was created and the service was divided. IROs, FIROs, Participation service and Quality Assurance Managers (Reg 44) remaining under one Service Manager, who works closely with the other Service Manager overseeing the other half of the service.

There has been robust recruitment improving stability and permanency across the workforce. The only outstanding roles that need to be recruited to are the newly

created Fixed Term contracts and a projected permanent post due to be vacant by virtue of retirement. This is underway, and will mean that there are no agency staff in the IRO service.

Whilst, for a significant length of time, over the course of 2021/2022, IROs have worked virtually due to Covid restrictions there has been increased face-to-face consultations with children and young people and meetings being either face-to-face, virtual or a hybrid model. This has been aligned to the choice of children and young people and room availability as Covid restrictions change within schools and other settings.

There has been the development of an informal challenge recording mechanism to ensure that there is transparency in the activity of the IRO; whilst there is a formal challenge and resolution process, the IRO should initiate informal challenge as the starting point unless the severity of the issue dictates more formal processes.

Alongside this there is an external partner challenge recording mechanism so it can be clearly identified where the IRO has directed the challenge, and there is a clear narrative of the outcome.

We have developed a child/young person feedback form to ensure we listen to children and young people's views about the review process and respond as appropriate to any changes we can make to improve the Child in Care review process.

We are improving the profile of the IRO service across social work teams and partner agencies. This involves attending team meetings and presenting information about the IRO service as well as developing relevant links with partner agencies.

The closing of cases of children and young people are now overseen by the IRO Team Managers, providing improved oversight that the salient issues have been addressed.

The service has reviewed and updated the Child in Care and Child Protection Dual Status process to ensure that Child Protection plans are ended as appropriate, in a timely manner whilst considering safeguarding measures to protect the child as required.

3. Quantitative information about the IRO Service

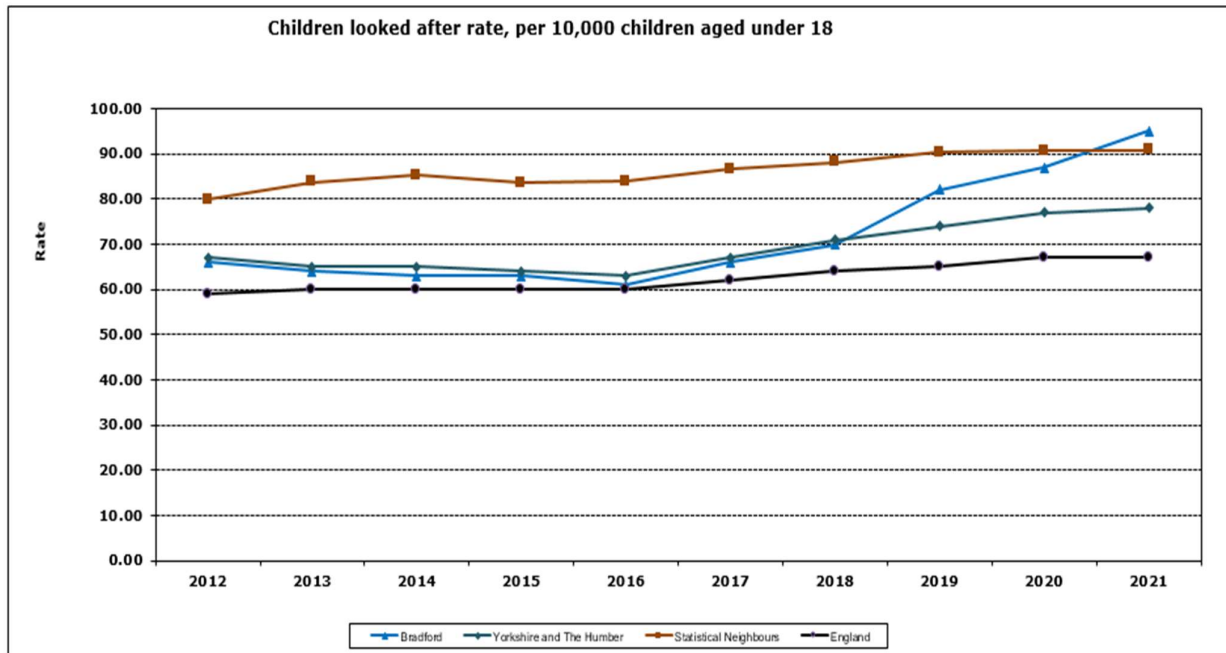
From April 2021 to March 2022, 481 children and young people entered care and 382 left care. For April 2020 to March 2021, 509 children and young people entered care and 405 left care. This is a decrease of 5.5% in children entering care and 5.6% decrease in children leaving care.

The last two years have seen a decrease in the volumes of children entering and leaving care. The latter is attributed to delays in Court timetabling for discharges of Care Orders but also Bradford has been impacted by staff retention which has caused drift and delay in progressing plans.

3.1 Number of Children in Care

On 31st March 2022 there were 1446 children and young people in care in Bradford, compared to 1352 in 2021 and 1246 in 2020. In the last year this is a 6.9% increase and over the last two years a 16% increase.

Since 2018 Bradford consistently has a higher rate of children in care per 10,000 children compared to Yorkshire and Humber and England. Over the course of 2020/2021 the data produced by the Department of Education cites that the rise in Bradford rates increased above its statistical neighbours.



Children entering care

Table 1

	2019	2020	2021	Changes from previous year
Bradford	35.00	36.00	35.00	1.00
Yorkshire and The Humber	27.00	28.00	27.00	-2.00
Statistical neighbours	31.60	28.90	27.30	-1.60
England	27.00	26.00	24.00	-2.00

The data in Table 1 highlights that prior to the Inspection in 2018 Bradford's rates of children entering care was lower than Yorkshire and Humber, England and Bradford's statistical neighbours.

Post to the 2018 Inspection which resulted in Bradford entering an Improvement Journey, the numbers of children entering care in Bradford increased significantly. It can be argued the Inspection outcome had a clear impact upon Bradford's threshold response resulting in the significant increase in entries to care.

In 2020 the rates peaked at 36, whilst in 2021 the figures slightly reduced to 35; this continued to be significantly higher than Yorkshire and the Humber, England and Bradford's statistical neighbours. Bradford's Improvement Journey has been protracted by the impact of Covid. Bradford has also struggled with staff retention and the impact of organisational restructures resulting in delays in care planning. This has impacted on early support i.e. Early Help and succinct planning at Child in Need and Child Protection stages, which affects the numbers of children and young people entering care. These factors are well documented in the Children's Commissioner Report to the Secretary of State for Education January 2022.

Children leaving care

Table 2

	2019	2020	2021	Changes from previous year
Bradford	23.00	30.00	28.00	-2.00
Yorkshire and The Humber	24.00	26.00	25.00	-1.00
Statistical neighbours	29.30	27.90	26.50	-1.00
England	25.00	25.00	23.00	-2.00

Comparing the data of children and young people entering care to those leaving care, a greater rate of children have left care in Bradford in 2021 than Yorkshire & Humber, England and Bradford's statistical neighbours.

As Bradford moves through the Improvement Journey there is focussed work around discharging care orders or replacing with more permanent orders i.e. Special Guardianship which will help to achieve permanency for children.

However, in 2021 Bradford (alongside England) evidenced a more significant downturn in children and young people leaving care, which has a detrimental impact on the overall numbers of children in care given the numbers of children and young people who enter care in Bradford.

Ultimately, Bradford, compared to Yorkshire & Humber, England and statistical neighbours, has high levels of children and young people in care. Bradford is a deprived city, which has a significant percentage of children living in low income household affected by high employment. It is the fifth largest metropolitan district with an ethnically diverse and young population. These are all factors that increase the

challenges for Bradford to provide the range of services that are required to support such a complex population.

3.2 Children who entered Care by Legal Orders

The data relating to the legal order by which a child/young person entered care over 2021/2022 is highlighted in Table 3.

Over the course of 2021/2022 there have been a number of audits and discussions that have taken place in regard to the use of Police Powers of Protection¹. Whilst there has been a decrease in the figures since 2019/2020 there is an on-going debate that the numbers of children and young people entering care via this route is high and whether or not there is a disparity in threshold between the Police and Social Care and/or whether or not planned intervention should have been taken earlier. It is promising that there is a reduction in the use of Police Powers of Protection which evidences that this dialogue is between partner agencies is having some impact.

The use of Section 20 remains the most used legal route. This is due to Section 20 being used as a pre-cursor to the onset of legal proceedings through the use of the Public Law Pre Proceedings process (when there is agreement between Social Care and the parents with the commitment that Care Proceedings will be applied for) and when managing young people through the homeless route or separated migrant route.

There is still a cohort of children and young people who enter care through the legal order of ICO Section 38.6; which is where the Court directs the children remain where they currently live subject to an assessment. This is due to the Court agreeing to the threshold for an Interim Care Order (ICO) but not the threshold for immediate removal of the child/young person. It can be argued that Social Care did not submit sufficient evidence to warrant immediate removal. This can present itself in cases of long term neglect where there can be long term involvement by Social Care across the spectrum of Child in Need and Child Protection planning. In these instances, the issue of risk can peak and trough but cumulatively over the years can significantly reduce the 'life chances' of children and young people. Given that Bradford is a deprived city a number of families are exposed to the difficulties caused by poverty.

Table 3

Legal Order	2020 -2021	2021 -2022
Accommodated Section 20	236	214
Interim Care Order	184	193

¹ powers held by police officers to protect a child from harm if they believe there is an imminent danger. This includes, but is not limited to, **the power to remove a child from the family home without a court order and to temporarily house them in a 'place of safety'**.

Police Powers of Protection	77	57
Other	12	17
Total	509	481

3.3 Child in Care by Legal Status

The data relating to the legal orders that a child/young person were subject to on 31st March 2022 is highlighted in Table 4.

The figures for legal orders as an overall picture at the end of March 2022 evidences a significant increase in the use of ICO Section 38.6 orders. Whilst overall the numbers of children and young people entering care via this legal route decreased in 2021/2022 the residue of children and young people subject to this legal order remains high. This is affected by protracted Court Hearings, which are a result of specialist assessments, independent social work assessments, international elements and drift and delay caused by changes in social worker. Additionally, the IRO service routinely advises social care teams to amend legal orders on the child's file when the legal order has changed through the care proceedings, therefore there will be some anomalies in the data reporting as some children and young people will have crossed the threshold for removal during the care proceedings and the legal status has not been amended. It is generally the case that large sibling groups are made subject to ICO Section 38.6; so whilst the numbers are high the number of families this actually correlates to is smaller.

The data for adoption is positive in Bradford; Bradford is able to evidence that they have secured Placement Orders on an ever increasing narrative which is linked to early intervention, thorough assessment and clear planning. The partnership arrangements between Bradford and One Adoption West Yorkshire are good with their inclusion in Legal Gateway Panel to identify any earlier indicators for Early Permanence.

Section 20 has increased which is linked to Government rotation for Separated Migrants as well as Bradford's oversight in managing the Homeless route, with a new protocol being introduced in 2021/2022.

Whilst respite has continued to decrease, this does not directly link to a lack of respite provision for children and young people across Bradford, merely that the respite offered is not for more than 75 nights which then requires an IROs oversight thus being quantifiable in our data.

Table 4

Legal Status	31/03/2021	31/03/2022	Differential
Care Order S31.1(A) CA 1989	845	920	8.87% increase

Interim Care Order S38 CA 1989	281	245	12.8% decrease
Placement Order	86	92	6.97% increase
Remand Or Committed For Trial Or Sentence	2	5	150% increase
S20 - Series of Placements >75 nights per year or multiple providers	3	2	33% decrease
S20 - Single Placement	111	131	18% increase
Section 38.6 Interim Care Order	24	51	122% increase
Total	1352	1446	

3.4 Placement type for Children in Care

The data relating to the placement type that a child/young person was subject to for 2021/2022 is highlighted in Table 5.

The use of mother and baby units has remained static over the last year. There are occasions when a mother and baby unit is appropriate, but the decision to use a mother and baby unit should not be taken lightly as the assessment is for 12 weeks and is in a highly protected environment and does not necessarily allow for the full assessment of external (community based) risks. Mother and baby units are very useful when assessing whether a mother and/or father can care for a baby and their level of commitment over an extended period of time as well as providing time for some intense 'direct work' around any prevailing worries but perhaps are not as effective in being able to assess the impact of deeply entrenched behaviours resulting from (for example) domestic abuse or drug abuse where there is a need to assess a parent in the realities of life within the community.

There has been a 6% increase of children in care currently living with connected carers which indicates that the social work teams are actively identifying family options. This is opposed to a 1% increase in the use of 'mainstream' foster placements; therefore, in determining the shape of fostering services the use of Connected Carers is growing at a faster rate albeit that 'mainstream' foster placements are still the most significant type of placement used.

The use of Residential placements has increased by 21.8%, and an increase of 30% of Post 16 semi-independent homes (currently not regulated by Ofsted). Bradford's in-house residential services have been faced with challenges over 2021/2022; over the course of the year placements have reduced with the view to enable an overhaul on how children and young people are matched to Homes as well as development of a strategic plan for the future provision of Residential services. Alongside a national shortage of foster placements for children there has been an increased use of independent Residential Homes and Post 16 provision.

Bradford still has a significant number of children placed at home with a parent or parents. Whilst the comparison between 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 is marginal at 1.8% increase it is still an area that needs focus by Bradford in the future. Placement with a parent can often be decided at the conclusion of care proceedings as a means of providing a further period of testing when the reduced risk of significant harm can be maintained. Placement with parents can also be assessed as the right route for a child young person as they grow and develop into young adults. However, a child or young person placed at home with a parent should be a short lived care plan. Bradford needs to make inroads into the length of time placement with parent's plans are lasting.

- a) 1.2% of placement with parents are 6 years' old
- b) 7% of placements are 5 years' old
- c) 3.6% of placements are 4 years' old
- d) 4.2% of placements are 3 years' old
- e) 16% of placements are 2 years' old
- f) 12% of placements are 1-year-old

Where a young person has communicated that they do not want their Care Order discharged, despite living with a parent, their views and wishes are listened to by the IRO. There can be many factors for this particularly around the level of support they will or won't be entitled to without the security of shared parental responsibility and the desire to maintain a social worker to oversee their future.

IROs have and need to continue to evidence robust oversight and use the challenge and resolution process as appropriate. Delays have been caused by children and young people transferring services (i.e. from children and families to child in care teams or care leavers service) as well as the impact of changes of social workers caused by staff retention. Social workers need to ensure that there is a robust step down plan to enable the Court to support the discharge of the Care Order.

More recently, there has been the creation of two dedicated social workers to focus on discharges of Care Orders to support the reduction of children and young people in care, that do not require a legal order.

Bradford adoption data is extremely positive. In 2021 there was a 45% increase in children being placed into their adoptive home which is evidence of good working

relationships between One Adoption and Bradford Children's Services. To facilitate adoption planning communication and written documentation is required to be clear and transparent. Matching children to adoptive placements requires a lot of support from partner agencies and social workers need to be focused. Children who are placed for adoption tend to be the younger end, therefore ensuring permanency is achieved swiftly is essential.

Table 5

Placement type	Number 2020/2021	Number 2021/2022
Foster Care	555	561
Connected Person	372	394
Placed for Adoption	35	51
Placed with Parents	163	166
Residential	119	145
Supported accommodation / Lodging	93	121
Mother and Baby Unit	5	5
Hospital	1	0
Remand	2	5

3.5 Age and Gender profile of Children entering Care

Table 6 outlines the data in regard to the gender profile of children and young people entering care.

Since entering care there are two young people who have been confirmed as identifying as trans². Gender identity has become an increasing factor when considering the care needs of young people. The IRO service is supporting identity issues, supporting young people to have time to consider their feelings; over the course of the next few years it is suspected that this data will increase.

The data has concluded for the last 2 years that more males than females enter care aged 17+ and correlating this data to those young people who enter care via the route of Section 20 it is generally accepted that this is due to more males entering care via the homeless or in particular the separated migrant route.

² A term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.

Whilst, on balance more males enter care than female's year on year, in 2021/22 the data for children entering care under the age of one year was on par.

Table 6

	31/03/2021			31.03.2022		
Age	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
0 - less than 1	42	57	99	43	44	87
1 – 4	43	39	82	34	41	75
5 - 10	57	69	126	53	52	105
11 - 16	92	71	163	78	84	162
17+	13	26	39	17	35	52
Total	247	262	509	225	256	481

3.6 Age Ceased Care

Table 7 outlines the data of the ages of children and young people leaving care. Children and young people can leave care through a variety of routes namely, adoption, Special Guardianship Orders, discharging a Care Order to no Order, an alternative Order being agreed at the conclusion of care proceedings (i.e. Child Arrangements Order) or ending Section 20 status by mutual agreement.

It has continued to be a theme in 2021/2022 that the data cites 17 year olds as being the highest number of young people ceasing care and this will mainly be due to turning 18 or through Section 20 status being ended.

The data supports that the younger children (aged 1-4) will achieve permanency outside of long term social care involvement; over half the children who entered care were able to leave care by means of adoption, SGO or reunification with a parent. However, children aged mid-range (5-10) are more likely to remain in care for longer periods whether this is placed with Connected Persons, mainstream foster carers, residential or placed with a parent. There are many reasons for this including the oversight of complex needs borne out of childhood trauma, the impact of social work retention and focus on moving care plans to achieve permanency outside of long term social care involvement and packages of support in place to achieve permanency outside of long term social care involvement

Table 7

Age Group	Number 2020/2021	Number 2021/2022
0 - less than 1	19	21
1 – 4	93	86
5-10	69	57
11 – 16	72	63
17+	150	155
Total	403	382

3.7 Reasons that Children Left Care

During the pandemic, there have been a delays in court capacity to hear new proceedings for discharge of care orders; this has led to a reduction in children leaving care via some of the permanence options listed below in 2020/21, in Table 8.

The 'other' option is used in unusual circumstances these include existing jurisdiction maintaining responsibility for the family or care proceedings transferring to another Local Authority, remand status' ending and some are simply errors where a young person was made CiC (usually linked to large sibling groups where there is an older sibling who did not form part of the accommodation into care).

As highlighted earlier with this this report the data for adoption is positive with a 56.6% increase in children being adopted in 2021/2022.

However, there has been a decrease in achieving permanence by SGOs. Some of this will be absorbed by using different Orders e.g. the use of Child Arrangement Orders which has increased in 2021/2022. There is an impact on achieving permanency through drift and delay caused by social work staff retention.

Table 8

Reason	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	%
Returned to parents	72	79	9.7% increase
Supervision Order	56	47	16% decrease
Independence (aged 18)	137	141	2.9% increase
Special Guardianship Order	60	46	23% decrease

Adopted	30	47	56.6% increase
Child Arrangements Order	7	11	57% increase
Other	41	11	73% decrease
Total	403	382	

3.8 Ethnicity Profile of Children in Care

Bradford has a diverse population which is reflected in the number of children in care. The Independent Reviewing Officers ensure that identity needs are covered in the child in care review process. In addition, there has been some training organised by and delivered within the team on issues affecting Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) children in care as reflective practice is the best way to ensure that IROs continue to prioritise the importance of considering ethnicity factors that affect children in care.

Table 9 evidences the diversity of children and young people looked after in Bradford. Whilst the highest ethnicity group is White British, there is a wide representation of other ethnicities that requires IROs to be alert to identity needs and ensure they maintain an up to date knowledge base and have a proactive oversight.

Table 9

Ethnic Group	31/03/2022
Asian/British Asian – Bangladesh	16
Asian/British Asian – Indian	2
Asian/British Asian - Other	22
Asian/British Asian - Pakistani	129
Black/Black British - African	39
Black British / other	2
Chinese	2
Gypsy/Roma	59
Information Not Yet Obtained	18
Mixed - Other	30

Mixed - White/Asian	127
Mixed - White/Black African	19
Mixed - White/Black Caribbean	55
Other Ethnic Group	30
Refused	0
Roma	18
Traveller of Irish Heritage	3
White - British	789
White - Central European	1
White - Eastern European	68
White - Irish	2
White – Other	15

3.9 Number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) – Separated Migrant Children and Young People

Table 10 evidences the ethnicity of Bradford's Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (Separated Migrant children and young people).

The data reporting follows the Department of Health criteria therefore it can be difficult to quantify the true data around ethnicity, as the ethnicities that arrive via the route of separated migrant do not fall under the categories, therefore are recorded as 'other ethnic group'. Additionally, the data recorded evidences that recording of ethnicity is not accurate as by definition of being a separated migrant you would not have an ethnicity that inferred any British element.

Further analysis of the information under the categories of 'other ethnic group' or 'Information Not Yet Obtained' identifies that a large number of Separated Migrant children have travelled from Kurdish speaking countries (i.e. Iraq, Iran, Syria).

Other areas include travel from the Middle East, Sudan and Eritrea.

Numbers have increased in 2021/2022 due to the National Transfer scheme Protocol for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children³ and the volumes of separated migrant children and young people entering England. This has placed additional pressure on the Care Leavers service at times as they oversee the transition of Separated Migrant children and young people to Bradford. In 2021/2022 the Care Leavers service updated their protocol for separated migrant children to improve overall care planning for this cohort of children and young people.

Table 10

Ethnicity	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022
Asian/British Asian - Other	3	8
Asian/British Asian - Pakistani	1	1
Black/Black British - African		5
Information Not Yet Obtained		2
Mixed - Other		1
Other Ethnic Group	13	34

3.10 Children on Child Protection Plan before entering Care (month by month)

Table 11 evidences the numbers of children and young people who were on child protection plans prior to entering care. There has been a 14% decrease on the numbers of children and young people entering care whilst being subject to a child protection plan. However, 44.6% of children and young people who enter care have been subject to a child protection plan at the point they entered care.

In 2019/2021 49% of children and young people were subject to a child protection plan at the point they entered care. Whilst the figure has come down in 2021/2022, there are still a significant number of children and young people who convert from child protection to child in care.

There is further work to be undertaken to improve outcomes within child protection processes to reduce the numbers of children and young people entering care in Bradford.

Table 11

2020-2021		2021-2022	
30/04/2020	11	30/04/2021	17

³ 'The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) protocol for unaccompanied asylum seeking children has been created to enable the safe transfer of unaccompanied children in the UK from one local authority (the entry authority from which the unaccompanied child transfers) to another local authority (the receiving authority). Only unaccompanied children that meet the definition of a UASC, are eligible to be referred to the NTS. (National Transfer Scheme Protocol for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. Transfers should take place within 10 working days of referral to the NTS: Dec 2021)

31/05/2020	10	31/05/2021	12
30/06/2020	15	30/06/2021	21
31/07/2020	69	31/07/2021	25
31/08/2020	41	31/08/2021	13
30/09/2020	23	30/09/2021	21
31/10/2020	17	31/10/2021	17
30/11/2020	9	30/11/2021	11
31/12/2020	17	31/12/2021	16
31/01/2021	14	31/01/2022	19
28/02/2021	10	28/02/2022	12
31/03/2021	14	31/03/2022	31
Total	250	Total	215

4 Performance data from the IRO Service

IRO caseloads have been between 80 – 90 per FTE for the last financial year. Caseloads remain higher than the recommendations set out within the IRO handbook; this is inevitable in light of the ever increasing population of children and young people in care but has been supported by the creation of 3 Fixed term 2 year contracts.

Additionally, through supervision, there continues to be a targeted discussion and challenge around cases to ensure that the IROs drive permanency across Bradford. Bradford remains on an Improvement Journey following its Ofsted inspection in 2018; the challenges for the social work teams continue to be the ability to retain staff and recruit staff. The IRO service continues to have a significant part to play in ensuring that care planning remains on track and permanency is achieved as soon as possible.

A total of 3560 Child in Care reviews were chaired by IROs in the year ending 31st March 2021. This is compared to 3578 in the year 2020/21. This is a 0.5% decrease. The volume of reviews completed remains relatively static.

The service has continued to ensure a high percentage of reviews take place on time; 97.8% of reviews were completed on time compared with 97.3% in 2020/2021. The service has set an aspirational figure of 98%. It is positive that performance in this area has remained stable over the last few years despite the challenges of rearranging

reviews due to social work changes and a transfer of cases to permanent IROs through recruitment.

5 Child Participation

The importance of a child or young person's participation in the decision making processes of their lives is now a well-accepted concept embedded in recent legislation, government regulations and guidelines. The Department of Education gathers data on participation based on PN codes as outlined in Table 12. The IRO is expected to ascertain the views of child or young person prior to each review and to achieve this should have multiple resources. These can include (but are not exhaustive to) visits, using viewpoint⁴, WhatsApp, advocates, communication aids, interpreters, letters and messaging. How a child and young person wants to participate in their review and to what level is considered on a person to person basis by the IRO.

The use of PN7 has increased in the last year. When analysing the data, the general discrepancies come during the transition of aged 3 and 4. When a child is under 4 there is PN code 0 (child under 4), which means that mitigates the use of consultation; but aged 4 and onwards the option of using viewpoint and other techniques as a means to communicate views and /or be offered consultation via other means becomes available.

IROs are encouraged to observe children of the younger age range so that they can formulate an overall picture of how settled they are. From a service perspective there needs to be improvement in ensuring the participation of children at this age as well as confirmation that the log-in details of viewpoint have been shared when a child turns 4 to enable a practitioner to access viewpoint.

There have also been refusals to speak with the IRO or access an advocate or use alternative means to provide views for the child in care process with those aged 4 and above. It is important that this is also evidenced. Whilst others who have day-to-day oversight of young people in care could offer their interpretation of how the young person views their care plan, IROs are encouraged to evidence integrity in the information they report on.

Additionally, human error also accounts for some of the data, as views have clearly been sought and evidenced but there is inaccuracy in the data recorded.

There is a significant increase in PN5 and this is largely around the use of different platforms by the IRO to obtain the views of children and young people. This is a developing theme as children and young people appreciate communication with an IRO via a variety of means rather than the only option being face-to-face consultation.

⁴ Viewpoint is the current commissioned service to support children and young people participate in their child in care review process.

Table 12

Participation Code	2020- 2021	
PN0 – child under 4	784	721
PN1 – Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself	897	771
PN2 – Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf. Child's views represented by advocate or independent reviewing officer (IRO)	14	20
PN3 – Child attends and conveys his or her views symbolically (non-verbally). If the child is asked a direct question and nods for example, that is defined as a symbolic contribution	0	0
PN4 – Child physically attends but does not speak for him or herself, does not convey his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) and does not ask an advocate to speak for him or her (Attendance without contribution)	5	38
PN5 – Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her. Views represented by advocate or independent reviewing officer through texting, written format, phone, audio/video, viewpoint	447	905
PN6 – Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium. For example, texting, written format, phone, audio/video, viewpoint, to someone in the Child in Care Review other than the IRO or Advocate. The IRO has to be satisfied that the views presented are current, accurate and for the purpose of this Child in Care review	1410	1064
PN7 – Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review	19	34

6 IRO Quality Assurance and Making a Difference

Bradford IRO service continue to exercise the Challenge and Resolution process involving Stage 1, 2, and 3 evident on the child's file; with oversight through the management structure and clear timeframes for responses. However, prior to formal processes being initiated the IRO uses the informal challenge, whereby they seek to

ensure resolution to issues that are impacting the child through negotiation with either the Social Worker, Team Manager or at times the Service Manager.

The recording of the informal challenge is now explicit on the child/young person's file. This was implemented on 11th March 2022 and next year's Annual report will be able to provide data on the volumes of informal challenge activity by the IRO service. However, in the short timeframe that the reporting has been available 33 informal challenges were made by IROs. Examples include follow up on agreed recommendations following a mid-way check on the file, updating care plans, advocating for children and young people on consistency of social worker allocation and communication around family time.

Table 13 evidences the data in regard to the volumes of Stage 1, 2 and 3 Challenges initiated by IROs in 2021/2022

Stage 1 challenges increased by 23% and Stage 2 challenges increased by 54%. There were no Stage 3 challenges in 2020/2021.

Table 13

Stage of Challenge	Number of Challenges	Immediately escalated after stage 1	Resolved at stage 1
Challenge stage 1	252	16	236
Challenge stage 2	48		
Challenge stage 3	2		

The formal Challenge and Resolution process enables the IRO to initiate Challenge 1, addressing any worries with the Team Manager. If the matter is not resolved, then Stage 2 is initiated and there is a formal meeting chaired by the IRO Team Manager involving the Service Manager. If the matter is still unresolved then there is a formal meeting involving the Service Manager for Safeguarding and the Head of Service for the area team.

Whilst there have been no escalations to CAFCASS, the IRO service does alert the Deputy and Assistant Director and at times the Director if there are specific issues to be resolved at a strategic level or awareness to a specific area risk to ensure transparency in communication.

It is not always the case that the Challenge process runs concurrently. Issues may be resolved at stage 1 but follow up oversight by the IRO highlights a continuation of the issue and stages 2 and 3 may be initiated at a later date.

There are multiple reasons why a Challenge and Resolution can be initiated by an IRO, as set out in the table in Table 14.

Table 14

Theme	Reason why Challenge and Resolution process was started	% difference from 2020/2021
Care Plan not being updated / poor quality	69	32.6% increase
Drift and Delay in care planning	114	52% increase
Assessments not being updated /poor quality	64	14% increase
Poor Preparation for the Child in Care review	49	25% decrease
Review Recommendations not being followed up	85	85% increase
IRO not being notified of significant changes	5	50% decrease
Lack of information sharing	25	38% increase
Social Work visits to children not being undertaken within statutory timeframe	15	275% increase
New risks not being assessed	15	200% increase
Insufficient evidence of the child's voice	14	250% increase
Insufficient evidence of parent / carer views	3	200% increase
Case Management oversight	46	48% increase
Other	29	81% increase

The challenge and resolution process has seen an increase in 2021/2022 which is contributed to IROs embedding their mid-way check process and having greater oversight and awareness of any drift and delay in care planning at an earlier stage. It is also indicative of the staff retention that Bradford has faced in terms of social workers and the impact this has on care planning.

Oversight on the challenge and resolution process is supported by quarterly reports to the Heads of Service providing a breakdown of the reasons why challenges are made by the IROs service so that themes can identified and addressed. These quarterly reports also identify themes of children and young people entering care so that this

can be reviewed. Examples being the use of Police Powers of Protection, young people entering care via the homeless route etc. If there are certain cohorts of children and young people entering care over a given timeframe, then this can lead to auditing around the specific theme so that any trends can be identified and acted upon as required.

The challenge and resolution process is embedded within the casefile recording system; however, it is also the responsibility of the IRO to raise challenge and seek resolution across the spectrum of agencies involved with children and young people in care. This process is being developed to ensure that such challenge and resolution is evidenced and learning is consolidated across partner agencies. Since this process has been activated there have been 4 partner agency challenges. These have all been related to Education.

Education provision has been a theme in Bradford, therefore it would have been expected that more partner agency challenges were detailed specifically on children and young people's records. The themes are associated to part time education plans, EHCPs being updated and a general view that education should be striving to be more aspirational for Bradford's looked after children.

Additionally, the ability for children and young people to be able to access CAMHs in a timely manner, whether this is for therapeutic support or assessments in relation to ADHD or Autism, is often an area that IROs raise, therefore it would have expected that more partner agency challenges in regard to this had been issued.

IROs continue to complete audits on children's files to provide overview in addition to the mid-way checks and challenge process. This remains an area for development within the IRO service. Currently IROs workload is impacted by high caseloads and managing oversight on care planning.

261 audits were completed in 2021 – 2022, which is a further fall since the audit numbers in 2021 – 202. The service has focused improvement in its oversight through the challenge and resolution process and mid-way checks to ensure that any concerns in regard to planning are addressed earlier in the process.

6.1 Feedback from Children and Families and other agencies

The IRO service has received a number of compliments over 2021-2022. The following are a few examples -

As I am sure you are aware the SGO was granted yesterday. Myself and X just wanted to send you one last email thanking you for everything you have done.

Thank you so much for all your assistance.

When you were first appointed as the IRO myself and X had reservations because it was another change and we felt like we were going to be starting again, but how wrong we were!

You being appointed as the IRO turned out to be the best.

We have really enjoyed working alongside you and who knows we may work together again in the future as we are still active foster carers.

Most importantly we want to thank you for caring, you listened. We wish you all the best for the future.” [received from foster carers]

CAFCASS staff feel the Bradford IROs provide them with excellent communication, updates and liaison and have good practice regarding challenge” [received from a CAFCASS]

Just want to keep you in the loop and would also like to say a big thank you. Xs mother felt really included in the CIC review and since this meeting her relationship with X has improved a lot, she is keeping in regular contact. X and X’s mother have also been supporting her with finding support from a solicitor. [feedback from a social worker following a Child in Care review]

“...felt the review was conducted very thoroughly and you challenged professionals. We felt supported at the review and felt we are working together and not against each other. Thanks for your support.” [feedback from a Social Worker]

“.. has been a great advocate and support for our UASC young people. He has brought such valuable knowledge of care planning for young people seeking asylum and their specific needs. ” [feedback from a social worker].

“I would also like to take this opportunity to say that whenever I see your name as the IRO for one of the families I am supporting, it does makes me smile. I feel that you are always approachable and accessible for families, carers and children, even when talking at times about really difficult things. It is clear you hold children and their wellbeing at the centre of every meeting I attend with you, ... It is clear you appreciate and understand the pressures felt in the current climate, and balance this really well with ensuring the children who we both support are happy, healthy and safe. [feedback from a social worker].

7 Developmental priorities for the next twelve months

Need	Action	Timeframe	By whom
Continue to maintain a stable and permanent workforce.	Supportive supervision on a monthly basis. High support and high challenge by IRO Team Managers to the IROs	Consistently over the year	Service manager and IRO Team Managers

	Seamless recruitment processes when there are identified future vacancies identified.		
Building on plans for a hybrid return to work strategy.	Incorporating the positives of virtual working, the wishes and feelings of children and young people in terms of consultation and attendance at their review and working with partner agencies to facilitate effective meetings.	To be discussed for each and every review	Team Managers and IROs
Establishing consistency in IRO quality assurance of care and permanency planning for children and young people, and the IRO footprint on the child's case file. This includes undertaking mid-way checks to ensure that review recommendations are not subject to drift and delay.	Planning effective team meetings for reflective discussion Routine quality assurance during supervision Team Manager audits.	Monthly team meetings Monthly supervision	IROs and Team Managers
Promotion to evidence the use of challenge and resolution with partner agencies will be embedded into practice.	Routine quality assurance during supervision.	Monthly supervision	IRO Team Managers
Good quality mechanisms for child and young person participation in their child in care review.	Contribute to the tendering process for child and young person participation platform.	Conclude by September 2022	HoS and Service Manager
Reduce drift and delay in care planning	Robust supervision oversight on certain	Monthly supervision	IRO Team Managers

	cohorts of care planning i.e. placed with parents. Consistency in mid-way check and dispute resolution.	Routine oversight and through Child in Care Reviews, mid-way checks and audits	Service Manager IROs
Maintain positive working relationships with Social Care and Partner agencies	Regular attendance at team meetings to discuss issues and share themes and practice. Proactive attendance at IRO team meetings by key partner agencies.	At least quarterly meetings Monthly Team meetings	IRO Team Managers

8. Areas for further focus on social work practice issues for the next year

- To continue to highlight the impact of changes in social worker/team manager and social work teams on continuity of care planning for children.
- To continue to highlight the importance of conveying the child's lived experience through the use of direct work and incorporation of this in the analysis of assessments to inform care planning.
- To continue to highlight the importance of timely decision-making, management oversight and safety planning on incidents of significant harm and permanency planning for children and young people.
- To ensure that parents are fully included wherever possible in care planning, regardless of how long the child and young person has been in care.
- To continue to ensure that the permanency plan remains the right plan over the lifetime of the child / young person and that all avenues are explored to enable a child or young person to live within their extended family network at the earliest opportunity.

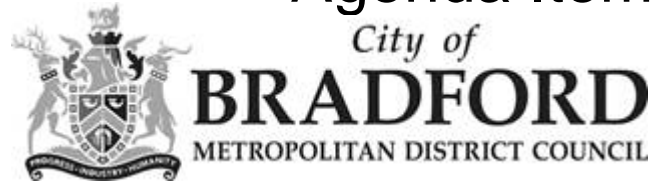
- To ensure that those young people moving towards leaving care are well supported and have opportunity to learn the necessary life skills to be successful in independence.
- To ensure that social workers are robustly challenging partner agencies to ensure that the care plan for the child / young person is fit for purpose.
- Whilst we have developed a process to obtain feedback from children and young people in regard to the child in care review experience; responses are limited. Therefore, we need to ensure that the service promotes the use of feedback forms. Additionally, we need to undertake discussions with the participation service to enable further consultation on how we can improve the service.

Helen Cliffe

Service Manager

6 June 2022

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Report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services to the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee to be held on 20th July 2022

Subject:

C

**FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT COVERING THE PERIOD OF
1ST APRIL 2021 TO MARCH 31ST 2022.**

Summary statement:

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the Fostering Services provides written reports on the management, outcomes, and financial state of the fostering service. This Annual Fostering Service Report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to fostering services in the Bradford Council area as required by statutory guidance. The Annual Fostering Service Report must be presented to Corporate Parenting Panel.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

There are no specific equality issues identified in this report.

Marium Haque

Strategic Director Children's Services
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Portfolio:
Children and Families

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

This is the Fostering Service's Annual Report which provides an overview of the work of the Fostering Service. It identifies strengths and areas for development that will strengthen the work we do as Corporate Parents and ensure that children and young people in Bradford will be happy and safe and have opportunities to reach their goals.

2. BACKGROUND

This Annual Report should be read in conjunction with the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose (Appendix A). The Statement of Purpose sets out the context under which Bradford Council carries out the functions of the fostering service. The fostering Service is a regulated service and as such subject to inspection by Ofsted under the Care Standards Act 2000.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

None identified.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

None Identified

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

None identified

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

Not required

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None identified

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

None identified

7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

None identified

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

None identified

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

No issues identified

7.5 TRADE UNION

No issues identified

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

This covers all wards

7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)

No issues identified

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The report directly impacts upon our corporate parenting responsibilities.

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

None

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

Not applicable

9. OPTIONS

For noting and discussion only

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to note the content and actively consider and comment upon the strengths and future recommendations

11. APPENDICES

Statement of Purpose.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

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Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

Fostering Service Annual Report

April 2021 to March 2022

1. Background.

1.1 The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the Fostering Service provides written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service. This report provides an overview of activity from the last financial year, April 2021 to March 2022, and the plans from the service for the forthcoming year 2022 to 2023.

1.2 The Annual Report should be read in conjunction with the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose (Appendix A). The Statement of sets out the context under which Bradford Council carries out the functions of the fostering service. The fostering Service is a regulated service and as such subject to inspection by Ofsted under the Care Standards Act 2000. Currently the Fostering Service is inspected by Ofsted as part of Bradford Council Children's Services under the 'Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services' (ILACS) framework.

2. Summary

2.1 This has been another busy and at times challenging year for the fostering service. It has been a period of rapid change in terms of staff and management retention and this has been exacerbated by staff sickness mainly due to the Covid 19 virus.

2.2 The impact of the pandemic and the accompanying social restrictions have continued to present logistical challenges for service delivery but it has also brought out the very best in our foster carers. It is remarkable that members of the public have come forward to enquire about becoming foster carers and many existing fostering families have continued to provide care and open their doors to welcome new children and young people into their homes.

2.3 During the reporting period the service has undertaken an audit against the Fostering National Minimum Standards and has identified areas requiring improvement. As a result, a Service Development Plan is being developed which will ensure that the service is monitored and continuously improved.

2.4 In February 2022 the Fostering Service implemented a monthly file auditing system in order to monitor practice against the Fostering National Minimum Standards.

2.5 Early in 2021 Bradford Fostering Service entered into a 12-month contract with Bright Sparks, an independent company to assist with the recruitment of foster carers by increasing our visibility on social media and therefore increasing the number of enquiries. This contract has recently been extended for a further 6 months.

2.6 Bradford Council's Fostering Service provides foster homes for Bradford children in care. Different sorts of foster families are recruited, trained and supported to provide a range and choice of placement types to meet the differing needs of the children who need them.

- 2.7 In the reporting period 25 new mainstream foster families have been recruited. This includes 18 short term foster families and 7 Short Breaks foster families. In addition, the Family and Friends Assessment Team assessed 98 new family and friend foster carers bringing the total of new foster carers to 123 new foster families for Bradford.
- 2.8 As at the 31st March 2022 there were 16 new mainstream assessments in progress and 4 new applications were anticipated by the service. This work will carry over into 2022/23.
- 2.9 On the 31st March 2022 there were 773 children and young people living with Bradford foster carers. This is an increase of 20 children compared to the same date in 2021.
- 2.10 The 'support offer' to Bradford foster carers is being improved with the return to face to face support groups and the development of closer working relationships with the Bradford Independent Foster Carers Association (BIFCA).
- 2.11 The Service has continued to work closely with The Foster Network to develop the Mockingbird model within Bradford's fostering service. It is planned that 2 constellations will be established in the next reporting period.

3. The role of the Fostering Service

- 3.1 The Fostering Service aims to provide a high quality responsive child-centred service in relation to its core functions and to recruit new foster carers from within our diverse community. We prepare applicants through training to be able to deal with the range of issues that foster carers face when looking after children.
- 3.2 The service recruits and assesses foster care applicants from Bradford's rich and diverse community to provide a range of foster carers, with different skills and experiences to meet the needs of the children who need them. The service undertakes comprehensive assessments and checks to ensure that prospective carers are suitable and able to carry out their role. We supervise, support and develop carer's skills and knowledge in order that they promote and achieve the highest standards of care, safeguarding and outcomes for the children in their care.
- 3.3 The service is responsible for;
- Ensuring the provision of a range and choice of local, high quality foster homes for Bradford's Children.
 - Recruitment, assessment, preparation and training of new applicants wishing to foster.
 - Identifying and matching children and young people depending on the needs of the child and skills and experience of the foster family.
 - Permanence planning
 - Support, supervision and training of foster carers
 - Promoting placement stability by liaising and working in partnership with other interested agencies.
 - Ensuring the service is compliant with the relevant legislation and Fostering National Minimum Standards.

3.4 Types of Foster Care

- Short Term: Time limited foster care from a few days, months or lasting up to 2 years
- Long Term: Planned, matched placements designed to last until a child turns 18 and beyond.
- Family and Friends (Connected Persons): Emergency, Planned and Court approved placements for children and young people within their wider network, including family members or others with whom child has an existing and positive relationship
- Short Breaks: Short Breaks provision for children with disabilities.
- Support Care: Part of a package of support (including day care) where carers provide planned time limited support to maintain children with their current foster placements and to prevent placement breakdown.
- PACE: The Local Authority has duty to provide accommodation to children and young people under the age of 18 who have been arrested and charged in relation to a criminal offence. PACE stands for Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 which placed this duty. PACE transfers take place in order to limit the amount of time children and young people are required to spend in police custody with the young person being transferred to Local Authority accommodation overnight before being presented to court the following morning.

4. Fostering Service Structure

4.1 Bradford's fostering service currently consists of;

- 1 x Mainstream Fostering Assessment Team,
- 1 x Family and Friends Assessment Team,
- 3 x Post Approval Support Teams,
- 1 x Short Breaks Team,
- 1 x Recruitment and Marketing worker and Enquiry Engagement worker,
- Project Support Worker for Mockingbird
- Weekly Fostering Panel and Independent Agency Decision Maker

4.2 Like other areas of Bradford Children's Services, the Fostering Service has over the last 5 years faced a significant increase in demand for services. The number of children in care has increased significantly which in turn has driven demand for foster placements. Since 2017/18 the number of Bradford foster homes has increased from 431 to 566, an increase of 135 households.

4.3 Also like other areas of Bradford Children's Services, the Fostering Service has experienced periods of staffing instability and changes of management. This has been exacerbated by staff sickness, mainly due to covid-19.

4.4 There is currently 1 substantive Service Manager within the fostering service. During the summer of 2021, in recognition of the wide span of control and role stretch, a Fostering Team Manager was seconded to an additional Service Manager post. The responsibility for the day to day operational management of the service is divided between the two Service Managers. One Service Manager manages the pre-approval teams and front door, ie, placement referrals/family finding, foster carer recruitment and

marketing and the mainstream and family and friend assessment Teams. The other is able to focus on the post approval teams, ie foster carer support and supervision and development of the Mockingbird project.

4.5 Additionally, following a period of churn within the senior management of the fostering service a Strategic Lead Manager was appointed to undertake a review of the service and lead a service development and improvement plan. This post holder also provides line management for the two service managers.

4.6 During the reporting period the service has been under pressure. Caseloads have fluctuated considerably as the service has endeavoured to allocate the work. Assessing Social Workers have an agreed caseload of 5 assessments at any one time. Supervising Social Workers would usually be expected to carry a caseload of 20 fostering households. However, the service has struggled throughout the year to allocate all of the work, particularly at times when there have been staff vacancies and sickness. At times Family and Friends Assessing Social Workers have been managing as many as 9 assessments and Supervising Social Workers have held 26 cases. Some foster carers have been supported through the duty system. This situation has improved more recently with the recruitment of permanent staff, the return to work of workers who have been off sick and the use of agency workers to backfill workers on long-term sick leave.

4.7 A review of the staffing needs of the service has been undertaken and proposals have been prepared for consideration at the Work Force Development Group.

4.8 Please see the table below showing the current structure of the fostering service.

Assistant Director - Safeguarding & Review, Commissioning & Provider Services					
Strategic Lead Manager - Fostering					
Service Manager				Service Manager	
Team Manager x1 Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team	Recruitment and Marketing Manager x 1	Family and Friend/SGO Support	Fostering Panel x Weekly	Fostering Support Teams x 3	Short Breaks Team
Recruitment activity	Internal and external comms	Reg 24 Viability Assessments with CSW's	New Applications	Foster Carer Supervision & Support	Recruitment of Short Breaks Carers
Preparation training for potential foster carers (Journey to Foster)	Marketing/ Recruitment activity.	Reg 25 Extensions	Family and Friends Temporary Approval Extensions Reg 25.	Foster Carer Training & Development	Supervision/ support/ development of Short Breaks for children with disabilities
Initial Visits	Maintenance Website	Family and Friend Fostering Assessments	Full Approvals of Family and Friends Foster Carers	Support Groups	• Coordinate Link Placements
Form F Assessments Approvals	Social Media	Court Reports where required	Initial Reviews	Foster Carer Annual reviews	• Annual Reviews
Presentation to Panel	Retention activity/Events planning	Foster Carer Supervision		Fostering Duty	• Contribute to training of carers

		and support whilst temporarily approved	3 yearly reviews Reviews following Allegations or Concerns Long term Matching	Kinship Carer Support (post approval) Long term Matching with in house carers Mockingbird	
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4.9 The Mainstream Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team currently consists of 1 Team Manager, 1 Enquiry Engagement Officers and 5.7 full-time equivalent (fte) Recruitment and Assessment Workers.

4.10 It is the role of the Enquiry Engagement Officer to respond to all enquiries from members of the public about becoming a foster carer for Bradford. In the first instance he will contact all enquirer by telephone to provide a warm and friendly response and any additional information the enquirer may require. Where possible he will also arrange an initial home visit by an Assessing Social Worker to the enquirers home.

4.11 The Enquiry Engagement Officer also arranges and attends information evenings and day time events to meet people who may be interested in fostering.

4.12 Each Assessing Social Worker has an agreed caseload of 5 ongoing assessments at any one time giving a team capacity of 63 assessments per annum. Not all assessments result in final approval. Sometimes, during assessments, applicants can experience a change in circumstances or may decide that fostering is not for them. At other times the Assessing Social Worker may find that the applicant is not suitable and end the assessment. This being the case, the target of 45 new mainstream fostering households in 2022/23 has been agreed and is achievable.

4.13 The **Family and Friend Assessment and SGO Support Team** Consists of 1 Team Manager, 1 Practice Supervisor, 11.8 fte Assessing Social Workers and 2 Special Guardianship Support Workers.

4.14 The Family and Friend Fostering Assessment Team jointly undertakes Regulation 24 viability assessments with children's social work colleagues wherever possible. The team also undertakes all full family and friend fostering assessments (regulation 27) often with short deadlines imposed by the court. Social Work Supervision, training and support is provided by the team to all temporarily approved foster carers. Family and friend foster carers can be located at a distance from Bradford, eg Glasgow, Dorset etc and require monthly supervision.

4.15 Agreed caseloads are 5 ongoing assessments at any one time per Assessing Social Worker. This being the case, the team has capacity to undertake 59 assessments at any one time. Given an average time required to undertake an assessment is 16

weeks, the optimum number of assessments an Assessing Social Worker is able to complete 13.5 assessment per annum (allowing for annual leave and training). This being the case the team has capacity to undertake 159 assessments in the year. During the period 2021-22 the family and friend fostering team began 221 assessments. Of these, 123 were negative and 98 were approved providing 119 beds for Bradford children. At the 31st March 2022 the team were also supporting 37 families who were temporarily approved as family and friend foster carers. The rate of referral continues to grow.

- 4.16 The team also has 2 SGO Support Workers. Once a Special Guardianship Order is made it discharges the Care Order in respect of the child and the child is no longer 'in care, therefore social work involvement is minimal'. Special Guardians acquire Parental Responsibility at the point of the SGO being made. This is shared with the child's parents, however, the Special Guardian has the ability to exercise this responsibility without seeking permissions from the parents.
- 4.17 The role of the SGO worker is to help sustain placement stability at times of need by offering behaviour management advice to SGO carers, arranging therapeutic support where necessary and liaising with other parties involved with the child. At the 31st March 2022 these workers were supporting 50 SGO families.
- 4.18 There are 3 **Post Approval Support and Supervision Teams**. Each team consists of 1 Team Manager and an average of 7.5 fte Supervising Social Workers (SSW's). As at the 31st March 2022 these teams were collectively supervising and supporting 510 approved fostering households with 683 children and young people. Supervising Social Workers offer supervision and support to both mainstream and family and friend foster carers alike.
- 4.19 The Supervising Social Workers main roles and responsibilities are to provide regular supervision and support to foster carers to ensure that children are kept safe and feel wanted, their friendship and family relationships are supported, children and young people are supported in education or employment and their needs are promoted in line with their care plan. The SSW also has responsibility to ensure that the requirements of the Fostering National Minimum Standards are met. It is also the role of the SSW to ensure that foster carers are able to develop their skills and experience through training and development opportunities. SSW's also provide support through support groups.
- 4.20 The **Short Breaks Team** consists of 1 team manager and 3,6 fte SSW's. As at the 31st March 2022 the team were providing supervision and support to 28 fostering households and 57 children. Of these 4 were providing Short Breaks for disabled children,

5. Recruitment and Marketing

- 5.1 To be able to meet the needs of the diverse range of local children that need foster placements, recruiting and retaining our carers has to be one of the main priorities of the fostering service. It is imperative we recruit new local foster carers from the Bradford district in order to provide Bradford homes for Bradford children.
- 5.2 Like most other Local Authorities Bradford faces significant competition from Independent Fostering Agencies due to their constant recruitment marketing activities

and promises of higher levels of payment. 30 such organisations operating in and around our area.

- 5.3 From March 2020 when the country went in to lock down almost all fostering recruitment activity went online. In March 2021 Bradford's in house fostering service entered in to a twelve-month contract with Bright Sparks, an independent digital marketing company to assist with the recruitment of foster carers by raising the service's profile on the internet and increasing our visibility on social media. The contract has the option to extend for a maximum of 1 further year in 2 six month periods and this option has been taken for one six month extension period.
- 5.4 Bright Sparks have worked alongside our Recruitment and Marketing Officer and wider Fostering Recruitment Team to rebrand the service and to update our fostering website. The website is now hosted by Bright Sparks. They have also created adverts and content for our social media pages which link to our website. Visitors to the website are able to download an information pack and our fostering payment rate sheet. Whilst there has been an increase in the number of visitors to the website and the number of people downloading information it is disappointing that this has not translated in to a significant increase in the number of potential foster carers in assessment.
- 5.5 Nationally there has been a downturn in the number of enquiries converting to applications for mainstream fostering. There may many reasons for this including prospective foster carers being unsure about the economic impact of the ending of the furlough scheme in September 2021 and more recently, the war in Ukrainian with the appeal to the public to open their homes to refugees in February 2022. Notably, the number of enquiries have picked up again since May 2022.
- 5.6 The advertising tactics used by Bright Sparks until January 2022 focussed upon the financial rewards of fostering. Adverts were general and featured imagery of younger children. The need within Bradford is to recruit foster families for children aged 8+, sibling groups and children with complex needs. The in-house fostering service has been working with Bright Sparks to refocus the advertising strategy.
- 5.7 The contract with Bright Sparks is due to expire in September 2022 unless it extended for a further six-month period. Bradford Fostering Service has recently appointed a new Team Manager for the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team. This person is an experienced and well regarded Fostering Recruitment Team Manager who was previously employed by Leeds Council. It is the preference of the service not to extend the contract with Bright Sparks Further but to bring this activity back in house. This is contingent on the current budget set aside for the Bright Sparks contract being transferred to the fostering service.
- 5.8 The Fostering Service along with the Recruitment and Marketing Manager are currently developing a new Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy. As well as online activity this will include a broader marketing approach including a return local outdoor advertising (busses, roundabouts etc) and community involvement. For example, presence at the Bradford Dragon Boat Race, Pride etc. The Recruitment and Assessment Team have a target of recruiting 45 new fostering families by March 31st 2023.

5.9 Recruitment Outcomes

- 5.10 During the reporting period 1625 people visited the fostering website and downloaded a copy of the information pack or the foster carer payment rate sheet. In order to do this, they were required to enter their contact information and were made aware that the fostering service would make a follow up call to provide further information. This is completed usually in the next working day.
- 5.11 Of the people who downloaded information from the website 381 people responded to an initial contact from the service. The service will make at least three attempts to call an enquirer by telephone and this is followed up by text and email. If attempts to make contact are unsuccessful the enquirers details are kept on file and attempts are made at a later date to contact the enquirer again. Of the 381 people who responded 320 booked a time convenient to themselves to discuss fostering further.
- 5.12 Of these 118 booked an initial home visit. Initial home visits are undertaken by Assessing Social Workers from the Recruitment and Assessment time. The visits are an opportunity for the prospective foster carers to ask any further questions and for the Social worker to meet them in their home environment.
- 5.13 Of the 118 people who received a home visit 33 submitted an application to foster. 8 of these withdrew during the assessment process. 25 new fostering households were approved following Panel. 18 were approved as mainstream foster carers and can provide 26 fostering beds. 7 were approved as Short Breaks carers and provide 9 new fostering beds.

Outcomes – Enquiry to Approval 2021 -2022	
People who visited the website and downloaded information	1625
Number of initial contacts – initial Enquiry	381
Number of telephone information appointments booked	320
Number of initial home visits completed	118
Total Number of Application Forms Received	33
Total Number of New Foster Carers Approved	25
Conversion rate from initial contact	6.6%

6. Fostering Panel

- 6.1 Under the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 Fostering Services are required to set up and appoint a fostering panel. Under Regulation 25 the fostering panel is required to:
- To make a recommendations as to whether the applicant is suitable to be a foster carer and the terms of the approval.

- To consider the first annual review for newly approved foster carers, as well as reviews following the managing allegations process, and where foster carers are seeking a change in the terms of their registration status.
- To recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster carer, and whether the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate.
- To give advice or make recommendations, on other matters or cases referred to it by the fostering service provider, including terminations of approval.
- The fostering panel must also advise, where appropriate, on the procedures under which reviews in accordance with Reg. 28 are carried out by the fostering service provider, and periodically monitor their effectiveness.

6.2 In addition, the National Minimum Standards 2011 requires that:

- Panels provide a quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented and the timeliness of assessments and decisions.

6.3 The Bradford Council Fostering Service has fulfilled its Panel functions for many years by the establishment of three fostering Panels, designated A, B and C. However, Panel agendas have become fuller during the last few years and additional panels have been held when necessary. During 2021-22 it became clear that a fourth Panel was required to meet the level of work being undertaken by the Fostering Service. Panel D has been established and now meets monthly. Each Panel meets once a month ie 4 panels each month. 43 Panels were held during the reporting period.

6.4 Panel Membership

6.5 Each Panel has a Chair and Vice-Chair.

6.6 In order for a Panel to be quorate it must have a minimum of 5 members present. This must include;

- The chair or vice chair;
- A social worker with at least 3 years relevant post-qualifying experience;
- 3 other members, of which, in the absence of the independent chair, at least one must be independent of the Fostering Service.

6.7 Panel members are drawn from the 'central list' of 24 members. Panel membership is made up of people who have a variety of personal experiences and perspectives related to children in care. Membership includes people from social work, education and health backgrounds as well as independent members including a County Councillor.

6.8 The role of Panel Advisor is currently shared between three fostering supervision and support team managers. This is not ideal and represents a significant time commitment away from their Team Manager role. Although it is not a statutory requirement to have a

dedicated Panel Advisor most fostering agencies would acknowledge this as a key role to ensure the smooth running of Panel. The role of the Panel Advisor is to;

- Attend Fostering Panel in an advisory capacity.
- Co-ordinate and agree the agenda
- Ensure paperwork has been quality assured
- Read Panel Paperwork before Panel and advise the attending Social Workers of any potential questions or areas requiring clarification.
- Ensure paperwork is sent out in compliance with regulations
- Advising Panel on the regulations, guidance, policy and procedures where required
- Providing updates on matters presented
- Taking feedback from and to panel and the fostering service about practice issues
- Being involved in the recruitment and appointment of panel members
- Arranging and conducting training.

6.9 A proposal for a Panel Advisor post has been included within the staffing review prepared for the Work Force Development Group.

6.10 Panel Activity

6.11 Throughout the year the Panel met 43 times and heard 318 cases.

Panel Activity	2021/2022
Number of New Mainstream Approvals	18
Number of Short Breaks Approvals	7
Number Family and Friend Approvals	98
Number of Regulation 25 Extensions	62
Number of Annual Reviews including Initial reviews	110
Number of Long Term Matches	19
Number of Brief Reports	3
Number of Cases Deferred for additional information	1
Total Cases	318

6.12 Virtual Panels

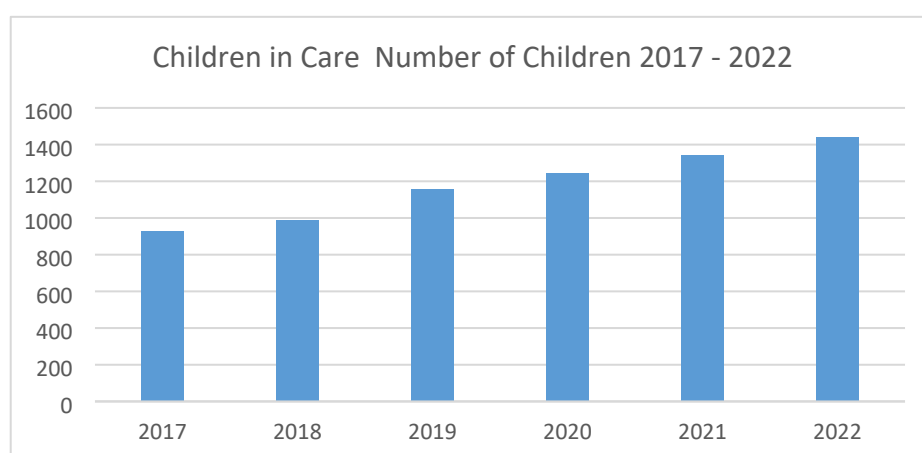
6.13 Since March 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic has meant that throughout the year all Panels have been held virtually, by use of the Zoom. The continuation of virtual Panels has been discussed at each Panel Business Meeting during the year. Panel Chairs and the fostering service is keen to return to face to face meetings. While there have been some advantages to virtual panels, greater attendance by children's social workers being the most striking, it is felt that the experience for applicants and foster carers is not as personal. It can be harder for panel members to pick up nuances and body language via a computer screen.

6.14 While it may be the case that for some attendees being able to remain in their own homes rather than attend at a large office might be less daunting, overall our view is that the negatives outweigh the benefits.

6.15 Plans are being put in place to bring the Panel meetings back together face to face, with some hybrid arrangements.

7. Children in Care

7.1 As at the 31st March 2022 there were 1442 children in the care of Bradford Children's Services. This is an increase of 100 children (7.5%) from 1342 on the 1st April 2021. This has been a continuing trend since 2017. During the 6-year period between 2017 and 2022 the number of children in care has increased by 516 (56%) from 926. This trend appears set continue.



7.2 Of the 1442 children in care on the 31st March 2022 963 (67%) were living with foster carers (including in house, family and friends and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) foster homes). This percentage has reduced slightly from 69% in March 2021 and is lower than the national average of 70%. The rapid growth in the number of children and young people being cared for by Bradford has significantly increased the demand for foster homes. 53% of all children in care in Bradford are cared for in in-house foster placements.

7.3 Of the 963 children living with foster families on the 31st March 2022 773 (80.5%) were living with Bradford foster carers. Of these, 378 were living within 232 mainstream foster families. This is a utilisation rate of 1.6 foster children per mainstream fostering household. This is good performance.

7.4 Similarly, 395 children were living with 273 Family and Friend foster carers. This is a utilisation rate of 1.4 per Family and Friend Foster Family.

7.5 The number of children in care fluctuates on a daily basis. Overall the service was caring for 20 more children on the 31st March 2022 than on the same date in 2021.

7.6 Under the children act 1989 when the Local Authority is considering the need to provide care for a child it should first consider placing the child with extended family or with friends who are able to keep the child safe. By doing this the child is able to be brought up within the context of their own family/friend network and is able to retain a

sense of identity. Over the year the number of children living with family and friend foster carers has increased by 29 children.

7.7 At the 31st March 2022 190 children and young people were living with IFA foster carers. This represents 13% of all children in care. This is up from 11.5% in March 2021.

7.8 The remaining 479 children and young people in care who were not living with foster carers at the 31st March 2022 were placed in a mixture of residential, semi-independence, placed with parents or subject to adoption orders.

7.9 Over the year the number of children placed within the independent sector has increased. There were 25 more children living with IFA foster Carers and 29 more children living within Children's Homes commissioned through the private sector. These children are likely to have more complex needs than can currently be met within the in-house fostering service.

7.10 Many of these children could have their needs met within a foster family if there was sufficient support and training for the foster carers. To this end, the fostering service intends to develop a 'specialist fostering Scheme'. It is planned that the current foster carers payment for skills system is extended to provide a skills level 4 payment set at £479.72 in addition to the age related maintenance allowance.

7.11 However, increasing the skills levels payments to foster carers will not in itself improve placement stability and foster carers ability to provide safe, robust and tenacious foster families for those children who desperately need them. Foster carers will need additional training and support and training. The service has previously invested in and implemented a trauma informed practice approach which includes Dyadic Development Practice (DDP - including PACE Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) and relationship based practice as the model of delivery. Although Bradford adopted this systemic practice approach, it is currently not clearly defined or understood. Many staff who have been trained in this approach have left the council. It is the intention of the service to re-establish this model.

7.12 Additionally, research evidences the significant benefit of collaboration between partner agencies who provide a range of interlocking services. If support and intervention to foster carers and children is provided in a timely cohesive manner, placement and school stability is greatly improved. It is therefore important to establish a 'Team around the foster carer around the Child' approach. The service will also be working with Bradford Positive Pathways (BPP) in order to access their services to support foster carers.

7.13 Adopting this model of practice will provide the opportunity for children and young people to be brought up within a family where they would otherwise be brought up within a children's home. This option is also considerably cheaper for the council. The average cost of an externally purchased residential placement is £4,246.00 per week or £220,792.00 per annum. The cost of providing an in-house level 4 foster placement for a 16-year-old (including the maintenance allowance) would be £670.47 per week or £34,864.44 per year, a potential saving of £185,927.56 per placement per year.

7.14 These proposals have been already presented to Bradford's executive and approved. The specialist fostering scheme will be developed over the coming months.

8. Approved Households

8.1 As at the 31st March 2022 there were 566 approved fostering households registered with Bradford Fostering Service. Of these, 238 were mainstream foster carers providing either short or long-term care, 23 were short breaks foster carers providing shared care for disabled children or other respite care, 268 family and friends foster carers caring for a relative or friend and 37 temporarily approved friends and family foster carers under regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations 2010.

8.2 As at the 31st March 2022 there was a total of 566 fostering families approved by Bradford Fostering Service. This number includes Mainstream Foster Carers, Short Breaks, Family and Friends, Temporarily Approved Family and Friends (Reg 24) and PACE. Overall, this is an increase of 69 households (14%) compared to the same period last year.

8.3 However, there has been a decrease in the number of mainstream fostering households in the same period from 245 to 232. The fostering service has deregistered foster carers who have not actively been fostering for some time.

8.4 The biggest increase in the number of fostering households has been with Family and friend foster carers. As mentioned above (para 7.5), the Local Authority has a duty to first consider whether a child can safely be cared for within their existing family and friend network. Family members and friends will often come forward to be considered as foster carers for the specific children in order to retain them within their known network.

Number of Approved Fostering Households by type.	2020/2021	2021/2022
Mainstream Long Term	245	238
Short Breaks	24	23
Family and Friends (Connected Persons)	196	273
Temporarily Approved Family and Friends Reg 24	32	33
PACE	0	1
Total	497	566

9. Foster Carer Resignations.

9.1 Each year fostering services can expect to lose a number of foster cares. Foster carers leave for a variety of reasons. In the last year a total of 82 foster carers left Bradford's fostering service.

9.2 The vast majority of these (60) were family and friend foster carers. Of these;

- 25 became SGO carers
- 14 resigned because of a change of circumstances
- 7 young people turned 18.
- 6 fostering arrangements disrupted

- 3 resigned following a court decision
- 2 resigned after the child returned home
- 3 resigned

9.3 Over the reporting period 17 mainstream foster carers have resigned. Of these;

- 9 foster carers resigned following a change of personal circumstances
- 4 retired
- 1 retired after a bereavement
- 1 retired when their long-term child turned 18
- 1 adopted the child
- 1 became an SGO carer for their child.

9.4 5 short breaks carers also resigned following a change in personal Circumstances.

10. Foster Carers Annual Reviews

10.1 The foster carer's annual review of approval addresses all relevant aspects of the National Minimum Fostering Standards and Regulations 2011. The reviews are initiated by the Fostering Social Worker with a written summary of achievements and significant events within the foster carer's home over the preceding year.

10.2 A Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer convenes and chairs an independent annual review meeting. A report is then either presented to Panel and endorsed by the Fostering Panel Agency Decision Maker or submitted directly to the Agency Decision Maker for non-Panel reviews. All first reviews are required to be presented to the Foster Panel as are Reviews convened following an allegation or standards of care concern against the foster carer. In Bradford every third review is also presented to panel.

10.3 In the reporting period the Fostering Panel considered 110 Foster Carers Reviews, 51 of which were first reviews. Others were sent directly to the Agency Decision maker for their deliberation.

11. Childs Voice.

11.1 The Fostering Service actively seeks to support children and young people to share their views about how they are being cared for and supported by the fostering service and wider directorate.

11.2 Children and young people are invited to comment about the support they are receiving from their foster carers, including support for family time with their birth family and friends and support with education ahead of their statutory child in care reviews.

11.3 Children are consulted with as part of the foster carers annual review.

11.4 The fostering social worker also aims to see children and young people in person when they are undertaking unannounced visits to fostering households. This will usually involve the Fostering Social Worker talking with the child or young person to ensure they are safe and happy within the foster home.

- 11.5 Children in foster care also have access to a Children's Advocates. This service is provided independently through the National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS). The Advocacy service can help children or young people to explore and express their opinions and be heard.
- 11.6 A new Participation Worker has recently been appointed by Bradford Children's Services. Early meetings have been held between the two services to establish how we can work in partnership in order to hear the voice of the child and therefore improve fostering services.

12. Foster Carer Support

12.1 Support Groups

- 12.2 In more usual times the Fostering Service would have provided support groups throughout the Bradford district. At the onset of the pandemic and with the government restrictions regarding social contact these support groups were paused and alternative arrangements were made online using zoom. However, as the restrictions were gradually lifted during the reporting period some face-to-face support groups were added.
- 12.3 The fostering support groups enable foster carers to meet with their peers and form supportive relationships. This in turn helps foster carers to understand their fostering role and share their experiences. Support groups provide opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills. They also provide foster carers with a safe space where they can discuss issues and challenges relating to their fostering role with other foster carers. Various speakers have been invited in the past to the foster carer support groups to talk about specific topics and offer any information about local activities within the community.
- 12.4 The following support groups have been offered throughout the reporting period;
- Newly approved foster carers support group – meeting quarterly
 - General support group with themed sessions – This group meets monthly alternating between a day time meetings and evening meetings each month. Face-to face meetings were added from September 2021 and the service continue to offer an evening support groups via Zoom for those foster carers who prefer this.
 - Men who foster support groups – quarterly, sometimes supported by 1 SSW
 - Children who foster – 1 themed session each school holiday (eg family online Halloween quiz / Easter/Spring themed treasure hunt/cooking lesson)
 - Short term foster carers group – bi-monthly
 - Asian foster carers' group – monthly

12.5 Mockingbird

- 12.6 Mockingbird uses an extended family model, in the form of 'constellations' which consist of a 'hub' home and several 'satellite' homes nearby. The scheme, which is supported through the Fostering Network, uses specially recruited and trained hub

home carers offer sleepovers (respite), peer support, regular joint planning and social activities. Because of its structure, Mockingbird helps alleviate the sense of isolation foster carers can feel and offers immediate practical support - similar to that a non-fostering family might receive from friends and relatives. Bradford Fostering Service has on two previous occasions launched Mockingbird constellations. However, these were not fully understood or always supported by the fostering senior managers or wider children's services. As a result, both of these constellations failed.

12.7 The Fostering Service is working closely with The Fostering Network and Bradford Children's Services to ensure that this project is better understood and supported. A new 'constellation' has recently been established and it is planned to establish another in the coming months.

12.8 Bradford Independent Foster Carers Association BIFCA

12.9 The Bradford Independent Foster Carer's Association has been established for a number of years. The association is constituted with a Chair Person, Vice-Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. The fostering service is working alongside the association to form closer working relationships with our foster carers. To this end a new Working Agreement has been drafted for use between Bradford Council Fostering Service and BIFCA.

12.10 The overall aim of the BIFCA is to raise the profile of all Foster Carers and to ensure that they are viewed as professionals by Social Workers and colleagues working with children in the care of Bradford council. BIFCA will;

- Provide strong channels of communication between the Fostering Service and the Association.
- Work in partnership with Corporate Parenting and Fostering Services.
- Seek to improve all aspects of fostering.
- Promote good practice.
- Represent Foster Carers as a group.
- Organise support and social events for Foster Carers
- Provide a number of foster carer ambassadors to assist the fostering service with specific function ie Foster Carer recruitment, training, etc

12.11 Working in this way BIFCA will raise the profile of Bradford foster carers, advance foster carers views and recommendations regarding the Fostering Service and support carers to provide to provide high quality care for the foster children.

12.12 BIFCA has recently set up a website for all Foster Carers to access information regarding various issues and topics and for them to leave their views in relation to any fostering matters. This will ensure that there are robust channels of communication and feedback from foster carers to senior managers.

12.13 Financial Support

12.14 The Fostering National Minimum Standards (28.3) require that the fostering service should annually review its policy regarding allowances and any fee paid to foster carers.

12.15 In line with most other local authority fostering services Bradford Council foster carer payments are made up of two separate elements, the 'maintenance allowance' and a 'professional fee'.

12.16 The maintenance allowance is the amount paid to all foster carers to cover the day-to-day expense of looking after a child in care. The amount paid by fostering agencies for this element of the foster carer's payment package is guided by the DfE who annually publish guidance on what the 'minimum weekly maintenance allowance' should be.

Bradford Council/DfE recommended weekly allowance	Age 0 -4	Age 5 - 10	Age 11 -15	Age 16 -17
	£138	£152	£173	£202

12.17 The second element to make up the foster carer's payment package is the professional fee. This is often referred to as the 'skills payment' and is paid to recognise the foster carers time, skills, training and experience.

12.18 The advantages of such schemes are that foster carers are incentivised to undertake training and develop their experience, which enables the fostering service to match children and young people with differing levels of need with well trained, high quality foster homes. Children and young people with more complex needs are placed with foster carers with the higher skills levels. The emphasis is upon the foster carer's skills and experience rather than on the child, thus avoiding labelling the child.

12.19 In Bradford professional fees are paid in three main 'skills levels'. Unlike the DfE recommended maintenance allowance rates, skills payments are not paid dependent on the age of the child. They are paid across the age bands. The full fee is paid for the first child and an extra 50% is paid for subsequent children. Please see the table below for the current fees paid by Bradford.

Weekly Fostering Carer Fee Rates			
Level	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
Level 1	£144.16	£216.24	£288.32
Level 2	£204.20	£306.30	£408.40
Level 3	£290.72	£436.08	£581.44
Level 4	£468.47	Complex and Specialist Placements	

12.20 A fourth skill level currently exists and is paid only to a very small number of foster carers, (5). These payments are being paid to Mockingbird Hub carers, a PACE Carer, carers from a previous scheme and to carers where these payments have been negotiated for specific children.

12.21 Although all mainstream foster carers receive a professional fee, these payments have not routinely been made to Bradford's Family and Friend foster carers.

12.22 Additionally, there was no clear process for foster carers to progress through the skills levels.

12.23 As a result, the fostering service produced a paper containing a number of proposals to improve the foster carers payment system and to create a specialist foster care scheme for children and young people who may otherwise be brought up in a children's home (see para 7.8 above).

12.24 The paper contained 5 proposals;

- That Family and Friends should routinely receive the same foster carer payment package as mainstream foster carers.
- That a new Entry level fee of £100.00 per week should be applied to all new foster carers after the implementation date of the policy
- That a new and clear process for foster carers skills progression is accepted and implemented
- The development of a specialist fostering scheme using level 4 payments to remunerate specialist foster carers. Additionally, this proposal contained a further proposal to appoint a Training Officer within the fostering service in order to enhance the skills and knowledge of both foster carers at all skills level and staff.
- That SGO allowances are linked to foster carers payment.

This paper has since been presented to the Executive Committee and the proposals have been agreed. The Fostering Service is currently implementing this policy.

13. Foster Carer Training.

13.1 Under the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 (NMS20 & 23) the fostering service is required to ensure that a "good quality learning and development programme is available to foster carers and staff". A calendar of training events should be published for foster carers to inform them of training available.

13.2 Fostering National Minimum Standard 20 requires all new foster carers to complete the DfE Training, Support & Development Standards workbook within twelve months of approval (18 months in the case of Family and Friends Foster Carers).

13.3 Foster carers should complete mandatory training courses within the first year of approval, these include;

- First Aid Paediatric Fostering
- GDPR for Foster Carers
- Risk Management and safer caring
- Safeguarding Children
- Recording and Record Keeping
- Allegations against foster carers.
- Equality and Diversity
- Internet Safety

13.4 Foster carers training needs should be considered and a personal development plan created for each foster carer within the foster carers annual review. This should then be constantly monitored by the Supervising Social Worker.

- 13.5 Most of Bradford foster carer training is sourced through an organisation called the Foster Care Training Hub. This organisation provides a range of online training courses. In addition to the range of paid for training modules the organisation also provides foster carers with a number of free to access courses.
- 13.6 The fostering service does not currently have a discrete foster carer training budget. However, Bradford's Executive Committee have recently agreed proposals to appoint a dedicated Training Officer within the fostering service and the setting aside of a training budget in order to invest in the upskilling of our foster carers and staff.
- 13.7 The impact of Covid restrictions and a switch to online training has been cited by carers as a significant factor in them being unable to attend training, this is especially relevant for our older carers and some carers for whom technology is seen as more of a challenge. There are some carers who also state that online training is also more flexible. The balancing of caring for children full time and work commitments is also often cited as reasons for being unable to attend training.
- 13.8 However, the uptake of foster carer training has increased over the last year. Collectively, during the reporting period Bradford foster carers accessed training 995 times from a selection of 77 courses. This is a significant increase over the previous year when training was accessed 428 times over 29 courses.

14. Developments for 2022 to 2023

- 14.1 Earlier in this year (2022) Bradford MDC announced that it will establish Trust to manage Children's Services. The consequence of this for the Fostering Service is that the service will be required to register with Ofsted as an Independent Fostering Agency. This in turn will bring about new working practices and expectations of the Fostering Service in terms of its relationship with Ofsted and working practices including recording, reporting and notifying Ofsted of particular events.
- 14.2 The Fostering Service will no longer be inspected by Ofsted as part of Bradford Children's Services Inspection framework (ILAC). The service will be inspected in its own right under the more rigorous Social Care Common Inspection Framework, (SCCIF):Fostering.
- 14.3 The 'Go Live' date for the Trust is the 1st April 2023. The fostering service is excited by the prospect of this eventuality and has started to plan for it.
- 14.4 The fostering service has begun to develop an ambitious action plan which will help to prioritise work in the following areas:
- 14.5 Strengthening Business Intelligence and Performance Monitoring Arrangements.**

A range of key performance indicators and business information requirements have been identified in order to more effectively monitor the fostering service. Currently management information and business tracking information are held in a combination of excel spreadsheets and on LCS. The intention is to hold and report as much information as possible through LCS. This will be used to produce a dashboard which will be able to provide quality information at a granular level.

14.6 Ensure the Fostering Service has sufficient staffing to meet current and predicted service demand.

The service will undertake a modelling exercise to understand the staffing needs of the fostering service based on planned targets and caseloads of 18 households per Supervising Social Worker and 5 assessments per Recruitment and Assessment Worker. Work has begun on this area of work and a paper has been produced for consideration by the Workforce Development Group.

14.7 Ensure effective Policies, Procedures and Processes are in place and align with statutory and National Minimum Standards and best practice.

The fostering service will undertake a review of all fostering service policies and procedures to ensure they are fit for purpose and Ofsted ready.

The service has undertaken benchmarking exercise against the National Minimum Standards and this has informed some of this plan. This will be repeated in the coming months. It is good practice for fostering agencies to benchmark themselves in this way at least annually to keep abreast of national and local changes.

This will also include the revision of key documents required by Ofsted under the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards Fostering 2011. These include:

- Statement of Purpose
- Foster Carers Handbook
- Children's Guide
- Foster Cares Training Handbook
- Foster Carer Financial Allowance Guidance
- Foster Carers Register
- Ensure the Fostering Service is Ofsted Ready. An Inspection will be carried out of the fostering service by the senior managers (a mocksted inspection) to ensure that the service is compliant and Ofsted ready.

14.8 Strengthen Foster Carers and Staff opportunities for learning and development.

The fostering service will review and revise the training offer made available to both foster carers and staff to ensure all carers and staff have the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the children they care for. Bradford's Executive Committee have agreed proposals contained within the foster carers payments paper that was presented in June 2022. It has been agreed that the Fostering Service should appoint a Training Manager for the service and work with finance to identify funding for a training budget.

14.9 14.4 Ensure the Quality of Practice in Bradford's Fostering Service Meets the Fostering Regulations and Standards.

The Fostering Service will develop and implement practice standards for workers within the service. It will also ensure that regular reflective supervision is taking place across the service and that this is recorded by managers.

14.10 The fostering service has strengthened their foster carer file audit proforma which complies to Bradford Policies and Procedures. These template is being used by the fostering service to undertake monthly file audits and will be further embedded in practice.

14.11 Strengthen fostering duty service arrangements

The fostering service alongside the commissioning team work hard to identify foster placements for children who need them. The fostering service will review the process of placement finding to ensure in-house placement opportunities are maximised.

The fostering team will also consider setting up an out of hours fostering duty system to support foster carers and children in need of advice or support during evenings and weekends. This service is currently provided through the general Bradford Council's Emergency Duty Team (EDT) service. A dedicated out of hours duty system would strengthen the support provided to foster carers by having fostering social workers they are likely to know and who have specialist fostering knowledge. This could lead to increased placement stability.

14.12 Strengthen fostering recruitment.

The Fostering Service is working to develop a coherent Fostering Recruitment Strategy designed to meet the needs of the sufficiency plan. The plan will take in to account placement demand and demography. This work is already underway. The fostering service is keen to maximise recruitment and retention opportunities and to ensure that Bradford fostering service is the provider of choice for foster carers. In order to achieve this the fostering Service will need to identify a meaningful recruit budget. The current budget for Marketing, recruitment and foster carer retention is not sufficient.

14.13 Strengthen Working relationships with the Bradford Independent Foster Carers Association (BIFCA).

The idea of the Foster Carers Association is to have an organisation run by foster carers for foster carers that will work in partnership with the Bradford Council Fostering Service and other senior managers to improve all aspects of the fostering service. By working together in this way we can ensure strong channels of communication, raise issues that affect foster carers, share ideas to improve the service, promote good practice, improve the outcomes for the children we care for and organise events for children and young people to have fun. The Association is funded by Bradford Council. The fostering service will to work with the BIFCA committee and other foster carers to strengthen the Association. A draft working agreement has already been produced and will be finalised shortly.

14.14 Implement the Mockingbird Programme

The fostering Service intends to have 2 Mockingbird fostering communities in established by January 2023. The first of these was established on the 2nd July 2022.



Bradford Council Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2022/23

If you, or someone you know, needs help to understand or read this document, please contact us on 01274 434750.





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Introduction

This Statement of Purpose summarises the aims and objectives and service arrangements of Bradford Fostering Service. It has been written to provide information for foster carers, people interested in becoming foster carers, Bradford Council's Children's Social Care teams and for anyone who works closely with or is interested in Bradford Fostering Service.

This Statement of Purpose has been developed in accordance with The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (amended 2013) and is reviewed annually and amended as necessary and approved by the Fostering Service Managers and the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care.

It is supported by a range of more detailed information including the online fostering handbook; a range of policies and procedures that describe the day-to-day responsibilities and expectations of all those involved in providing services to Bradford Fostering. This Statement of Purpose also links with the Children's Guide, which we provide to all children in a foster placement, subject to the child's age and understanding at the point of placement.

A copy of this Statement of Purpose is also lodged with Ofsted.

Our values

- Children and young people are entitled to grow up as part of a loving caring family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond and, where possible, this should be within their own family network.
- The child or young person's welfare, safety and needs sit at the centre of the fostering process.
- We provide warm, safe and loving foster families for children and young people in our care.
- The child or young person's wishes and feelings are fully taken into account at all stages.
- The child or young person's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised, positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
- The particular needs of disabled children or young people will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- The role of foster carers in offering their home and family life to a child or young person who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.

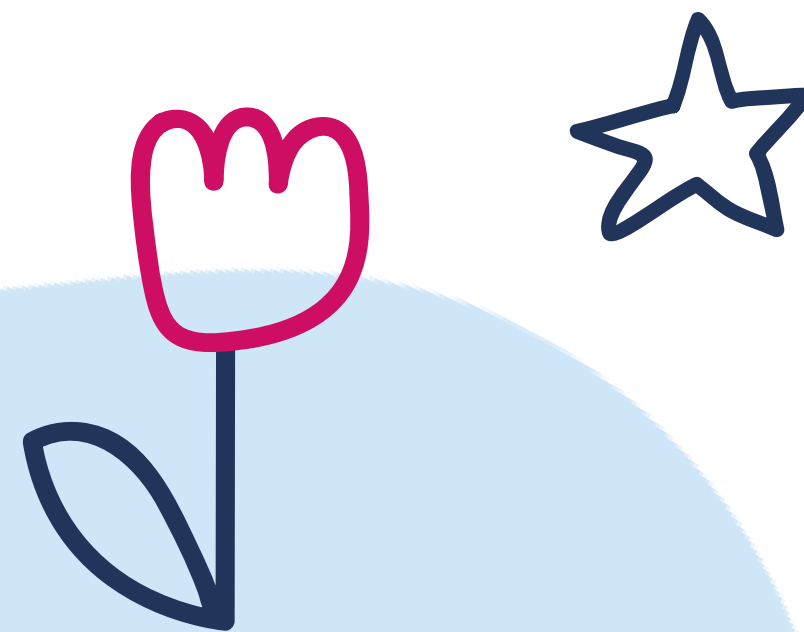
Aims & objectives

Bradford's Fostering Service is committed to providing safe, high quality foster care which supports our children and young people in care and helps them to reach their full potential and values, supports and encourages them to grow and develop as individuals. Our vision is for Bradford District's children and young people to have the best start in life and for them to be nurtured and supported by those who care for them so that they will develop into healthy, socially responsible and achieving adults who, in turn, show the same level of care when raising their own families.

Bradford Fostering Service aims to provide high quality services and support to foster carers by employing experienced and qualified staff.

To achieve these aims, Bradford Fostering Service has the following objectives:

- ♥ To recruit, assess and provide a fostering workforce that focuses on meeting the needs of the children and young people who are looked after in the Bradford district. ☑
- ♥ To increase the number of approved foster carer households.
- ♥ To maintain a wide range of support services, including independent support, to make sure that approved foster carers are valued as part of Bradford Fostering and their services as carers are retained.
- ♥ To produce an annual training plan, which is needs-led, so that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care.
- ♥ To support and promote the educational achievements of children and young people in care by ensuring that foster carers can provide opportunities for children to achieve.
- ♥ To promote positive emotional and physical health of children and young people in care by ensuring that foster carers help children and young people placed with them maintain good health.
- ♥ To ensure that the Bradford Fostering team have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to support foster carers.
- ♥ To ensure there are regular opportunities for foster carers to meet with service management who will seek regular feedback from foster carers and staff about service and training development.
- ♥ To provide regular support groups to foster carers to disseminate information and consult on service development. Support groups also offer opportunity for foster carers to meet other foster carers, receive informal training and support from supervising social workers.



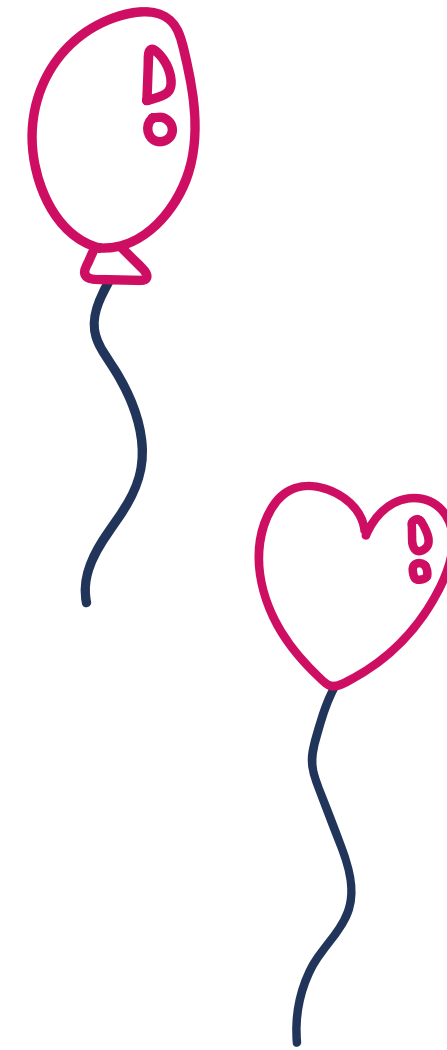
Key recruitment priorities

The Council has pledged to increase the number of fostering households in the Bradford District by 20% over the next 4 years. This equates to a net gain of around 108 households in that period.

The target in 2022/23 is 45 new mainstream fostering households and 15 short break households.

The ongoing recruitment priorities are in line with the needs of the children and young people needing foster families:

- ♥ To attract new foster carers from related backgrounds, which may include youth workers, children's residential workers, foster carers looking to transfer from other fostering agencies
- ♥ ☐ Carers from diverse backgrounds, who can support children and young people from a range of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds.
- ♥ ☐ Carers for older children and teenagers
- ♥ Carers for brothers and sisters
- ♥ ☐ Carers to provide permanent homes and long term stability for children and young people
- ♥ Part time foster carers for children and young people with disabilities/complex health needs
- ♥ Carers for specialist schemes such as Emergency Care, Shared Care, PACE care and holiday care



Foster carer recruitment

We are committed to an open, transparent and safe recruitment process that is focussed on attracting, assessing, training and approving high quality foster carers and is in line with Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

Everyone who meets the basic eligibility criteria of being over 21 years old, has a spare bedroom and sound English language skills is offered an initial visit with someone from the mainstream recruitment team or the short breaks team. The purpose of the visit is to provide more details about fostering and find out about the enquirer's personal circumstances and expectations and what they can expect in terms of the assessment process, as well as a basic review of the home and any outside space.

All prospective carers and all adults in their household are subject to statutory checks, including full DBS, and personal and employer references, as well as health checks for the prospective carers.

We recognise that not all carers will start their journey to fostering at the same point and some households will need additional time and support to be able to provide high quality foster placements. Only those considered likely to be ready to provide a safe, healthy and supportive foster home will be invited to apply.

The assessment usually takes 4 months. During this time, the assessor will visit regularly with the prospective foster carer to conduct a home study. The assessor gathers the information needed to complete a detailed report that will reach a conclusion about the prospective foster carer's suitability to foster.

Potential foster carers will be required to attend preparation training (2 days' Journey 2 Foster for full time or 3 days' Skills to Foster for part time foster carers). Both training courses provide potential foster carers with the opportunity to engage with experienced foster carers and trainers to find out what fostering is really like and prepare them for their future roles as foster carers.

After the report is completed, the applicants have 5 working days to comment on it before it is presented to the Fostering Panel.



Fostering panel

Panel provides an independent quality assurance role and considers the approval of fostering applicants and their continued approval over their fostering career as well as all long term foster matches. There are 4 Fostering Panels that meet monthly in Bradford to consider all the information within assessments and review reports.

Bradford Fostering Panels are chaired by 3 independent chairs who are appropriately recruited and checked. One is a former foster carer with a neighbouring Local Authority, one is a registered social worker.

The Panel Chairs ensure that all significant issues are discussed by the Panel before making their

recommendation on approval. They seek to make applicants and foster carers welcome at the Panel meeting and have the opportunity to give the Panel their views.

The Panel members include social workers, people from health and education services with experience of working with children, a foster carer from another fostering service, people who have been fostered themselves or whose children were fostered, and elected members of the Council. The Panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker regarding the approval, or continued approval following reviews.

All Panel members and Chairs have annual reviews and the

Panels come together at least annually for a training day to receive updates from the service and training on Panel issues.

The Agency Decision Maker is employed by Bradford Council to perform this role. The incumbent ADM is an experienced and fully-qualified social worker.

Other Fostering Panel business

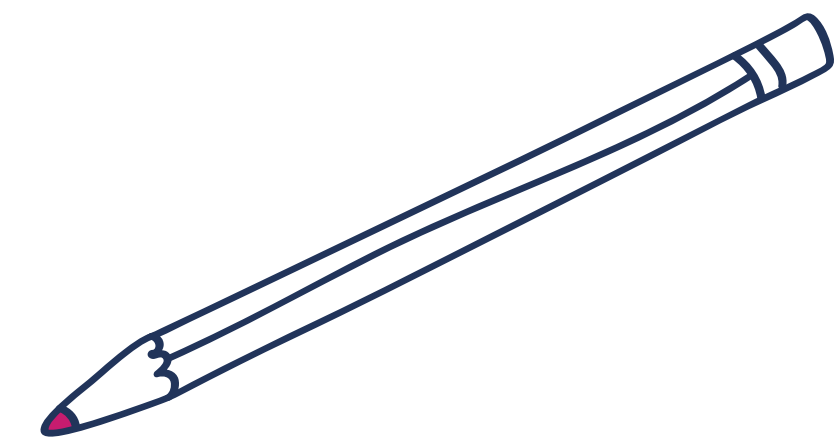
All Bradford foster carers have an annual review chaired by a Fostering Independent Reviewing officer. The foster carer's first annual review after approval must be presented to the Fostering Panel. Foster carers annual reviews are routinely presented to panel every 3 years thereafter ie year 4, 7 and so on. The Fostering Panel will also receive subsequent reviews where there is a request for a change of status of the carer, or where there have been allegations and/or concerns about their standards of care, to consider and recommend whether the applicants are suitable to

continue to act as foster carers. The ADM will make the final decision.

If the Agency Decision Maker does not approve an application to foster or continued registration following a review, the applicants will be informed of their right to make written representations to either the Agency Decision Maker or the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The IRM is an independent body which makes recommendations to Fostering Agencies in such circumstances. If representation is made to the Agency

Decision Maker, further consideration including any additional information will be presented to the Fostering Panel. Alternatively, applicants can ask the IRM to review their application. The recommendations of the Panel or the IRM will be considered by the Agency Decision Maker, who will make a final decision.

The Panel also has a quality assurance role and offers recommendations and advice to the Fostering Service on assessments and other matters which it oversees.



Fostering provision

Bradford's children and young people in care come from a range of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds and Bradford Fostering will endeavour to recruit and retain foster carers who reflect this. Any foster placements made will, as far as possible, reflect the individuality of children and young people, with particular attention being given to any placement offered to children and young people with a disability.

The ethnicity of the foster carer population, broadly reflects the ethnicity in the district and of Bradford's children in care population.

Bradford is a 'young' district. More than one in four of our residents are aged under 20 and the child population is predicted to grow at around 2000 per year. Bradford's population of children in care continues to grow.

Many children and young people who are looked after have experienced difficulties including abuse and neglect before being fostered. Some children and young people behave in a very challenging way, have special needs or complex health conditions.

All foster carers are supported to provide quality care through regular supervision with a qualified experienced supervising social worker.



Family & Friends as foster carers

Where children and young people are not able to live safely with a birth parent, priority will be given to find someone to care for them who is known or connected to the child or young person from within the extended family network. All viability assessments are undertaken by a social worker in conjunction with the Fostering Service and every potential Family & Friends carer will be given a pack at the outset that will explain what is being asked of them, what the expectations of care would be and will include alternative options for them to consider. This may result in the approval of family or friends as foster carers or use of appropriate legislation such as Regulation 24, or applications for a Child Arrangements Order or Special Guardianship Order.

Should the initial viability assessment of an extended family member or friend recommend that they are approved as a foster carer, a full fostering assessment will be completed by a supervising social worker in the Fostering Family & Friends assessment team.

Fostering outside the family network

Where children and young people are not able to remain with their birth family or within the wider family network then a home within a fostering family will be the first choice for the majority of children or young people.

Bradford Fostering intends:

- ♥ To provide a service that is responsive to the needs of children and young people who require a foster placement by recruiting sufficient carers to offer placement choice, and create a culture where children and young people feel safe.
- ♥ To provide placements that meet the requirements of children and young people's care plans wherever possible by utilising best value, local placements which promote continuity and maintain family networks.
- ♥ That all placements will take into consideration the need for the child or young person to be placed near to family and school. If at all possible, siblings will be placed together unless identified needs indicate otherwise.



Long term fostering

Some children or young people will need to live with foster carers permanently. Long term foster carers commit to providing a home for a child or young person throughout their childhood in to adulthood and independence. When a child or young person in care requires a long term or permanent foster home, a fostering family with the required skills and approval is identified by the Family Finding team and the child or young person is placed with them initially as a short term arrangement. After 12 months, the Independent Reviewing Officer will make a decision based on positive and significant progress made. The child or young person's social worker and the supervising social worker will prepare an assessment and matching report to present to the Fostering Panel, who will make their recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker for final decision.

Short term fostering

Short term foster carers look after children and young people who, because of a wide variety of circumstances, need foster care. The time a child may stay in short term foster care may vary in duration from an emergency overnight stay to up to 2 years. The length of stay is linked to further assessments of the child or young person's family members and in connection with court proceedings. Children or young people in short term placements may go back to birth family, on to adoption or in to long term foster care.

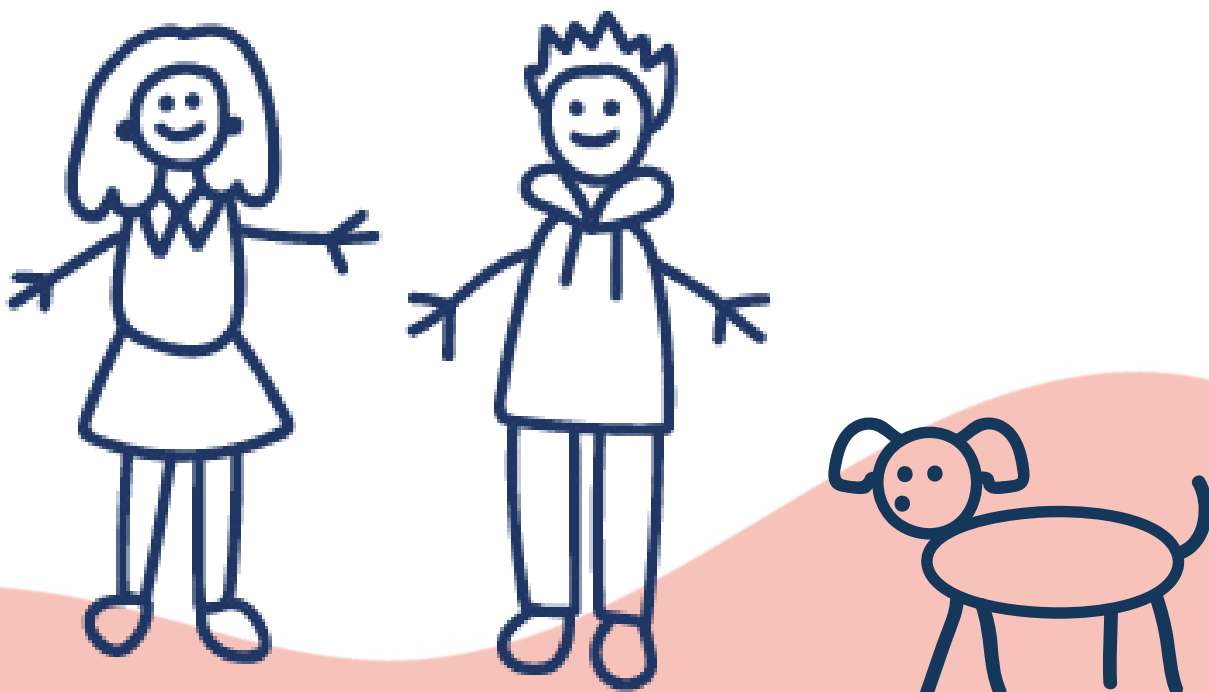
Shared care

Many full-time foster carers also provide respite (emergency or planned) placements either on a regular basis or one-off holiday breaks. Such placements can take place during the week, overnight or over a weekend.

Some fostering households choose to only provide part time or short break fostering placements.

Short breaks

A part-time fostering service for children and young people with disabilities, complex health needs or emotional disabilities who live with their family or with a foster family and are matched carefully with children and young people according to the carer's skills to meet the child or young person's needs and their availability to provide planned short breaks that include overnight stays, day care and childminding.



Support care

As part of a package of support for children and young people who are at risk of family breakdown, Support Carers are matched with children and young people for up to 9 months at a time and provide the children and young people with a range of planned short breaks that includes overnight stays, day care and childminding. This helps prevent children or young people from being taken in to care while support work is being offered to parents at the same time.

PACE

Bradford Fostering provides accommodation to children and young people under the age of 18 who have been charged with an offence so that young people do not need to remain in police custody longer than needed.

Staying put

It is important that young people in care only move to independence when they are ready to do so. Carers and young people are encouraged to consider Staying Put before the young person turns 18 (or 21 if the young person has additional needs) to continue to live in the fostering family home until the young person is ready to move on.



Placement Statistics

March 2022

On 1 March 2022, there were:

773

children and young people being cared for by Bradford Fostering households.

566

fostering households looking after children and young people from the Bradford district.

238

mainstream fostering households. 178 providing long term foster care and 60 providing short term foster care. 268 Family & Friends fostering families, 37 families looking after children and young people under Regulation 24 and 23 fostering families providing short breaks and holiday care for children and young people.

Mockingbird family model

Mockingbird family model

The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using the Mockingbird Family Model. It is an extended family model that provides sleepovers, peer support, regular joint planning and training and social activities for the families involved.

The programme improves the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between carers, children and young people, fostering services and birth families.

Mockingbird was developed in the USA and uses the concept of a 'constellation' which is where six to ten fostering families live in close proximity to a dedicated hub home of specially recruited and trained carers offering respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and social activities.



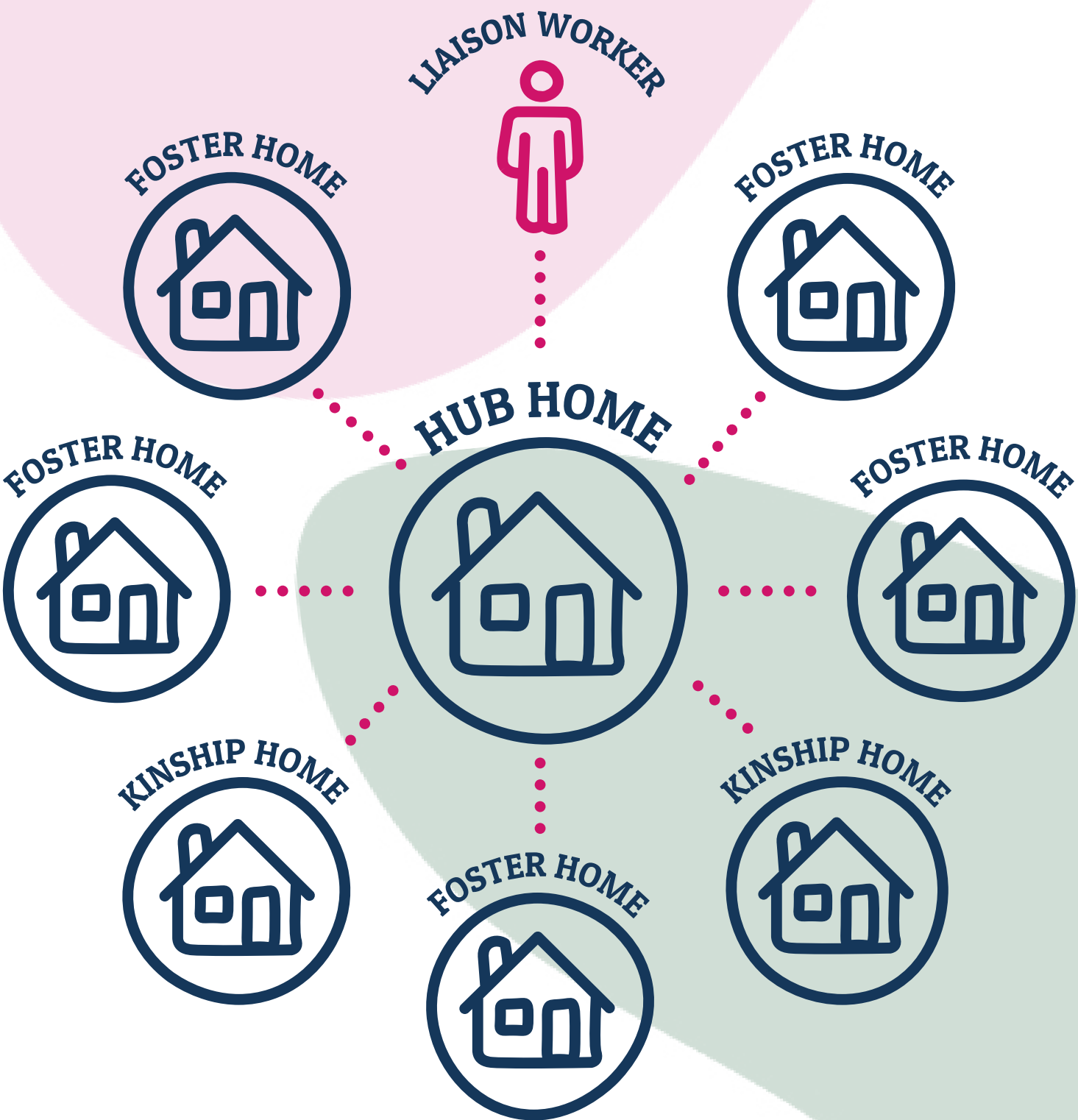
How does it work for Bradford Fostering?

Bradford has launched a Mockingbird constellation in July 2022. The hub home carers support 7 families. Recruitment is currently ongoing to find the hub carer for the second constellation to launch by January 2023

Bradford Fostering's roll-out of Mockingbird constellations will follow a measured pattern of recruitment of hub home carer; then recruitment of satellite families; followed by establishing and embedding the support and processes around the constellation before starting the process again for the next constellation.

The families engage in sleepovers at the hub home house and they are recognising the benefits for both children and carers. The carers are forming relationships with each other, sharing experiences and advice, and children are forming relationships and enjoying the social activities.

All families are recognising and accessing the support/ advice the hub home carers and liaison worker can offer.



Supporting our children and young people

13

Care planning and review

All children and young people who are in Bradford's care have a care plan, which is reviewed regularly. The wishes of the child or young person are taken into account in drawing up the care plan, as well as that of the birth family and the foster carers.

The care plan is reviewed at every Child in Care Review and at the four-month review the child's plan for permanence will be addressed. This plan is based on the needs of the individual child or young person and includes consideration of permanence being achieved by return to birth family or other means including long term foster care or adoption.

The care planning and assessment work will ensure that the child or young person, birth family and foster carers have access to appropriate specialist services to meet particular needs such as for education and health.

The views and wishes of the child or young person are sought through a range of age-appropriate means. This could also include the involvement of the children's advocate or independent visitor as necessary.

Family time

A care plan will always consider the need for children and young people to spend time with family and friends. It is important that our carers understand and value family time for children and young people and their role in helping to make sure it is a positive experience for the child.

Foster carers are trained and supported to help them to work with the birth family, and to support the child or young person. Foster carers take the child or young person to visit their family and may also supervise the family time, if appropriate.

A social worker

Every child and young person in care has a social worker, who will be the first point of contact for the foster carer for any information and advice on issues relating to the child or young person.

If the child or young person's worker is not available during office hours, a duty worker is always available to deal with urgent problems or issues.

Participation and consultation

We recognise the importance of participation in developing Children's Social Care provision so that inclusion and consultation are at the heart everything we do. The Children in Care Councils offer Children's Social Care a unique insight into the lives of children in care and they have been instrumental in the shaping and development of the services provided by Bradford Council.

Examples of how our Children in Care Council contribute to the Fostering Service:

- ♥ Involvement in the recruitment of senior staff, foster carers and independent reviewing officers
- ♥ Development of the Children's Guide and other service resources
- ♥ Involvement in training of new and experienced foster carers



Educational support

The Virtual School team provides specialist educational advice, guidance and support for children in care and care leavers by promoting educational outcomes and supporting children and young people with their educational pathways. The Virtual School works closely with schools and other education provisions supporting school-aged children in care whilst also providing advice and guidance around Early Years education and Post 16 provision.

Educational advice and guidance is available to support children in care in Early Years provision and those who may require additional educational support when starting school.

Each school-aged child in care should have a PEP (Personal Education Plan) to help them achieve educational outcomes, which is monitored by the Virtual School. Bradford's children in care have good education attendance rates and they make high aspirational progress in their achievements.

As young people progress to post 16 provision, the Virtual School provides individual careers education, information and guidance for post 16 care leavers as part of their pathway plans to continue to develop learning and work-based skills. The Virtual School works closely with schools and other education services to support foster carers working in partnership as a key team around the child or young person to promote and support their educational needs.

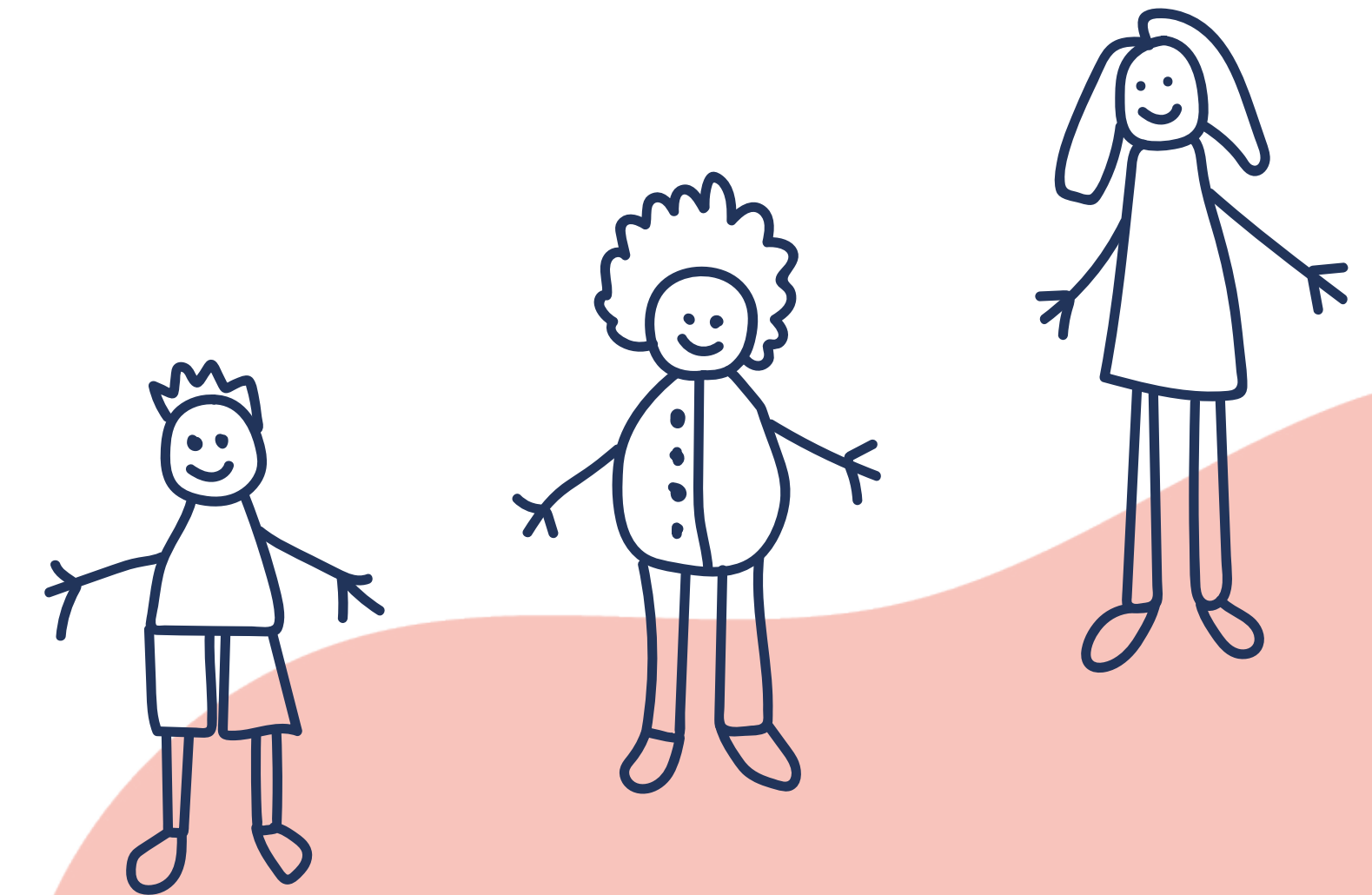
Children's guide

The Children's Guide explains what it means to be a child in care and includes a summary of what we set out to do for children and young people; who is involved in looking after them; how they can find out about their rights; and how to contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, an independent advocate, the Children's Commissioner and Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern.

Each fostering household has a copy of the Children's Guide, available on the online fostering handbook, as well as a paper copy. Foster carers will explain the contents in a way that is accessible and appropriate to the child or young person.

Children in Care Councils (CiCC)

There are 2 groups run for care experienced children and young people: the Children in Care Council for 7 to 14 year olds and the Care Leavers Council for young people aged 14+. The children and young people meet regularly to discuss ideas and look for ways to improve services and campaign on issues that matter to them.



The foster carer's role

On approval, each foster carer undertakes an induction and is given access to our online foster carer handbook, which outlines their role, the expectations of the service and provides guidelines and procedures of how foster carers should carry out their duties.



The foster home environment

Foster carers provide a safe, clean, stimulating environment for Bradford's children and young people in care. The safer care policy is reviewed whenever there is a substantial change in the fostering household.

Safeguarding

Foster carers undertake regular relevant training including Safeguarding & Child Protection, Safer Caring, Allegations and Child Sexual Exploitation. They understand the risk of complaints and allegations and each fostering household has a Family Safer Care Policy.

Health

All children and young people are registered with a GP, dentist and optician.

Carers are expected to encourage healthy lifestyles that include a healthy diet and regular exercise to help build children and young people's self-esteem, confidence and resilience, and to be role models by setting a good example.

Foster carers support children to attend medical, dental and other health appointments. Each foster carer is provided with forms to record and monitor medication and conditions. Foster carers are given delegated authority to agree to routine actions that may be required to meet the specific medical needs that the child or young person may have.

All health care information for each child is provided to the foster carer prior to a child being placed in their care and specific training is provided where it is required to individual foster carers.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) offer a dedicated service to children in care providing one to one work with children and foster carers.

Education

Carers understand the importance of promoting education that meets the needs of our children and young people to attain their potential. Each child and young person has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) and carers are expected to be involved in its formulation and monitoring. Children and young people who are looked after in care are also supported by Bradford's Virtual School.

Family time and contact with birth family

Foster carers understand the importance of regular, safe contact with extended family members and they are prepared to encourage a child/young person's attendance at contact sessions.

Transport costs to and from local contact events are built-in to the allowance paid to foster carers.

Recording

Carers are expected to provide relevant regular updates and notes about the children and young people in their care.



Support, training & services for foster carers

Direct support from a supervising social worker

All foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker who visits, supports and supervises the carer every 4 weeks, for the first year, then every 6 weeks after the first review, or more frequently if needed, to provide support, advice, guidance and supervision on most matters relating to fostering and the care of the child or young person. The carer will also be in close contact with the child or young person's social worker.

There is at least one unannounced visit every year to every fostering household.

Payments for fostering

All foster carers receive the national minimum allowance. Additional allowances are also paid to help pay for the child or young person's birthday, summer break and winter festival.

Fees are paid to carers who meet the specific requirements in the fee structure.

Independent support for foster carers

Bradford Fostering provides independent support for every foster carer where there is a need for mediation or advocacy to support carers during allegations.

All approved foster carers are provided with individual memberships with The Fostering Network, which include legal support, legal insurance and 24 hour legal helpline; support with tax and personal finances; special offers on thousands of lifestyle products and services; a quarterly newsletter; a monthly e-newsletter; support groups, training workshops and online forums; counselling and medical helpline; an education advice service and a confidential, impartial fostering advice and information helpline.

Kinship support for Family & Friends carers

Bradford Fostering works closely with Kinship, the leading kinship care charity in England and Wales, to provide independent support to all Family & Friends carers, but particularly to family and friends carers looking after children and young people on a Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangements Order or no order at all.

Support for carers from the LGBT+ community

Foster carers from the LGBT+ community are provided with membership of New Family Social, which provides a unique service for LGBT+ families that includes peer support, networking and local events.

Bradford Independent Foster Carer Association

Bradford's foster carer association provides independent support to foster carers including monthly coffee mornings, helping with tax returns, support with allegations, buddying/mentoring and arranging social events for foster families.



Foster carer support groups

6 groups provide regular support opportunities for foster carers to find peer support, meet other carers in similar circumstances to their own and develop their skills (during the pandemic these have been provided online via Zoom). The groups have provided an opportunity for peer learning as well as informal training on a wide variety of topics, led by colleagues in other services and partner organisations.

- ♥ Monthly meet-ups with informal training (day and evening sessions)
- ♥ Short term carers meet up with One Adoption West Yorkshire (day and evening sessions)
- ♥ New carers' support group
- ♥ Men who foster
- ♥ Short break carers
- ♥ Asian foster carers

Face-to-face support groups restarted in 2021 and support is being provided to BIFCA, the Bradford Independent Foster Carers' Association, to restart their face-to-face coffee mornings and peer support sessions.

Foster carer forum

Foster carers are regularly invited to attend and meet with the Fostering Service management team to find out about developments in the Fostering Service and beyond and consult on service development. Carers are able to raise issues and discuss openly with the service manager on any topic that concerns them.

Annual foster carer conference and awards

An annual event that celebrates carers' long service and provides an opportunity to network with other foster carers. The conference includes a key note speaker to inspire, educate and engage foster carers by delivering an engaging speech. Most recently, this was Luke Rodgers, a care experienced person.

Out of hours' emergency support

If additional support is required outside of office hours, foster carers contact the Emergency Duty Team. The development of the Mockingbird project in Bradford also provides out of hours support to carers in the constellation.

Training

Bradford Fostering is committed to investing in the training and development of foster carers and staff. Supervising social workers make sure the foster carers' training and development needs are an integral part of their supervisory visits.

In addition to the pre-approval preparatory training, approved foster carers have access to a wide range of training courses currently provided via the online training portal, The Foster Carers' Training Hub, as well as informal training opportunities provided through support groups sessions.



Fostering family finding

The Family Finding team receive all fostering family requests and has a comprehensive overview of all placements for emergency, long term and short term fostering family placements as well as any non-Council placements.

Family finders carefully match children and young people with foster carers to make placements, taking into consideration the child/young person's needs and the experience and skills of the foster family. They also consider the importance of the child/young person remaining in school and maintaining continued contact with extended family members.

SGO support

The SGO support team provides a daily duty service, taking referrals for Special Guardianship support assessments for carers and their children and young people when an SGO has been granted, should worries arise. The support is mainly offered after the Order has been made, the team also offers guidance to children's social workers completing SGO support plans.

Nursing team

There is a dedicated nursing team that looks after the health needs of children and young people in care in Bradford.

Allegations

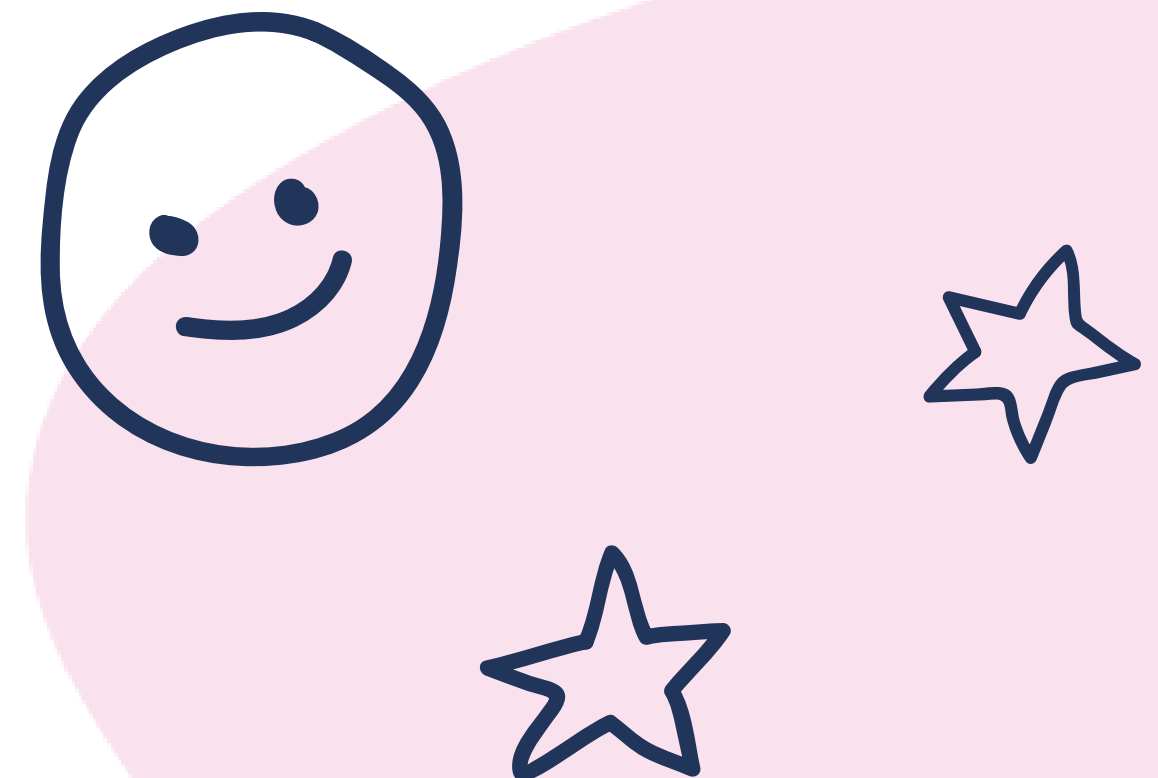
All allegations relating to foster carers are investigated by the service and reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) on behalf of Bradford's Safeguarding Board.

The West Yorkshire Safeguarding policies and procedures are followed. Foster carers are offered independent support during this process, which can be accessed via the supervising social worker.

Allegations review meetings take place between the Fostering Service manager and the LADO to track, minimise and address drift and delay in these cases.

Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers

The Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers plan, prepare and chair annual foster carer reviews to quality assure the practice, supervision and support of Bradford foster carers by the fostering service; to review and explore foster carers' practice and assess their ability to meet the needs of children and young people in foster care; to complete review reports detailing evidence based analysis as to why foster carers should be recommended for re-approval; to co-ordinate and develop the reviewing practice, policies and systems within the fostering service;



About our service

Management, structure & staffing

The day-to-day management of the Fostering Service is the responsibility of the two Fostering Service Managers, who report to the Strategic Lead Manager for Fostering, who in turn reports to the Assistant Director of Safeguarding & Review, Commissioning & Provider Services.

All managers within the Fostering Service are experienced social worker practitioners and maintain professional development in fostering and management practice through attendance at appropriate training courses, seminars and conferences and through research and other briefings.

There are four fostering supervisory teams in the fostering service, as well as two foster carer assessment teams, one family finding team and one marketing & recruitment team. Each manager supervises supervising social workers, foster family finding social workers and/or community resource workers. All fostering team managers are responsible to the

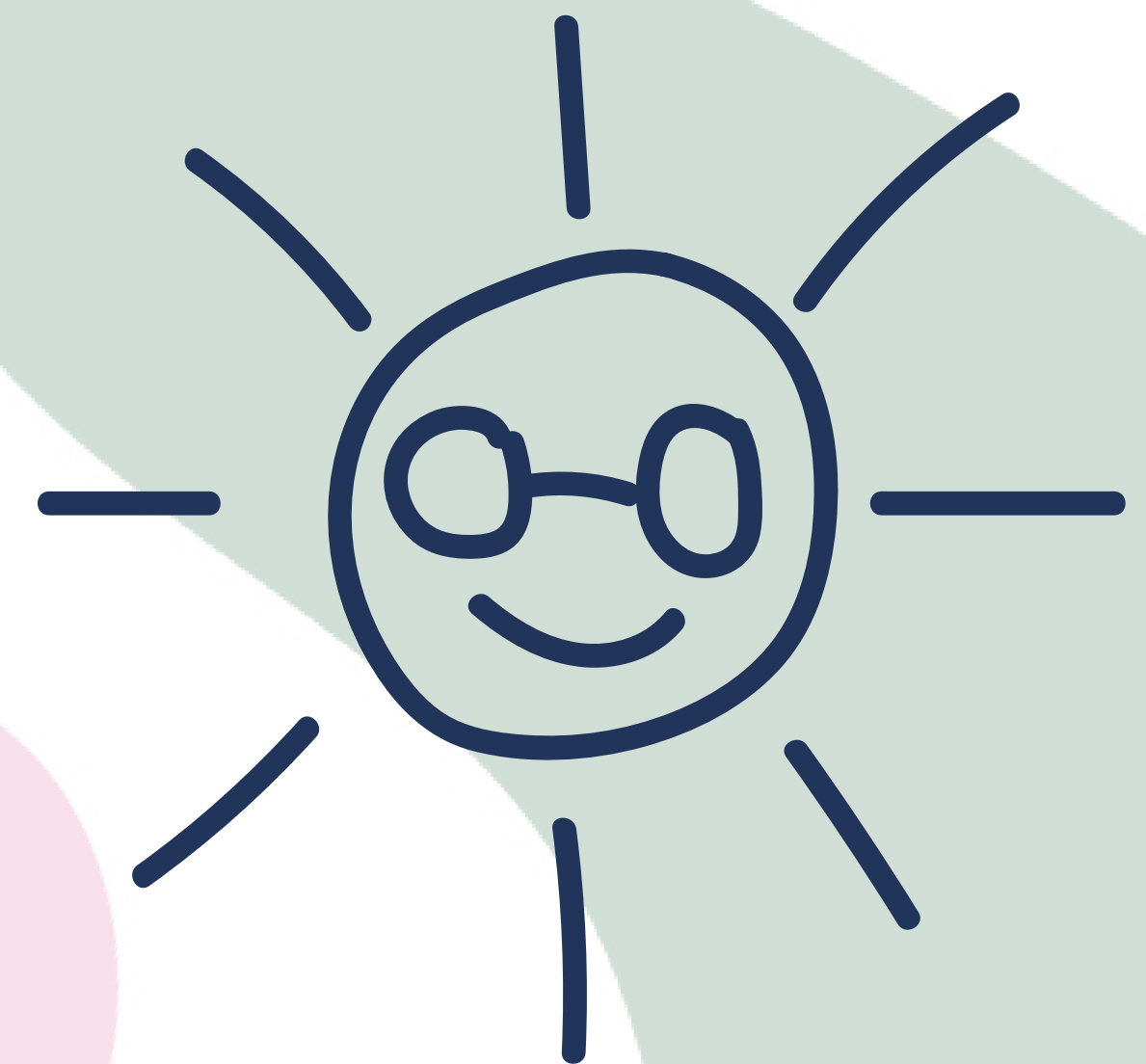
Fostering Service managers.

All the managers work as a team to provide operational management across the Fostering Service and to provide management cover, as appropriate, in each other's absence.

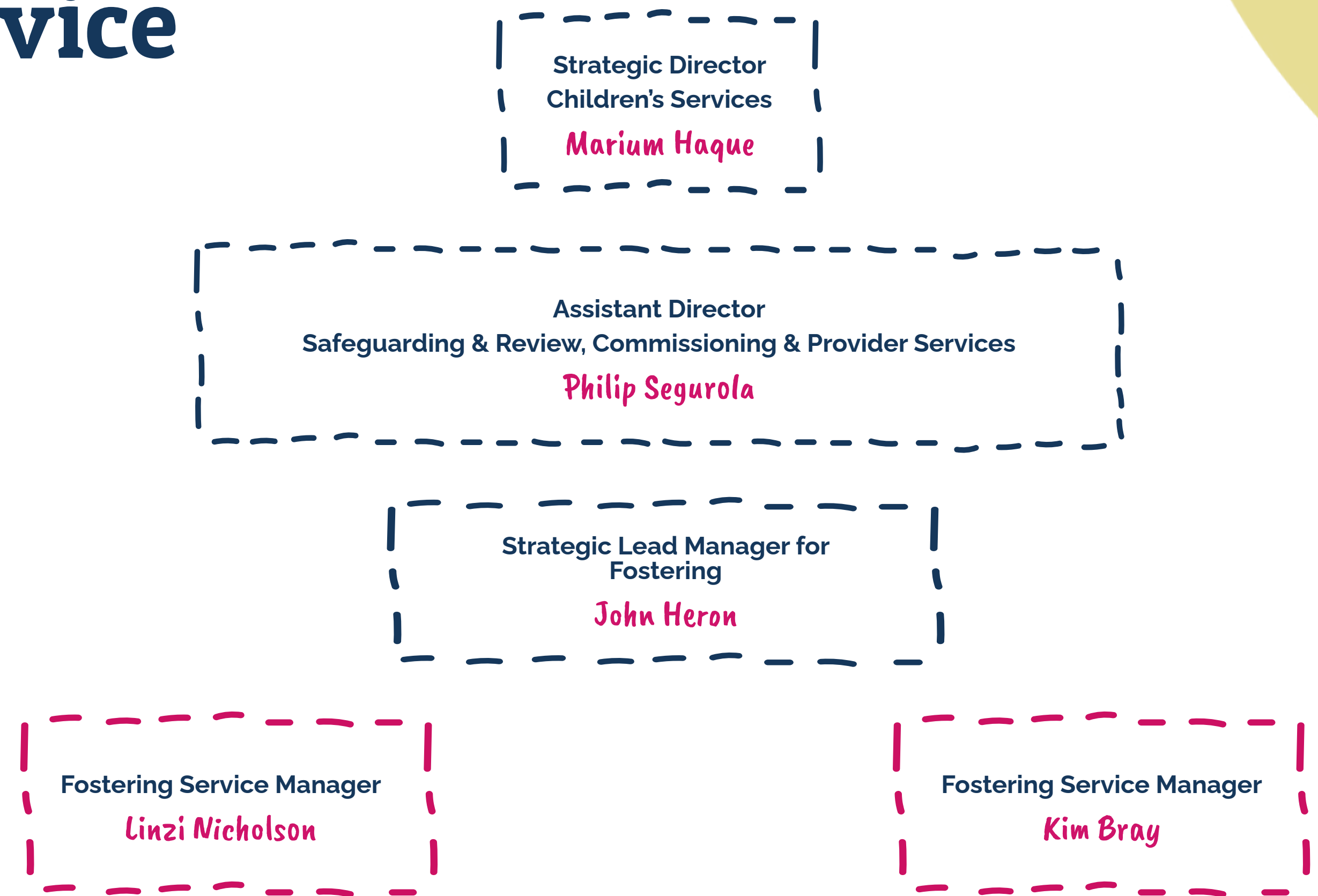
All the supervisory team managers are on a rota to provide management of the fostering duty system.

Bradford Fostering is also a corporate member of Research in Practice, CoramBAAF and The Fostering Network and all members of the service are able to use these resources to ensure practice is evidence-based and informed by research.

Staff from the Fostering Service and other appropriate services are involved in the review, planning and development of the service and contribute to wider Children's Service development.



About our service



Short Breaks Fostering Team Manager Shaista Yaqoob	Fostering Support & Supervisory Team Manager 1 Vera Hadwen	Fostering Support & Supervisory Team Manager 2 Yasmin Smith	Fostering Support & Supervisory Team Manager 3 Faiz Haque	Mockingbird Family Model Vickie Oldroyd	Fostering Permanency Team Manager Sue Barron	Fostering Recruitment & Assesments Team Manager Ben Whitehead	Fostering Marketing & Recruitment Manager Helen Picton
5 SSWs 1 CRW/ 2 BSOs	9 SSWs 2 BSOs	9 SSWs (5.8 FTE)	8 SSWs (6.8 FTE) 1 BSO	1 CRW (Mockingbird)	1 PS 16 SWs (15.5 FTE) 1 BSO	1 CRW (recruitment) 7 SSWs	

About our service

Staff qualifications and experience

All staff in the Fostering Service have an annual appraisal and a personal development plan that identifies their development needs and any training to help to progress and improve their skills, abilities and knowledge.

Fostering social workers

31 supervising social workers plus 4 family finding social workers; 2 SGO support social workers; 14 Family & Friends assessing social workers; 7 mainstream assessing social workers across 7 fostering teams.

Qualifications: All social workers have a social work qualification

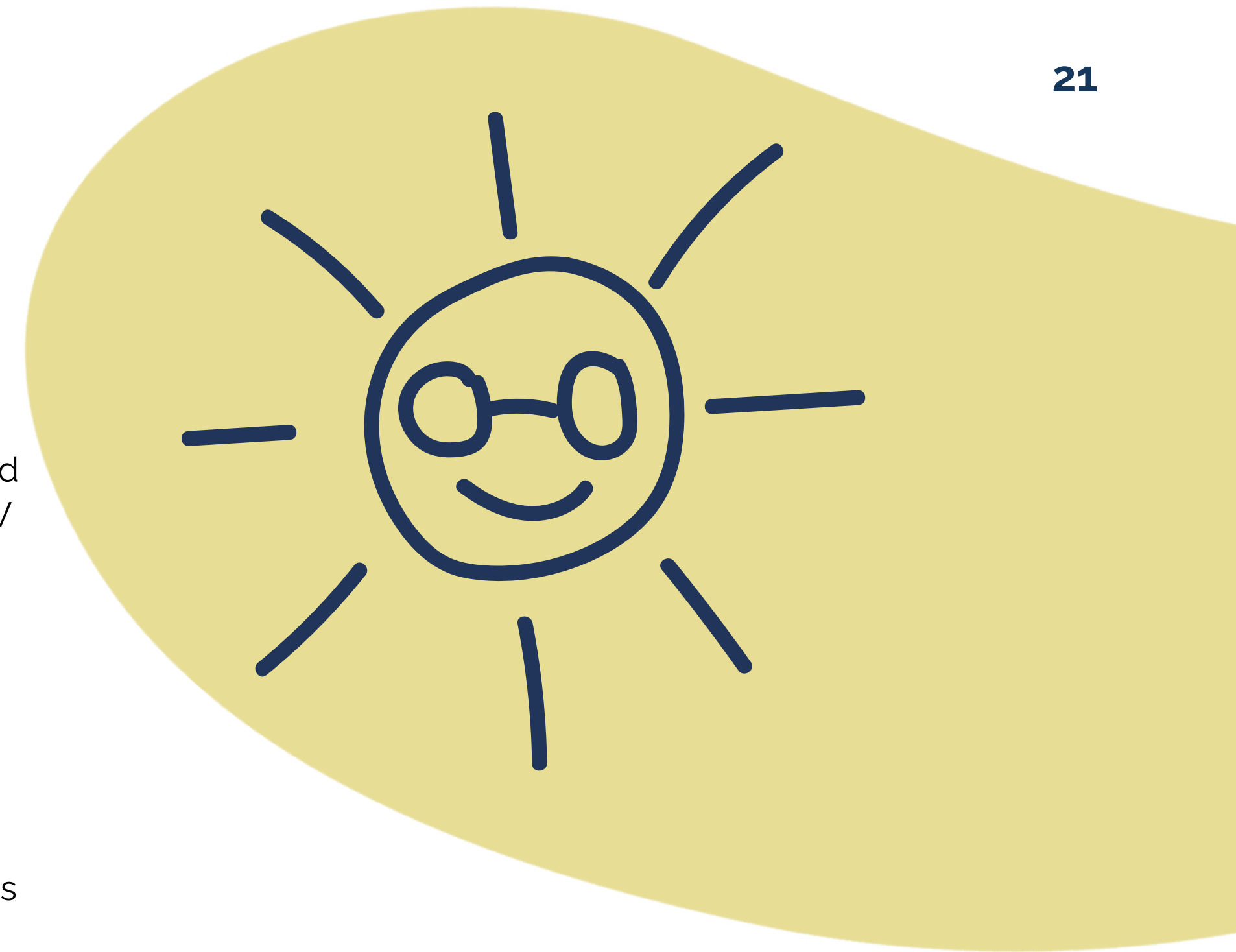
Experience: The social workers have a wide range of experience in social work and in fostering. A commitment to maintaining balance of experience is maintained. All workers have experience in statutory children's social work.

Community resource workers

There are 3 CRWs in the Fostering team, 2 of whom are also Bradford foster carers; 1 in the Recruitment team and the other as the Mockingbird liaison worker. The 3rd CRW works in the Short Breaks team supporting short break fostering applicants and current short break carers.

Fostering business support officers

Bradford Fostering Service is supported by 6 business support officers including 2 panel clerks, 2 finance officers and 2 general administrative posts.



Tell us your views

All young people in foster care receive information about the complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. This information is available in the Children's Guide to Living in Foster Care. Children can also raise issues, feedback or complain via Viewpoint, the online reviewing system. All complaints are dealt with by Bradford Council's customer services' team..

All children and young people in foster care have access to advocacy through NYAS and support from their Independent Reviewing Officer.

Foster carers are provided with information about how to complain on their own behalf and how to help their child or young person complain in the online foster carer handbook.

Any allegation about foster carers, which comes within a Child Protection remit, is investigated within the Safeguarding Procedures.

Any concerns about the Fostering Service may also be addressed to Ofsted.

Ofsted & inspections

The Fostering Service is inspected by Ofsted in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations (England) 2011 and the National Minimum Standards.

Since 2013, Ofsted inspects local authority services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers. These inspections include fostering services.

When published these inspection reports are available on Bradford Council's website.

Useful contacts

Bradford Council Comments & Complaints

Tel: [01274 436820](tel:01274436820)

Email: Fostering.Complaints@bradford.gov.uk

NYAS National Youth Advisory Service

Tel: [0808 808 1001](tel:08088081001)

Email: help@nyas.net

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD

Tel: [0300 1231231](tel:03001231231)

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Childline

Tel: [0800 1111](tel:08001111)

www.childline.org.uk

Help at Hand - the office of the Children's Commissioner

Tel: [0800 528 0731](tel:08005280731)

help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk



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