

# **Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee**

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**Wednesday 24 November 2021 at 1.00 pm**

**To be held at the Town Hall, Pinstone Street, Sheffield, S1 2HH**

**The Press and Public are Welcome to Attend**

## **Membership**

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Councillors Mick Rooney (Chair), Maroof Raouf (Deputy Chair), Mike Chaplin, Anne Murphy, Vickie Priestley, Kaltum Rivers, Safiya Saeed, Jack Scott, Richard Shaw, Sophie Wilson, Ann Whitaker, Cliff Woodcraft and Ann Woolhouse

## **Education Non-Council Members**

Alison Warner, Sam Evans, Peter Naldrett, Vacancy and Vacancy

## **Healthwatch Sheffield**

Alice Riddell (Observer)

## **Substitute Members**

In accordance with the Constitution, Substitute Members may be provided for the above Committee Members as and when required.

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## **PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE MEETING**

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The Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny Committee exercises an overview and scrutiny function in respect of the planning, policy development and monitoring of service performance and other general issues relating to learning and attainment and the care of children and young people within the Children's Services area of Council activity. It also scrutinises as appropriate the various local Health Services functions, with particular reference to those relating to the care of children.

A copy of the agenda and reports is available on the Council's website at [www.sheffield.gov.uk](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk). You can also see the reports to be discussed at the meeting if you call at the First Point Reception, Town Hall, Pinstone Street entrance. The Reception is open between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm, Monday to Thursday and between 9.00 am and 4.45 pm. You may not be allowed to see some reports because they contain confidential information. These items are usually marked \* on the agenda.

Members of the public have the right to ask questions or submit petitions to Scrutiny Committee meetings and recording is allowed under the direction of the Chair. Please see the website or contact Democratic Services for further information regarding public questions and petitions and details of the Council's protocol on audio/visual recording and photography at council meetings.

Scrutiny Committee meetings are normally open to the public but sometimes the Committee may have to discuss an item in private. If this happens, you will be asked to leave. Any private items are normally left until last. If you would like to attend the meeting please report to the First Point Reception desk where you will be directed to the meeting room.

If you require any further information about this Scrutiny Committee, please contact Alice Nicholson, Policy and Improvement Officer on 0114 27 35065 or [email alice.nicholson@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:alice.nicholson@sheffield.gov.uk)

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## **FACILITIES**

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There are public toilets available, with wheelchair access, on the ground floor of the Town Hall. Induction loop facilities are available in meeting rooms.

Access for people with mobility difficulties can be obtained through the ramp on the side to the main Town Hall entrance.

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**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILY SUPPORT SCRUTINY AND POLICY  
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE AGENDA  
24 NOVEMBER 2021**

**Order of Business**

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- 1. Welcome and Housekeeping Arrangements**
- 2. Apologies for Absence**
- 3. Exclusion of Public and Press**  
To identify items where resolutions may be moved to exclude the press and public
- 4. Declarations of Interest** (Pages 5 - 8)  
Members to declare any interests they have in the business to be considered at the meeting
- 5. Minutes of Previous Meeting** (Pages 9 - 16)  
To approve the minutes of the meetings of Committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2021
- 6. Public Questions and Petitions**  
To receive any questions or petitions from members of the public
- 7. Adoption Service - Annual Report 2020/21** (Pages 17 - 44)  
Report of the Director of Children and Families
- 8. Fostering Service - Annual Report 2020/21** (Pages 45 - 64)  
Report of the Director of Children and Families
- 9. Draft Work Programme 2021/22** (Pages 65 - 68)  
Report of the Policy and Improvement Officer
- 10. Date of Next Meeting**  
The next meeting of the Committee will be held on Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2021, at 1.00 pm, in the Town Hall

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## ADVICE TO MEMBERS ON DECLARING INTERESTS AT MEETINGS

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If you are present at a meeting of the Council, of its executive or any committee of the executive, or of any committee, sub-committee, joint committee, or joint sub-committee of the authority, and you have a **Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI)** relating to any business that will be considered at the meeting, you must not:

- participate in any discussion of the business at the meeting, or if you become aware of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interest during the meeting, participate further in any discussion of the business, or
- participate in any vote or further vote taken on the matter at the meeting.

These prohibitions apply to any form of participation, including speaking as a member of the public.

You **must**:

- leave the room (in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct)
- make a verbal declaration of the existence and nature of any DPI at any meeting at which you are present at which an item of business which affects or relates to the subject matter of that interest is under consideration, at or before the consideration of the item of business or as soon as the interest becomes apparent.
- declare it to the meeting and notify the Council's Monitoring Officer within 28 days, if the DPI is not already registered.

If you have any of the following pecuniary interests, they are your **disclosable pecuniary interests** under the new national rules. You have a pecuniary interest if you, or your spouse or civil partner, have a pecuniary interest.

- Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain, which you, or your spouse or civil partner undertakes.
- Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from your council or authority) made or provided within the relevant period\* in respect of any expenses incurred by you in carrying out duties as a member, or towards your election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

\*The relevant period is the 12 months ending on the day when you tell the Monitoring Officer about your disclosable pecuniary interests.

- Any contract which is made between you, or your spouse or your civil partner (or a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest) and your council or authority –
  - under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and
  - which has not been fully discharged.

- Any beneficial interest in land which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, have and which is within the area of your council or authority.
- Any licence (alone or jointly with others) which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, holds to occupy land in the area of your council or authority for a month or longer.
- Any tenancy where (to your knowledge) –
  - the landlord is your council or authority; and
  - the tenant is a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest.
- Any beneficial interest which you, or your spouse or your civil partner has in securities of a body where -
  - (a) that body (to your knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of your council or authority; and
  - (b) either -
    - the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or
    - if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

If you attend a meeting at which any item of business is to be considered and you are aware that you have a **personal interest** in the matter which does not amount to a DPI, you must make verbal declaration of the existence and nature of that interest at or before the consideration of the item of business or as soon as the interest becomes apparent. You should leave the room if your continued presence is incompatible with the 7 Principles of Public Life (selflessness; integrity; objectivity; accountability; openness; honesty; and leadership).

You have a personal interest where –

- a decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting the well-being or financial standing (including interests in land and easements over land) of you or a member of your family or a person or an organisation with whom you have a close association to a greater extent than it would affect the majority of the Council Tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the ward or electoral area for which you have been elected or otherwise of the Authority's administrative area, or
- it relates to or is likely to affect any of the interests that are defined as DPIs but are in respect of a member of your family (other than a partner) or a person with whom you have a close association.

Guidance on declarations of interest, incorporating regulations published by the Government in relation to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, has been circulated to you previously.

You should identify any potential interest you may have relating to business to be considered at the meeting. This will help you and anyone that you ask for advice to fully consider all the circumstances before deciding what action you should take.

In certain circumstances the Council may grant a **dispensation** to permit a Member to take part in the business of the Authority even if the member has a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest relating to that business.

To obtain a dispensation, you must write to the Monitoring Officer at least 48 hours before the meeting in question, explaining why a dispensation is sought and desirable, and specifying the period of time for which it is sought. The Monitoring Officer may consult with the Independent Person or the Council's Audit and Standards Committee in relation to a request for dispensation.

Further advice can be obtained from Gillian Duckworth, Director of Legal and Governance on 0114 2734018 or email [gillian.duckworth@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:gillian.duckworth@sheffield.gov.uk).

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Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development  
Committee

Meeting held 13 October 2021

**PRESENT:** Councillors Mick Rooney (Chair), Maroof Raouf (Deputy Chair),  
Mike Chaplin, Anne Murphy, Vickie Priestley, Richard Shaw,  
Ann Whitaker, Cliff Woodcraft and Ann Woolhouse

Non-Council Members in attendance:-

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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kaltum Rivers, Jack Scott and Sophie Wilson, and from Sam Evans (Diocese Representative – Non-Council Voting Member), Peter Naldrett (Parent Governor Representative – Non-Council Voting Member) and Alice Riddell (Healthwatch Sheffield, Observer).

**2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

4.1 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th February 2021, were approved as a correct record and, arising therefrom, the Policy and Information Officer (Alice Nicholson) stated that, with reference to (a) Item 4 – Elective Home Education, paragraph (c)(i), shortly after the Committee meeting, the Government had decided that all pupils' examination grades for summer 2021 would be based on teacher assessments, (b) Item 5 – Minutes of Previous Meeting, paragraph 5.1 (c), the more detailed information regarding the Amber Project had not yet been sent to Members, and she suggested that such information could be incorporated into the Annual Safeguarding and Sexual Exploitation Reports, which were to be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee and (c) Item 7 – Multi-Agency Support Teams (MAST) – Update, paragraph 7.5, (c), she would seek clarification

with regard to how the Committee could be involved in the review of early help services.

4.2 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19th May 2021, were approved as a correct record.

4.3 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7th July 2021, were approved as a correct record.

**5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

5.1 There were no questions raised or petitions submitted by members of the public.

**6. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22**

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson) containing the Committee's draft Work Programme for 2021/22.

6.2 Ms Nicholson reported that the Annual Adoption and Fostering Reports 2020/21 would now be considered by the Committee at its meeting to be held on 24th November 2021 and the Annual Reports of the Sheffield Safeguarding Children's Board and Sheffield Sexual Exploitation Service would be considered at the Committee's meeting to be held on 8th December 2021.

6.3 Members made suggestions in terms of issues to be considered by the Committee, which included (a) the effects of the cut in Universal Credit and the end of the Government's furlough scheme, on children and young people and (b) a review of Youth Services, after having been insourced for 12 months.

6.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made; and
- (b) approves the draft Work Programme for 2021/ 22, with consideration to be given to the suggestions now made.

**7. SHEFFIELD YOUTH CABINET - IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG PEOPLE IN SHEFFIELD: REVIEW AND FOLLOW-UP TO YOUTH CABINET AND SCRUTINY WORK 2021-22**

7.1 The Committee received an introductory report of the Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson) containing details of the review and follow-up to the

previous collaborative work undertaken by a Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group, with the Sheffield Youth Cabinet, on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people in Sheffield. Attached to the introductory report was a report of the Task and Finish Group and a report of the Council's Education and Skills Service on the survey of young people's experience of the pandemic.

- 7.2 Also in attendance for this item were Jude and Muneerah (Sheffield Youth Cabinet) who had been invited by the Committee to put forward their views how they, other members of the Youth Cabinet and other young people who attended youth clubs, had been affected by the pandemic. They were accompanied by Emma Hinchliffe (Youth Services, Libraries, Learning, Skills and Communities).
- 7.3 The Committee invited Jude and Munira to provide answers to the six questions which had been put to the Youth Cabinet at its meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> October, 2021, and also report on the responses from young people who attend some of the youth clubs in the city, as follows:-
- 7.3.1 Question 1 – Are you glad to be back at school and have you noticed any changes from the last school year?
- 7.3.2 Jude stated that he was really glad to be back at school, engaging with teachers and peers. He stated that whilst school was predominantly a place to go and learn, it was also a place to engage with teachers and peers. It was also a place for socialising, which helped young people develop, and assisted them when looking for apprenticeships and employment. Jude stated that he had struggled badly during the lockdowns, and did not have sufficient IT provision and the ability to engage, which had resulted in him suffering a drop in grades and sets. When pupils returned to school in March 2021, the situation had improved considerably, and whilst he had made some improvements in terms of his grades, he did not consider he had reached the grades he would have done if he'd been in school all the time.
- 7.3.3 In terms of comments of others, Jude stated that there had been a mixed response, with some pupils being pleased to be back in school, whilst others were not. Some pupils had expressed concern over Covid-19 in terms of group settings, a lack of adequate ventilation and concerns travelling to and from school on busy buses, whereas those undertaking practical subjects were pleased to be back. Many pupils found it easier to ask for help in person, found the lessons easier than being online and welcomed the social aspect of being back with their friends. Some pupils were struggling with less sleep and others preferred studying at home as they felt shy in the classroom setting.
- 7.3.4 Muneerah stated that she had found the lockdowns quite stressful, with having to isolate resulting in an adverse effect on her mental health, with several of her friends and family suffering with anxiety issues. She made reference to the problems being faced by young people who had dyslexia, indicating that the break in education had resulted in their progress being badly compromised, partly to do with the lack of continuity and awareness from teachers.
- 7.3.5 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were

provided:-

- Jude stated that in terms of the benefits of studying at home, he felt that things had improved when pupils started receiving more online calls from their teachers. This was during the first three months of 2021, and was the first time he felt he was properly engaging after the lockdowns, although he still considered that he was only learning around 50% than what he would have done in school. He believed that the majority of pupils found the online lessons less beneficial than face-to-face lessons in school. Muneerah concurred with these views, indicating that some pupils had adapted better than others. She personally considered it a negative experience and felt under-prepared/under-equipped.
- Accessibility to IT had improved during the pandemic, so schools and pupils would be much better prepared if there were any similar events in the future. It was acknowledged that several pupils suffered, particularly during the early stages of the pandemic, due to a lack of up-to-date IT. Through various projects and initiatives, schools had been able to acquire more laptops, which pupils had access to.
- Jude stated that he had been on the student Council at his school for six years, which met regularly, and held meetings with local community forums. There had not been much opportunity for pupils to voice their concerns during the lockdowns, other than the odd survey arranged by teachers. There were now many more opportunities for pupils to voice their opinions.
- Many pupils, particularly those from poorer backgrounds, suffered more during the lockdowns due to a lack of access to adequate IT provision. As well as affecting their learning, some pupils' mental health suffered, particularly with regard to anxiety. Some pupils faced problems in finding a quiet space in their household to be able to study, which again caused stress. Pupils suffering with mental health issues found it difficult to get the help they needed, both due to them being afraid to speak out about it and to a lack of professional expertise within schools and colleges. Several pupils were affected by watching their parents struggle financially during the pandemic.
- Muneerah stated that she struggled during the first lockdown due to a lack of online learning available, with the pupils work not being assessed regularly enough. Throughout the pandemic, the online learning experience had improved, although a lot of students continued to struggle. Some schools had adapted quicker and better than others in terms of online lessons, with little interaction between pupils and teachers at some schools. Jude stated that he did not have any online lessons until three months into the pandemic, and found it very difficult to engage when such online lessons commenced on a regular basis. He stated that some of his friends, at other schools, had made much better progress during lockdown, which he believed was due to the style and quality of online lessons.
- The reasons why pupils had been asked to turn their cameras off during online lessons was simply due to safety concerns. Some pupils indicated that

they would have found it easier to have their cameras on.

- Muneerah stated that she had struggled with her dyslexia whilst at secondary school, then the situation got even worse during the lockdown due to the loss of visual learning. She has since moved on from school to college, and had spoken to her lecturers at college in connection with what support she, and other students suffering with the condition, needed. For a number of reasons, mainly due to a lack of understanding, she had not felt as though she had received the support she needed.

7.3.6 Question 2 - Do you feel you have been given enough opportunity to catch up on your studies from lockdown? Why?

7.3.7 Muneerah stated that there was a mixed response to this question, with pupils in different year groups experiencing problems in different ways. Pupils in Y10 and Y11 had struggled due to it being their exam years, whereas pupils in Y7/8 and Y9 were struggling as they were being asked to do extra lessons in English and maths. Those pupils taking art subjects had also suffered in that the extra catch-up lessons in English and maths would often replace their chosen art subjects. Several pupils were struggling to catch up on those subjects, which were traditionally more difficult than others, such as maths and science. Muneerah's view was that the catchup work by schools wasn't as effective as it could be. There was a view that catching up should mean that, and not going over large areas of work again as this would create stress for some pupils. Such catch-up lessons should only comprise small groups, and pupils should have the option of asking teachers to go over what they thought they needed to know, rather than going over everything again.

7.3.8 Question 3 - How are you feeling about the way ahead? Is there anything you, or young people you know need support with (eg mental health)?

7.3.9 Muneerah stated that some pupils had found it stressful not knowing how to revise, as they had never been taught how to do so. There were general concerns regarding students being off with Covid-19, and with it being treated like any other illness. Mental health still remained a big issue, with those pupils suffering believing that schools only acknowledged it during Mental Health Awareness Week. The Youth Cabinet was aware that not all schools had taken up the support offered to them by Kooth, the online mental health support scheme, originally commissioned by the Sheffield Clinical Commissioning Group, available for all young people aged between 11 and 18. The Youth Cabinet would be contacting all schools, encouraging them to do this as they recognised the benefits this could have for young people.

7.3.10 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were provided:-

- The problems of young people having struggled during the pandemic had been replicated all over the country. More emphasis needed to be placed on the mental health needs of young people, and the message needed to be put across more forcibly. Many young people, particularly those suffering with

mental health problems, found it very difficult to speak out about their problems. Some pupils had been forced to get part-time jobs to make themselves more self-sufficient and less reliant on their parents, some of whom were struggling financially due to the pandemic.

- The Youth Cabinet had met with Learn Sheffield on a number of occasions to discuss various issues, including access to part-time jobs and work experience. A number of pupils were concerned that they hadn't had the opportunity of getting work experience which would be an advantage when looking for employment.
  - Jude stated that, in his opinion, there was a lack of mutual respect from some teachers. He also considered that there was a reluctance on some pupils to ask questions, partly due to the fear of being judged or ridiculed in front of both teachers and peers. All teachers should be more encouraging in terms of supporting pupils to ask questions.
- 7.3.11 Question 4 – For those who were due to take exams last year, how are you feeling now about the results you were given and what impact this has had on you?
- 7.3.12 Jude stated that most of the pupils and young people questioned had indicated that they were happy with the grades they had been given by their teachers. It was considered that the grading and assessment system had worked generally well.
- 7.3.13 Question 5 – For those who are due to take exams this year, how are you feeling about them?
- 7.3.14 Jude stated that there was some confusion amongst pupils in terms of what work they were going to be tested on, or what work they needed to do to catch up on. Some pupils considered that the Government needed to make decisions earlier in terms of whether they would be expected to be sitting examinations, as they needed to know which topics they should revise. Some pupils were both concerned and frustrated at the fact that they were being forced to sit exams whilst the year group before them had not had to do so, even though their education had still been disrupted.
- 7.3.15 Question 6 – Any other feedback from the young people about the impact of Covid-19 on their education and the support they feel they need now? What can schools do?
- 7.3.16 Muneerah stated that more work was needed in terms of raising awareness of mental health issues, and that teachers should receive more training on this issue. Jude made reference to Kooth, indicating that he considered all schools should be advertising this very useful service, particularly on behalf of those young people who did not wish to visit their GP or CAMHS for various reasons. The service had been advertised in youth clubs across the city.
- 7.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the information contained in the reports now submitted, the information now reported and the responses to the questions raised;
- (b) thanks Jude, Muneerah and Emma Hinchliffe for attending the meeting, and providing the feedback now reported and responding to the questions raised; and
- (c) requests the Chair, in consultation with the Policy and Improvement Officer, to draft actions for the Committee, following the views now expressed, to be shared with, and agreed by, the Youth Council.

## **8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 7.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee be held on Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021, at 1.00 pm in the Town Hall.

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## Report to Children, Young People & Family Support Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021

**Report of:** Carly Speechley, Director, Children and Families

**Subject:** Adoption Service Annual Report 2020/21

**Author of Report:** Vicky Brooke, Adoption Service Manager,  
Vicky.brooke@sheffield.gov.uk

This is the annual report of Sheffield City Council's Adoption Service. It reports on activity and performance in the Service during 2020/21, and details developments that have taken place during the reporting year, and developments planned for the service moving through 2021/22.

Key activity data in the report indicates that the number of Sheffield children adopted from care decreased from 41 in 2019/20 to 33 in 2020/21. This is in line with the national trend. The percentage of children adopted from care reduced from 15% to 12% in the same period. This is in line with the latest national average of 12%. Our performance on timeliness of adoption was strong. On average children adopted in year were moved from becoming looked after to placed for adoption in 421 days, 5 days quicker than the Government target and 73 days quicker than the national average performance.

A key development in the reporting year was the establishment on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 of the South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency. This is a partnership jointly established between the adoption services of Sheffield, Barnsley and Rotherham Councils, and Doncaster Children's Services Trust. This initiative is in line with the Government drive to regionalise all adoptions services in the country.

**Type of item:** The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Performance / budget monitoring report	<b>x</b>
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Other	

**The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:**

Note the activity and the performance of Sheffield City Council's Adoption Service in 2020/21.

**Background Papers:** South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency Six Month Report

**Category of Report:** OPEN

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# Sheffield City Council: Annual Adoption Service Report for 2020/21.

## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report is the Annual Report of Sheffield City Council's Adoption Service. It details the activity and performance of Sheffield's Adoption Service and the outcomes for Sheffield children needing adoption for 2020/21 and sets out improvement and development work planned for 2021/22.

## 2. Introduction

2.1 Sheffield City Council Adoption Service's remit is to recruit and approve prospective adopters; match and place children with approved adoptive families; and to provide adoption support to adopted children, adoptive parents and adopted adults.

2.2 It is a legislative requirement that the service provides reports on its activity and performance to Elected Members.

2.3 As for every area of work, this has been an extraordinary year due to the Covid 19 pandemic, but it has thrown up particular challenges in relation to moving children on to adoptive families and supporting them post placement. It has also impacted upon the recruitment and assessment of adopters. This has been a difficult year for adoptive families and demand for intense high level support services has grown significantly during the year.

2.4 As mentioned in the introduction, another significant development during the year (in addition to adapting to the impact of Covid 19), has been the creation of the One Adoption South Yorkshire (OASY) Regional Adoption Agency. Sheffield established the agency jointly with the adoption services of Rotherham, Barnsley, and Doncaster, and the agency went live on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021. The Head of Service was appointed at the end of last year and took up post on the date the agency went live.

2.5 This annual report focuses upon the activity of Sheffield Adoption Service since for most of 2020-21, the service had not regionalised or impacted upon performance. The OASY Head of Service is writing a separate report on the first 6 months of the regional adoption agency activity.

## 3. Adoption Activity - Children 2020/21.

3.1 Table 1 below sets out the number of children who have been through different stages of the adoption process in Sheffield in 2020/21 compared to the previous three years:

**Table 1**

	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17
Early permanence placements in year	7	3	11	4	5
Children made subject to SHOBPA decision	48	38	55	51	76
Children made subject to Placement Orders	35	37	41	38	56

Children matched to adoptive families	36	43	38	41	52
Children placed with adoptive families	37	41	38	44	44
Children adopted in year	33	42	40	39	51
Number of disrupted placements	2	2	1	2	3

3.2 As can be seen from Table 1, the number of children subject to a 'should be placed for adoption' decision increased during the year. This is in line with there being a slight increase nationally. However, Placement Orders are slightly lower, as is the number of Adoption Orders. Some of the decline in adoption orders can be attributed to delays in processing adoption applications at Court, due to Covid. The Courts were not able to prioritise these. These falls are mirrored nationally. The Adoption and Special Guardianship Leader Board (ASGLB), collates data from every local authority, regional adoption agency and voluntary adoption agency in England. The data for England for 2020-21 shows a decrease of 9% in the number of placement orders granted, along with a 17% fall in adoption orders. Alongside this there has been a further 4% increase in the number of special guardianship orders granted nationally during the same period. In Sheffield there were 44 children made the subject of special guardianship orders during the year which is higher than the number adopted. The majority of the special guardians were grandparents or other family members.

3.3 The percentage of children who left care via adoption in Sheffield in 2020/21 was 12%, which is a fall on previous years. In 2019/20 it was 15% which is similar to 2018/19 when it was 14.8%. This trend reflects a national fall in adoption plans. However, the combination of adoption orders and special guardianship orders in Sheffield, as permanence options for children, is above the national and statistical neighbour averages.

3.4 The number of Fostering for Adoption (FfA) placements increased over the year. The service made seven over the year. This compares well to the previous year when only 3 were made. However, we need to be rigorous in ensuring that this is considered as an option for all children entering care. The big advantage for the child is that it reduces the number of moves and means he/she is placed with their permanent family at a younger age. The benefit to the adopter is that they get a child at a very young age, sometimes immediately from hospital following birth, who has experienced fewer or no moves since entering care.

3.5 There were two children whose adoptive placements disrupted during the year. The service held disruption reviews to learn lessons from these and the learning has been shared across the service. The first was a little boy who was placed at the age of five with a single adopter. His behaviour deteriorated post placement and at the same time the adopter struggled due to the impact of covid upon her support networks and employment. There was a rigorous disruption review which highlighted several areas of learning. The second was the disruption of the placement of the eldest sibling (aged eight), of a sibling group of 2 girls. This was a very complex case but eventually it led to the difficult decision to separate the girls and the adopters have adopted the youngest child. This case has led to more robust scrutiny of how we best support adopters and work together across agencies to best support adopters who are willing to adopt older children or sibling groups. Within the Regional Adoption Agency, we have now built-in additional training for adopters willing to take sibling groups or older children. We also routinely ask relatives to attend a workshop to hear directly about the adoptive parenting task and their role in supporting a therapeutic parenting approach. Both of the children whose adoptive placements disrupted have now got plans of long-term fostering.

## 4. Adoption Timeliness

4.1 National scorecards for adoption agencies are used to compare performance of adoption agencies both nationally and with statistical neighbours. A low number of days represents good performance for the three primary indicators which are known as A1, A2 and A10.

4.2 **A1- ‘average time in days between a child entering care and being placed for adoption’:** Our average timescale in Sheffield for this indicator during the year 2020-21 was 421 days, which is strong performance given the circumstances. It is 5 days quicker than the government target of 426 days. The ASGLB data shows that the national average performance on this indicator increased by 34 days to 494 days, so the local performance was very good by comparison on this indicator.

4.3 **A2 – ‘average time in days between placement order being granted and the decision to match with adoptive families’:** Our average timescale for this indicator during the year 2020-21 was 151 days which is a big improvement on the previous year’s performance of 194 days. The national average for this indicator increased to 206 days, so again comparatively this is very good performance under challenging circumstances. However, we haven’t yet met the Government target of 121 days for this indicator.

4.4 **A10 is an adjustment of A1 which measures the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, adjusted for foster carer adoptions.** In Sheffield the average days is 363 days which is good performance, and stronger than the national average of 375 days.

4.5 **Characteristics of adopted children:** The definition of harder to place children nationally applies to sibling groups; children with disabilities; those aged 5 and over and those who are not from white British backgrounds. Some children fall into several of these categories. Of the 33 children adopted in Sheffield during the year, 23 of them fitted one or more of these categories. Sixteen were part of a sibling group, 8 were from ethnic minorities excluding white minorities and 9 were aged 5 or over. None were disabled. Of those adopted there were 15 girls and 18 boys; 25 were under the age of 5.

4.6 Below is a summary of the timescales linked to different groups of children:

	Overall Average for all adopted children	Overall Average for Harder To Place	Overall average for children from BAME backgrounds	Overall average for Siblings	Over all average for children over 5
<b>A1</b>	421	480	483	488	559
<b>A10</b>	363	414	313	392	463
<b>A2</b>	151	174	239	196	197
<b>Children</b>	33	23	9	16	8
<b>A1 in time</b>	20	12	6	8	3
<b>A2 in time</b>	20	11	2	8	3

**4.7** To give a flavour of individual children, the child who took the longest from entering care to being placed for adoption (A1) was a little boy aged over 5 of white British origin. He was the subject of long care proceedings and the A1 was 954 days, although he was linked quite quickly once the Court had made the placement order. The shortest was a single, white British baby girl and the timescale was 150 days from entering care to placement. The child who was matched with adopters most quickly, once a placement order was made (A2) was a white British baby girl, placed at birth with a fostering for adoption family (A2 was 0 days). The child who took the longest to place was a little boy, who was under 5 years old, of mixed white/black Caribbean origin, part of a sibling group (A2 was 522 days). He was adopted by his foster carers.

## **5. Adoption Activity – Adopters 2020-21.**

5.1 We continued to recruit and assess adopters during the year despite the challenges of covid. Training and assessment sessions transferred to virtual technology and where visits were carried out there was strict guidance on managing these safely. However, staffing issues and problems completing certain references did impact upon activity. Additionally, some families who were considering adoption could not proceed due to the impact of covid on their jobs or other circumstances.

5.2 We were also unable to carry out our planned recruitment strategy as the Communications Team were required to prioritise messaging in relation to the pandemic. We approved less adopters than last year. Yet given the circumstances we consider that we did well to continue to bring adopters through and support them.

### 5.3 Recruitment and approval of adopters

	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17
Number of adopters approved	24	31	31	21	29
Number of Sheffield adoptive families with children placed in the year.	30	18	25	24	25

5.4 As stated this table shows we approved less adopters than last year. This is against the national trend which shows a 5% increase in approvals. However, in contrast to that we had more of our available adoptive families have children placed than previous years. There was a significant increase in the number of our Sheffield adoptive families matched to children. Of these 30 children placed with our adopters, 23 were from Sheffield and 7 from other agencies. This is a significant improvement in performance.

5.5 We approved 24 families while 35 children were granted Placement Orders. Some of these children were part of sibling groups so the number of adoptive families required would have been lower than that figure. However, the challenge is recruiting families who can meet the needs of 'harder to place' children: sibling groups; children with additional needs; older children and those of complex ethnic backgrounds. This is a challenge for all agencies and there is a national shortage of adopters available for these groups of children. This means that while we have adopters waiting, they do not always match with the children waiting. It also means we still need to use adopters approved by other adoption agencies, known as inter-agency placements. A key aim of the OASY Regional Adoption Agency is to help recruit adopters to meet the needs of the children waiting.

## 5.6 Use of inter-agency adopters

- In total, of the 37 Sheffield children placed, 14 were placed with adopters approved by external agencies during the year. Of these 6 were with other regional adoption agency or local authority adopters and 8 were with voluntary adoption agencies. There is a fee when we place our children with other agency adopters. The group of children placed externally included three sibling groups of two children as well as a sibling group of three, placed early in lockdown.
- The characteristics of children placed in inter agency placements are not dis-similar to those placed with Sheffield adopters, other than there are fewer young, single, white British children in the co-hort. This is because there are generally adequate numbers of adopters in house to provide families for these children.
- Sheffield Adoption Service have quickly agreed interagency fees for children where we have no suitable internal adopters in order to avoid delay for the child. This also means a child leaves care more quickly so achieving permanence more promptly and the costs are off set against this in the longer run. The agreement for this going forward will sit with the Head of Service for the OASY Regional Adoption Agency.
- At the same time as placing some of our children with other agencies adopters, we have provided 7 adoptive homes for 7 children from other local authorities under the same inter agency fee arrangements. One of these is a Fostering for Adoption placement.

## 5.7 Recruitment Activity Undertaken

- As mentioned above we have not been able to carry out planned recruitment activity during 2020-21. Despite this we received a healthy number of enquiries over the year: 179 in total. There is always a high dropout rate from enquiries and this number only converted in to 19 applications to adopt.
- Since the OASY Regional Adoption Agency went live we have had the support of a regional communications group, and this has led to the development of a shared website to receive enquiries. We have updated our branding and a regional recruitment strategy is being developed.
- We have continued to deliver our regional program of Preparation Training, including specialist training for adopters considering Fostering for Adoption, or those who already have children.
- Where enquirers are interested in inter-country adoption, they are directed to Adoption Yorkshire, which is a voluntary agency who provide specialist advice to those wishing to adopt children from abroad. Sheffield commissions this service along with other members of the One Adoption Hub.
- Direct recruitment based on children's profiles has been less than during normal years but there have still been some Activity Days. We have also run virtual South Yorkshire exchange events, specifically for local adopters and local children. During 2021-22 we will be able to use Link Maker (which is a national tool for linking children and adopters), to more effectively share information regionally about the available adopters in the RAA and the children in each authority, who require families. The National Adoption Register is still closed. Internally we continue to have regular Children Waiting Meetings to look at potential links between our own adopters and our own children.

- One of the key measures of the success of the OASY Regional Adoption Agency will be how effective it is in recruiting families for children in the region. It is too early to judge this yet.

## **6. Adoption Support 2020-21**

6.1 Adoption support is an essential part of the service. As seen earlier in this report many children placed for adoption have complex needs and there are different challenges depending upon the child's early history, emotional or behavioral needs, as well as the need to understand their life story and identity. Adoption support is wide ranging from lower-level support groups and activities, assistance from universal services, up to specific multi agency and therapeutic packages. Some of the therapeutic support needs of adoptive children and families are met by the nationally available Adoption Support Fund. An accredited list of private therapeutic providers is maintained regionally through North Yorkshire County Council on behalf of Yorkshire and Humberside. This is currently being updated.

6.2 An integral element of adoption support in recent years has been the Adoption Support Fund (ASF), set up by the government to support adoptive families. However, the future of the Fund remains uncertain. At the time of writing, it has been further extended until March 2022. Beyond that it is subject to the government's budget review in the autumn. The ongoing lack of clarity about what will happen when the Adoption Support Fund ends is a cause for concern. Expectations have been created amongst adoptive families about being able to access therapeutic services for children and families via this route. If the fund were to end this would present difficulties, particularly while meeting the threshold for CAMHS services remains difficult. The future is unclear for both adoption agencies and families in this respect. The support provided by therapists funded by the ASF is often outside the skillset of staff employed in the adoption support team and CAMHS do not have the capacity.

6.3 As reported last year, we have become more robust as a service in reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of support provided via the ASF. The Fund is now asking agencies to be much more accountable about how funding is used. Covid presented difficulties to therapists in delivering support remotely and in several cases the therapy had to stop for a while. We did ask adopters for feedback on how providers had helped them during lockdown, but we had a very low response rate. We know that adoptive families already receiving high levels of support struggled during this period, particularly as young people were not in school and support services were not as available. There were more child protection referrals. Unfortunately, we did have a small number of adopted teenagers (6 young people including a sibling group of twins), admitted to care and covid 10 was certainly a factor in this. Those young people have multiple and complex needs, highlighting the need for a multi-agency approach to adoption support.

6.4. During lockdown the government provided grants via the adoption support fund to help families cope with the additional demands of Covid. In Sheffield this amounted to £49542. The criteria for this funding were slightly different to the normal ASF criteria. We used it to provide training to adopters on non-violent resistance; expanded Adoption UK membership to more adopters (they offered a range of workshops, advice and consultations); paid to increase the hours of the independent advice line and recruited a temporary part time worker to help us carry out new assessments of adoption support needs.

6.5 Many of the key challenges facing adoptive families relate to education or health. This led the service, at the end of 2019 to developing a multi-agency group, to look at how we respond to some of the issues raised by adoptive families. Unfortunately, this work was delayed due



to the impact of Covid 19 and then the decision to transfer adoption support to the Regional Adoption Agency. However, the Head of Service for OASY is planning to develop a strategic multi agency adoption support plan with relevant services across the RAA. This will involve engaging relevant agencies across the RAA region and achieving consistency/consensus with partners in education, CAMHS, health and SEND. Adopters in Sheffield have requested that the Head of Service understands the work started in Sheffield around this and a meeting is planned to look at this at the start of October. Alongside this, work is being done create consistency of our own core-offer to adopters so that whichever local authority area adopters live in, they get the same.

6.6 The data below provides information about adoption support referrals during 2020/21-20 compared to the two previous years.

- **New requests for assessments for post adoption support** made to the adoption support team during the year 2020/21: 72 requests for adoption support were received and 54 resulted in the provision of support. This compares to 77 in 2019/20 when 56 resulted in the provision of support. During 2018/19: 88 assessments were requested and 73 resulted in the provision of support. Surprisingly, given the impact of Covid 19 on families, this shows a drop in referrals. However, the adoption support team have had a very busy year with families who were already known to us as being in need of support, experiencing greater difficulties. As mentioned previously there have been a number of family breakdowns with young adopted teenagers entering care. Once in care, these young people have tended to need high levels of multi-agency provision, reflecting their complex needs.
- **Adult adoptee support:** there were 15 adopted adults in receipt of support, not one-off advice, compared to 31 **adults** during the year 2019-20. This compares to 40 during 2018-19.
- **Letterboxes contacts:** 489
- **Adoption allowances:** 255
- **Applications to the Adoption Support Fund:** There have been 87 approved applications to the ASF during 2020/21, compared to 119 in 2019/20; these include new referrals, current open cases, and further requests for ongoing therapy. Again, given the pressures of the pandemic on families, this is an unexpected fall. It may be linked to therapists not being able to deliver direct services during this time.

6.7 The most common requests for support relate to adopters asking for help in managing their child's behaviours and we provide support and advice on how to respond or request therapeutic parenting from appropriately trained therapists, funded via the ASF. Other frequent requests relate to identity and contact. Theraplay and life story work with children is provided. As discussed above, a significant number of families we work with have children on My Plans or EHCPs; or health issues which warrant us working closely with colleagues in MAST, CAMHS, health and education. Like many families, adoptive families are often frustrated by delays and resource issues.

Where families are in crisis, we work together with other elements of Children's Services such as Aspire, Early Help and fieldwork colleagues.

6.8 In normal times there are several support groups and activities in place to assist children of every age range (including teenagers), as well as their parents. Unfortunately, during 20/21 these have all been impacted upon by covid and it has not been possible to hold groups in person. We have had to rely on virtual or remote means. We have held virtual 'bake offs' for young people and a zoom coffee morning for new adopters. Newsletters have been provided on a quarterly basis to adoptive families, to inform them of events and give useful information about how the service is working during covid. We sent our last Sheffield newsletter in January

2021, and they are now OASY newsletters which provide updates about the developing RAA, useful resources, events etc. It is intended to develop a portal for adopters to access information on the OASY agency consistently throughout the year. In addition to the above, there are a range of adopter led groups with an active WhatsApp group. Adopters also use the Adoption UK Adopter Voice Facebook page to share ideas and opportunities. We are also members of New Family Social which provides support and advice to LGBT adopters. All LGBT+ adopters have membership of this organisation and the range of services it offers.

6.9 We have team members trained in different levels of theraplay, which is a therapy aimed at building attachments within adoptive families. They do group and individual work as well as training for adopters. One is a fully certified theraplay practitioner and member of the practicum. She does direct work with families but also through our Stars group, where she teaches theraplay techniques to adopters with young children. This group receives excellent feedback from those who attend. It has been run virtually during lockdown which raised some issues but was still well received.

6.10 We continue to benefit from the jointly commissioned (along with other Yorkshire and Humberside local authorities), adoption support service from PAC UK/ Family Action/ Adoption UK. This includes the following support services for adoptive families, adult adoptees, and birth families:

- An advice line for those affected by adoption: birth families; adopted adults; adopters provided 5 days a week for 3 hours a day with two early evening sessions up to 7pm. As stated earlier the ASF covid grant was used to extend the hours of this service during lockdown.
- 'ADOPTTEENS' - Support for adopted teenagers and including a website, online chat forum where support can be provided, a Youth Council across Yorkshire and Humber and social events. The Youth Council has the aim of using teenagers' views and experiences to help improve and develop policy and practice. Take up is not as high as we would like, and consideration is to be given as to how to improve take up within South Yorkshire and offer more local events.
- Improving the participation of adopters and their views (adopter voice) in service development and delivery of services across the region. South Yorkshire have a local coordinator who works hard to bring adopters perspective to the service. He also sits on the RAA board.
- Improving the participation of birth parents in service development across the region.
- Support and counselling for adopted adults wishing to access their records and intermediary services for those wishing to meet their birth families.
- Pro- active independent birth parent support and counselling; and
- Independent support for adoptive parents.

6.11 The Peer Mentoring Scheme went live in March 2020. Volunteers had been recruited and trained from October 2019 in preparation of the launch. There was a good response from Sheffield adopters. The aim is for volunteer adopters to support other adopters a bit like a buddying scheme. The service operates across South Yorkshire, with separate schemes in West and North. It is commissioned from Adoption UK who recruit and train the mentors and allocate to mentees. We now have 15 trained peer mentors in the region. 8 of these are from Sheffield and 6 from the other 3 areas (2 per agency). There have been 44 mentees: Barnsley

1x referral; Doncaster 5x referrals; Rotherham 11x referrals; Sheffield 24x referrals. Due to their being some spare capacity mentors have also supported 1 mentee in West Yorkshire and 1 in North Yorkshire. Adoption UK collate feedback from mentees regarding the impact of the service but report a very low response rate. The feedback they do receive comments positively on the opportunity to speak to someone who has been through a similar experience.

6.12 We offer an all-day duty service to members of the public regarding any adoption related matter.

## 7 Adoption Panel Business.

### 7.1 Business and Meetings.

- During 2020-21 Sheffield City Council has continued to operate a single adoption panel which met every two weeks. Since the creation of OASY Regional Adoption Agency we have introduced a shared Panel with Barnsley. However, this came into force outside the timeframe of this report.
- Credit must be given to the Panel to adapting to Covid so rapidly. A Panel meeting was planned the day England went into lockdown and this went ahead virtually at a time when everyone was still adapting to zoom meetings and how to manage them for complex meetings. There have been no delays related to Panel functioning and both they and the business support service should be acknowledged for achieving this. However, the Independent Chair does have reservations about delivering Panels remotely in the longer term and it is likely we will move towards a hybrid model going forward.
- In the period from 01/04/20 to 31/03/21 there have been 24 panels meetings. One panel was canceled due to insufficient business.
- The panel has recommended **24** approvals of adopters,
- There have been **36** matches considered by the panel.
- There has been **1** relinquished child presented to panel for consideration as to whether they should be placed for adoption. This was recommended by Panel and subsequently agreed by the Agency Decision Maker.
- Panel activity has been broadly in line with the previous year with just a slight increase in the number of matches considered. There were adequate Panel meetings to meet need. Only one additional panel was required at the end of March.
- The Panel deferred one match and one approval for further information. There were no non approvals.

**7.2 Agency Decision Maker:** we have 2 agency decision makers (ADM's) in Sheffield. Both are senior managers in Children's Services. One of them was appointed in January 2021, following the departure of one of our previous ADMs to work for Ofsted. The newly appointed ADM has attended CoramBaaf training on the role of ADM and has already demonstrated a robustness of decision making. The ADM is not a panel member but makes a considered decision based on the recommendation of the Panel. They also make decisions during care

proceedings about whether a child should have a plan of adoption. Since the RAA came into force the two Sheffield ADMs make decisions about children's care plans and matches but the Head of Service for OASY makes decisions about adopter approvals.

### 7.3 Panel Membership

- The panel has an experienced independent Chair who previously worked for the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). The medical advisers to the panel are very committed and knowledgeable in the field of adoption. They provide comprehensive and clear advice to the agency and to Panel- as well as adopters. Legal advice is readily available as required. Both the Chair and Agency Adviser have good relationships with these advisers.
- The central list of panel members is sufficient to meet need. It is in line with regulatory requirements. There are long standing, committed members who are very knowledgeable, and they have a range of skills and experience. Over the last few years, it has been recognised by the Panel that further diversity of panel membership would be welcomed and recruitment to the Panel central list bears this in mind. Additional social work members are always welcome. An adopted adult has been identified to join the list, which is welcome but there continues to be a need for greater diversity.
- The Agency Adviser retired at the end of March 2021. She had a long history in children's services and the field of adoption. She had good knowledge of the regulations and legal context of adoption. She has provided panel members with regular updates on cases as well as informing them of relevant case law and research. She has organised training for Panel members and provided regular information on relevant case law or research. She has ensured appraisals and DBS checks are all up to date.
- The Agency Adviser role is currently vacant, and the role is covered by a temporary agency worker.

### 7.4 Quality Assurance

- Panel provides feedback to workers and the agency on the quality of reports presented and the worker's presentation. Since October 2018 this has included a grading of the quality of reports in line with OFSTED guidelines. This is collated to give an overview of the quality of reports over time so that workers and their managers can be given a clear indication of Panel's view of the standard of reports.
- While there are many reports presented that are of high quality, this is not yet consistent enough. Team managers are key people in driving up standards so mandatory training has been provided to them on their role in effective quality assurance of adoption reports. However, this is an ever-changing group of staff so the training needs regular refreshing and repeating. Areas identified for improvement are the social workers written analysis of the child's identity and the sufficiency of the report as a document for adopters and adopted children to use as an accurate source of information in the long term.

- The Agency Adviser provides robust and thorough written and verbal feedback on reports which come through for both Panel and ‘Should be Placed for Adoption’ decisions made by the Agency Decisions Maker.
- It is an expectation of the service that no Panel recommendations or agency decisions are made on inadequate reports until the quality has been sufficiently improved.
- The Agency Decision Maker provides feedback to Service Managers if she has concerns about the quality of reports at both the care planning and Panel stages.
- Consultant social workers work across the service and support newly qualified staff as well as more experienced ones with adoption matters. Family finders from the adoption service also support children’s social workers with placement and support plans as well as advising on the preparation and transition of children from foster care to adoption. Panel report that where the family finders are involved, this often impacts positively on the quality of reports and support plans.
- Recently a strategic decision has been made for children on placement orders to transfer to the Children Looked After Service. These staff will have less experience in adoption work. The adoption team are providing advice and support to these workers to try to maintain good practice and establish expectations around the standard of reports presented to the Panel and ADM.
- Performance clinics chaired by the Director of Children and Families Services take place every month when there is challenge and oversight of all aspects of the service, including the panel gradings of reports.

## **8. Regional Adoption Agency Update**

8.1 One Adoption South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency went live on 01.01.21 so has only been in operation for the final quarter of the year that this report covers. It comprises of Sheffield, Barnsley, Rotherham, and Doncaster Adoption Services.

8.2 Doncaster is the host agency, and they employ certain key posts- primarily the Head of Service, a performance analyst and a business support officer. All other staff have remained employed by their existing local authority. Regional Adoption Agencies nationally vary in the way they are structured and led.

8.3 The aim of the agency is to improve practice and processes and outcomes for children, from more efficient recruitment of adopters, faster matches and improved adoption support. It is very early days and the evidence base around impact nationally is still developing- given that many projects like ours have only just gone live and it takes time to become established. As with any partnership arrangement there will be opportunities and challenges. It will be important to capture the learning coming out of the arrangements and to use this to inform practice going forward. It is very early days, but the aim is to benefit from shared expertise, resources and processes.

8.4 The RAA is governed by the RAA Governance Board. The Board is chaired by the Director of Children’s Services from Doncaster Children’s Services Trust and is made up of Directors or Assistant Directors from the four South Yorkshire local authorities, a Director of a local voluntary adoption agency, a Virtual School Head from Doncaster Children’s Services Trust, and an adopter who is employed by Adoption UK, a national charity promoting the voice of

adopters. The Head of Service reports to the monthly Governance Board meetings. She has written a six-month report on the progress of the OASY Regional Adoption Agency so far. Monthly performance data is now being submitted in relation to adopter recruitment and children, but we are not yet able to include adoption support data, partly due to differences in how the services operate within the region. This is being addressed.

8.5 There is a big agenda of work to put in place within the RAA, to develop consistency of practice and achieve the aims of recruiting more adopters to meet the needs of children waiting so they can be placed with their permanent families more quickly. Also, in order to establish a consistent offer of support. This is being actively worked on through a range of workstreams and with the voice of adopters included. The Head of Service meets regularly with other RAA leads and this also informs development.

**9. Other Developments in the Year:** Covid has impacted upon developments during the year and obviously the main focus has been establishing and becoming part of the new Regional Adoption Agency. The work we had planned to work on a multi-agency adoption support strategy could not proceed as intended since services had to deal with the demands and adjustments of Covid. However, this is not forgotten and will form part of the OASY longer term strategy.

**9.1 Fostering for Adoption:** we have acted upon feedback from Fostering for Adoption carers to revamp our training in this area. We focus more on the potential risks and specific duties relating to managing contact with birth families and other 'fostering' elements.

**9.2 Adopter voice engagement.** This has continued as more and more adopters join the Adoption UK facebook page and make use of the independent adopter coordinator (who is an adopter himself), to raise issues and feed into developments. This is becoming more embedded as the pathway by which adopters can feed into service development and raise issues that they are facing is understood by adopters. The Head of Service has met with adopters from across the region to introduce herself and outline the vision for the RAA. This will continue.

**9.3 The growth of the Peer Mentoring Scheme for adopters.** This went live in March 2020, when it began to accept referrals for mentors who had been recruited and trained the previous winter. It is facilitated on behalf of Yorkshire and Humberside by Adoption UK. We have a local coordinator who recruits and trains the volunteers on an ongoing basis as well as dealing with referrals to the scheme. He provides regular updates to the service leads in South Yorkshire on the take up and growth of the scheme. Adopters have long requested such a scheme as an opportunity to speak to other adopters at various stages of their journey to get advice and low-level support. Like many other services it has had to be delivered remotely due to Covid 19. The scheme is being commissioned for a further two years and Adoption UK will continue to provide this service on our behalf.

## **10. Priority Actions for 2022/23**

**10.1 Continue to Develop and Embed the OASY Regional Adoption Agency:** the way in which the RAA was set up in South Yorkshire has meant that it went live on the same day that the Head of Service took up post on 01.01.21. Much has been done to bring the 4 member agencies together but there is much more to be done with a strategic plan covering the short, medium and longer term.

**10.2 Recruiting a More Diverse Range of Adopters.** A key measure of the success of the RAA will be to continue to work on the sufficiency of adopters. The key challenge as seen above in the section relating to timeliness is to recruit a more diverse range of adopters, particularly those willing to take sibling groups. We shall be targeting our recruitment and marketing activity to address this as well as offering a comprehensive and competitive support package.

**10.3 Adoption support: Core Offer:** Work is currently being done to agree a core offer of support for all adopters across the region and this will help level out disparities across the region. Adoption support in general is a key concern of many adopters and is a growing area of need.

**10.4 Multi – agency adoption support:** this is a much more difficult and complex agenda which will take longer to establish than the core offer (which is in the control of the RAA), as it depends upon cooperation and collaboration with colleagues in health, education, CAMHS and SEND. Having consulted with our adopters, we know that they need and want a more joined up multi-agency support service. Additionally, Adoption UK complete a survey of their members annually, known as the Adoption Barometer. 2452 adopters responded and 159 adopted young people or adults. This also highlights the need for effective multi-disciplinary support nationally, with better understanding of the needs of adoptive families across all services. Consideration is being given to repeating this survey regionally, to see how we compare to the national picture.

**10.5 Create OASY Adoption Panels:** work is underway to increase panel capacity available to workers by sharing panels across the region. The Chairs will be employed by the RAA and there will be a pane meeting operating nearly every week in some part of the region. This will help improve timeliness for families and children. Panels, like other areas of the service will adapt to a new hybrid way of working.

**10.6 Increase the number of children we place for adoption regionally:** this will follow improved recruitment. We are already placing across the RAA but this will need to grow. It is beneficial for children as it improves support. We will be able to use Link Maker more effectively over the year to identify available adopters and children. It offers a shared data base, and it will also provide reliable data about children and adopters in the RAA. This does not mean inter agency placements will not be quickly agreed where there is no in-RAA match, but it is a measure of the success of the RAA to be able to recruit the right adopters for the children waiting.

**10.7 Performance Indicators and management information:** a RAA performance analyst is due to take up post in August. The RAA is already collating and sharing information provided each month by performance teams in each agency regarding adopter recruitment and placements of children, but this does not include adoption support. A key action is to identify performance indicators in relation to adoption support and start to collate this data.

## **12. Summary**

**12.1** The last twelve months have been like no other, with rapid changes needing to be made to the way services are developed and delivered. On top of this we have regionalised the adoption service. Despite this, performance in many areas has been maintained or improved. Children continued to move to adoptive families and a much higher number of these than last year were placed with our own adopters. There has been a continuation of good performance in relation to timeliness from when children enter care to being placed for adoption (A1). We are meeting the national target. When adjustments are made to allow for adoption by foster

carers (A10), we are doing even better. Timeliness from securing a Placement Order to a decision on a match (A2) has improved significantly. For the second year running the number of special guardianship orders has overtaken the number of adoption orders but the combination of these permanence outcomes means many children are leaving care to join permanent families.

12.2 The number of adopters approved this year has fallen, which is outside the national trend. We aim to improve that this year, back at least to the 2019/20 number of 31 approvals in our part of the RAA region. However, in contrast, more of our available, waiting adoptive families have been matched with children, than in previous years. They have primarily provided families for Sheffield children: of the 30 children placed with our adopters, 23 were from Sheffield and 7 from other agencies. This is a significant improvement in performance. Now we are part of the RAA it is anticipated that adopters will take even more children from the four member agencies.

12.3 The number of adoption plans for children has increased compared to last year, which might be linked to the increase in numbers of children coming into care.

12.4 Fostering for Adoption: numbers have increased this year, following the work done in 2019-20 around improving practice in this area. However, we need to ensure that Fostering for Adoption is being used as effectively and regularly as it can be. There are plans to repeat the training for fieldworkers and managers in the Autumn.

12.5 It has been a tough year for some of our adoptive families with a few who were experiencing problems pre-covid finding they could no longer manage. Remote working impacted upon how well we could support families. Many of our usual support groups were unable to function during covid. We replaced these by online groups where possible although adopters often reported that home schooling etc meant they struggled to accommodate these. Additional support services were provided by an ASF grant and this did help some families. Referrals to the ASF continued (slightly down on last year), but there were struggles with actually delivering the therapy

12.6 The long-requested Peer Mentoring scheme is now live. Regionally Sheffield has a good number of mentors, and the scheme is being utilised by adopters at different stages of their journey.

12.8 The Adoption Panel has completed slightly lower levels of activity to the previous year. They continue to take a robust quality assurance role. The quality of reports remains inconsistent, and Panel have particularly highlighted those issues relating to identity are a particular area for improvement. We are considering future training for staff with this in mind. At the start of the year the Panels had to change and operate virtually, due to Covid 19 and while this throws up challenges it is working well overall.

12.9 Regionalisation of the adoption services in South Yorkshire has taken place and the development of this service has been a big theme in the last quarter of the year. The Head of Service for OASY has provided a six-month report and statement of purpose which will compliment this annual report on the Sheffield Adoption Service.

**Vicky Brooke**  
**Service Manager, Adoption**



# One Adoption South Yorkshire



**One**  
Adoption  
Agency  
SOUTH YORKSHIRE

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SIX MONTH REPORT  
Jan 2021 - June 2021



# FOREWORD

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This is the first Formal Report from One Adoption South Yorkshire. We are very proud to share with you what we have achieved in our first six months in operation.

We came into being in very inauspicious circumstances. Having worked together for some time developing a Regional Adoption Agency structure which would work for South Yorkshire everything was finally agreed for a 'go-live' date of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021.

As Head of Service I arrived for my first day in Doncaster and had just enough time to pick up a laptop and a mobile phone before we went into the most serious lockdown of the Covid-crisis at the end of that very same day.

The RAA teams across South Yorkshire have been fantastic in coming together and creating new structures and new ways of working from their bedrooms and attics.

We also would like to thank all our partners, adopters, locality teams, virtual school head teachers, medical advisers, panel chairs, finance and commissioning teams for supporting us and bearing with us as we created a brand new agency with microphones on mute and IT equipment and Wi-Fi signals crashing all around us.

Well done to everyone involved. Things will only get better from now on.

Stephanie Evans  
Head of One Adoption South Yorkshire



# Who Are One Adoption South Yorkshire?

LOCALITY	SM	TM	AP	PANEL-ADVISE R	RECRUITMENT	FAMILY-FINDING	POST ADOPTION SUPPORT	TOTAL NUMBER OF SW STAFF (NOT FTE)
BARNSELEY	0.2	1	1	0	6.5 FTE SW between recruitment and family finding <b>4.5</b>	6.5 FTE SW between recruitment and family finding <b>2</b>	<b>1 SW FTE</b> 0.8 Dev Worker – letter-box	14
DONCASTER	0.8	0.2	1.8	<b>0.6</b>	<b>3.45 FTE</b> 0.5 SCA	<b>1.65 FTE</b>	3.2 FTE 2.5 SCA (incl letter-box)  New shared post 0.5 with SGO – Educ Supp	16
ROTHERHAM	0.2	2	0	0	<b>5.8 FTE</b> 1 Support Worker	<b>2.6 FTE</b> 1 Co-ordinator	<b>1.5 FTE</b> 1FSW 1 contact co-ordinator	18
SHEFFIELD	1	2.5 FTE	0	<b>0.6</b>	<b>6 FTE</b> 1 Interviewing officer	<b>4</b> 1 SCA	<b>3.8 FTE</b> 1.5 SCA 0.6 Letter-box co-ordinator	25

Service Manager – Barnsley – Sharon Wood  
 Service Manager – Doncaster – Claire Holmes  
 Service Manager – Rotherham – Lindsey Knight  
 Service Manager – Sheffield – Vicky Brooke

Team Manager – Barnsley – Michael Richardson  
 Team Manager/Advanced Practitioner – Doncaster – Mel Johnson  
 Team Managers – Rotherham – Helen Mangham and Jill Stanley  
 Team Managers – Sheffield – Liz Rowe, Jane Sandland and Laura Williams

Agency Adviser – Doncaster – Sue Carroll  
 Agency Adviser – Sheffield – Gary Wilson

Advanced Practitioner – Barnsley – Jayne Haywood  
 Advanced Practitioners Doncaster – Mel Johnson and Sam Parkey

## RAA Governance Board – meets monthly

Riana Nelson, Director of Learning Opportunity, Skills and Culture, DMBC – Chair  
 Director of Children’s Services – RMBC  
 Assistant Director Children in Care, Sheffield City Council  
 Director of Children’s Services, Barnsley  
 Director of Children’s Social Care, Doncaster Children’s ServicesTrust  
 Adoption-UK – Adopter Voice  
 Virtual Head, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Yorkshire Adoption Agency – Voluntary Adoption Agency Representative



# How Does One Adoption South

## Yorkshire Work?

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One Adoption South Yorkshire is a 'partnership' model, Regional Adoption Agency. There are now 31 Regional Adoption Agencies in England rather than the 180 original adoption agencies and only 5 or 6 local authorities remain unaligned and all of them have plans to join a RAA in the not too distant future. The partnership model is used by many of the more recently created RAAs.

As a partnership model all the teams remain employed by their previous employing authority and for the moment they all remain in their original sites. Obviously since the beginning of the RAA everyone has been working from home and the different authorities currently have very different approaches to staff returning to offices but most staff are very keen to get back to 'actual' working as soon as it is safe to do so.

Doncaster Children's Services Trust is the host agency. There is a very small 'Hub' team comprising the Head of Service, a full-time Business Support Officer and a planned, but not yet available, half-time Data and Performance Analyst. The Business Support post has just been appointed to and the Performance Analyst post is expected to be filled by August. As host agency DCST is responsible for employing the Hub staff and supporting the management of those aspects of the budget which are held centrally.

Practitioners and Business Support staff remain locally based as do the Panel Advisers and the Panel Administrators. The Adoption Panels were re-configured in May 2021 into East and West panels. The East panel covers Rotherham and Doncaster and the West panel covers Barnsley and Sheffield. There are a minimum of two panels per month in each area and each Panel has a Chair and two Vice-chairs to ensure there is sufficient capacity to cover all the expected approvals and matches each year. The intention is to engage both Chairs centrally through DCST and have a 'central list' of panel members comprising all RAA panel members but the Panels will continue to meet at least once per month in each of the 4 localities.

Each local authority has also made a 'contribution in kind' for support services such as Human Resources, Finance, Communications, Business Intelligence and Commissioning.

At National level the Regional Adoption Agencies are well supported with regular leadership meetings and developmental opportunities for practitioners and adopters.





# Performance

Performance data is collected both for the individual authorities and for the RAA as a whole and is split between the adopter data and the children's data. At the present time we are able to produce reliable data based on the requirements of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board but there are some areas of data collection, particularly around post adoption support and the stability of adoptive families that we will need to develop further in the future.

## Adopter Data

National Adoption Regulations have specific expectations regarding the length of each element of the journey to approval for adopters.

Stage 1 – Should be completed within 2 months

Stage 2 – Should be completed within 4 months

### No. at Stage 1

	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
Barnsley	5	8	7
Doncaster	8	7	9
Rotherham	5	4	7
Sheffield	11	9	6
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>

### No. at Stage 2

	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
Barnsley	11	14	10
Doncaster	4	5	4
Rotherham	9	5	9
Sheffield	7	9	13
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>36</b>

### Ave days between Application (Stage 1 Start)/(Stage 2 Start) and Approval

	Qtr 1 20_21	Qtr 2 20_21	Qtr 3 20_21	Qtr 4 20_21	Full Year
Barnsley	170.9	207.0	212.6	260.3	209.3
Doncaster	230.9	194.8	198.0	238.3	214.9
Rotherham	227.4	226.8	241.3	143.9	207.0
Sheffield	244.3	197.4	253.3	338.3	239.1
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>212.4</b>	<b>205.2</b>	<b>228.5</b>	<b>226.3</b>	<b>217.5</b>

The annual average across the RAA is longer than the expected target of 186 days from Registration of Interest to Approval and the table shows that, in some months, specific adopters in specific teams have taken longer than the average. This kind of individual variation is very hard to avoid due to the specific circumstances of individual adopters but the table shows an acceptable level of performance across all teams, although there remains scope for improvement.

### No. of Adopters Approved

	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Total
Barnsley	4	1	3	3	3	1	2	0	3	3	1	2	26
Doncaster	3	0	4	0	2	2	2	1	3	0	1	2	20
Rotherham	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	3	0	4	3	24
Sheffield	0	2	2	4	5	1	3	4	0	1	0	2	24
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>94</b>

As you can see the four offices have been very similar in performance over the last year. This has been consistent with their performance as individual agencies in previous years. The business case for the RAA indicated that there would need to be 92 adopter approvals per year to meet the needs of the children needing families across South Yorkshire. Last year's performance would therefore indicate a positive performance against this target.



However there are early indications that one of the challenges for OASY, as for many RAAs, is to recruit adopters who will be a good match for the children needing families.

A very basic illustration of this is if we compare this table of the ethnic characteristics of adopters within the RAA with the ethnic characteristics of children needing families.

### Ethnicity of adopters

	ABAN	AIND	AOTH	BAFR	CHNE	MOTH	MWAS	NOBT	WBRI	WIRI	WOTH	Total
Barnsley	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	89	1	1	92
Doncaster	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	68	0	2	70
Rotherham	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	76	0	3	82
Sheffield	3	2	0	2	1	1	0	3	112	0	2	126
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>370</b>
% Barnsley	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	97%	1%	1%	
%Doncaster	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	97%	0%	3%	
%Rotherham	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	93%	0%	4%	
%Sheffield	2%	2%	0%	2%	1%	1%	0%	2%	89%	0%	2%	
<b>% One Adoption SY</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>2%</b>	

### Ethnicity of Children

	ABAN	AIND	AOTH	BAFR	BOTH	CHNE	MOTH	MWAS	MWBA	MWBC	NOBT	WBRI	WIRI	WIRT	WOTH	WROM	Total
Barnsley	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	40	0	0	0	0	44
Doncaster	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	25
Rotherham	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	6	0	1	0	46	0	0	0	7	62
Sheffield	0	0	7	0	4	0	1	0	4	3	0	43	0	2	4	5	73
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>204</b>
% Barnsley	0%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	91%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
%Doncaster	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
%Rotherham	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%	0%	2%	0%	74%	0%	0%	0%	11%	
%Sheffield	0%	0%	10%	0%	5%	0%	1%	0%	5%	4%	0%	59%	0%	3%	5%	7%	
<b>% One Adoption SY</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>6%</b>	

At the outset of the RAA in January 2021 we had 20 more adopters available than we had children to place. Early analysis would suggest that this was partly due to adopters having different characteristics and different expectations about the children they felt able to care than the children needing to be placed. But this was also possibly due to the impact of covid on both the courts and social work practice meaning that care proceedings were taking longer and fewer children were available for adoption. In the early months of the RAA many of these adopters were matched with children from within the RAA and in some cases externally so the current position is much improved.

### Children Placed for Adoption – 20-21

	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Total
Barnsley	2	3	1	1	7	3	2	3	1	3	3	3	32
Doncaster	2	0	1	3	3	5	1	2	0	0	1	1	19
Rotherham	0	3	3	2	3	3	5	4	4	0	0	3	30
Sheffield	5	0	4	4	1	5	2	2	1	6	1	4	35
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>116</b>

The RAA Business Case expected that across South Yorkshire 154 children would be placed for adoption each year. So these figures would indicate that the figure last year was lower than expected. Again as you can see the four areas are very similar in the number of children placed. The Doncaster figure is slightly lower than in previous years and this is something the RAA will be working on with colleagues in Doncaster as there could be several reasons for why this would be the case.



## Children Placed within the RAA

	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Total
Barnsley	2	1	1	1	6	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	15
Doncaster	1	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	9
Rotherham	0	1	3	1	2	3	1	0	4	0	0	2	17
Sheffield	2	0	4	1	0	3	0	1	1	4	1	2	19
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>60</b>
% Barnsley	100%	33%	100%	100%	86%	0%	50%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	47%
%Doncaster	50%	-	100%	0%	33%	40%	100%	50%	-	-	100%	100%	47%
%Rotherham	-	33%	100%	50%	67%	100%	20%	0%	100%	-	-	67%	57%
%Sheffield	40%	-	100%	25%	0%	60%	0%	50%	100%	67%	100%	50%	54%
<b>% One Adoption SY</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>52%</b>

This is obviously a key area of interest for the new RAA. The aim would be to place as many children as possible with our own adopters. There is a financial element to this as every external placement incurs a cost. The local authorities have maintained the cost of an adoption placement at the same level for several years but the Voluntary Adoption Agencies have been increasing their charges in recent years. However the aim to place as many children with in-house adopters is not just about costs. We know our own adopters much better than those from other agencies so we can more confidently match them with our children. We are in a much better position to support adoptive families when they are within our own area rather than hundreds of miles away and a key aim of the SYRAA is to create a local adoption community where we can support our adoptive families, our adopters can support each other and we have good relationships with partners in education, health and community services which can offer additional support where needed.

In order to support good matching within the RAA one of the very first actions back in January was to set up a monthly matching panel where any child needing more careful consideration for matching or where we may have to search externally for a family could be considered. At the same time we began negotiations with Link-maker, the national matching agency to re-configure the four agencies into one on their system. As everyone is on different recording systems and different communication systems the single area on Link-maker has been the key to successful matching. Across the RAA everyone can see all the adopters' profiles and all the children's profiles at any time. Even at this early stage practitioners have made real efforts to move away from familiar ways of working such as looking first at what adopters are available within their own locality and are now looking much more broadly across all four teams from the earliest opportunity. The South Yorkshire RAA is a good size, with a total population of 1.4 million to give sufficient choice and a broad enough geographical sweep for us to find the right families for our children.

It is still too early to be able to demonstrate whether we are placing more children within the RAA as the available data still relates mostly to placements planned before the RAA began. The next report for the end of the year 21/22 will show the full impact of the changes made. For the moment there is anecdotal evidence of more placements planned within the RAA and fewer external placements being explored.

## Timeliness

### Average time from Placement Order to Matching (A2 Indicator) (for those children adopted)

	Qtr 1 20 21	Qtr 2 20 21	Qtr 3 20 21	Qtr 4 20 21	Full Year
Barnsley	154.5	192.9	89.0	92.4	130.4
Doncaster	54.5	215.7	247.5	197.4	193.2
Rotherham	-	158.2	220.1	292.4	217.0
Sheffield	133.5	191.3	94.4	136.3	151.4
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>114.2</b>	<b>186.2</b>	<b>164.7</b>	<b>178.3</b>	<b>173.9</b>

The national target for the A2 indicator is 121 days. As is evident from the table above there have been periods where this target has been achieved by most of the partner agencies and there has been one quarter where the RAA average was below the national target. This is because there are relatively small numbers of children involved and for most very young children this target can be achieved by most agencies. So the months where an agency has only placed babies will be the ones under target. The months where an agency has placed older children they are likely to exceed the target. The aim is always to reduce the waiting times for all children and the RAA will continue to do work on the timeliness of placements.

### Average time between entering care and being placed with adoptive family

	Qtr 1 20 21	Qtr 2 20 21	Qtr 3 20 21	Qtr 4 20 21	Full Year
Barnsley	262.7	404.6	301.0	350.7	347.4
Doncaster	241.3	442.9	384.0	520.0	437.9
Rotherham	180.0	404.5	515.0	525.0	471.7
Sheffield	451.5	437.3	399.9	402.3	421.6
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>288.3</b>	<b>423.8</b>	<b>437.3</b>	<b>447.9</b>	<b>423.3</b>

The national target for this measure is 426 days and as this table demonstrates the full-year average for the RAA is under this target and there are some quarters where many of the individual teams are well under it. As above this depends on the ages and characteristics of the children whether they are very young or not, whether they are part of a sibling group or not, whether they have complex needs or not. However as with the A2 measure improvements can always be made and this particular target is a measure of how well the RAA is working with the local authorities as they are the ones responsible for initiating care proceedings and making the decisions in respect of the children.

This table shows all the children where an adoption order has been made in the last year but does not show the improved timeliness figure for those children adopted by foster carers. Where this happens the time period is reduced to the date the child was first placed with the foster carers which obviously results in much shorter period between entering care and being placed with a permanent family.





# POST ADOPTION SUPPORT

Ultimately the key to any Regional Adoption Agency's success will be the quality of its post adoption support. The aim of any RAA is to provide permanent loving and supportive homes for children and supporting families into the future will be necessary to ensure their success. Potential adopters will choose the agency they wish to go with according to what they have heard about the quality of the assessment, the success in placing children but also according to what they have heard about the support for families after the adoption order has been made.

The OneAdoptionSouthYorkshire vision is to contribute towards making South Yorkshire a great place to raise children in general but in particular to create a supportive community for adopters and adopted children. For this vision to become a reality requires commitment from all partners as well as the ongoing efforts of RAA practitioners.

Many of the teams are already providing excellent post adoption services with activity groups for children and support groups for parents readily available but as can be seen in the early staffing table capacity is uneven across the teams and this is an area where we need to develop more consistency as we start to work together as a single service.

The RAA needs to work closely with the four virtual heads and local schools to ensure that children's needs are recognized in schools, staff are well prepared to respond to individual need and the pupil premium is well spent. We need to work closely with colleagues in children and young people's mental health services right across the spectrum, public, private, school-based, community based, supported by the Adoption Support Fund, provided by voluntary agencies or free from the NHS. We need to work closely with adopters and adopted children so we know what works and what they think would best meet their needs. We need to get involved with our local communities so that adopted children are involved in universal activities such as local sporting and cultural activities. We need to work with colleagues in Children's Social Care and local Youth Services to ensure that where these specialist services are needed adopted children get the support they need.

The RAA has existing commissioned services which support the Post-Adoption offer and in the first year we will be reviewing these and considering whether they meet the needs in their current form or whether we might want to think about using these services differently.

In the early stages of the RAA we intend to focus Post Adoption Support development on two key areas:-

- The initial post placement offer to new adopters – at the moment this is very different in each of the 4 areas. In the coming months we will be consulting with practitioners, with adopters, with partners and with colleagues in Finance to develop an appropriate and consistent offer.
- The longer-term multi-disciplinary offer which could, if required, support a family and a child into early adulthood.

We intend to put together both offers using a combination of in-house RAA resources, commissioned services, support from local authority colleagues and support from partner agencies.



# Finance

One Adoption South Yorkshire was created by bringing together the Adoption budgets from the four partner agencies.

These budgets have now been configured into 3 sections:-

**The Staffing budgets** – all staff continue to be employed by their previous employing authority. There have been no secondment arrangements or TUPE arrangements. The staffing complement remains exactly as it was and the budgets remain with the local authorities with recruitment and other employment activities managed through the respective Human Resources teams. The staffing budgets are managed locally and no overspends are possible. However any underspends can be re-cycled into the RAA staffing arrangements with the agreement of the employing Local Authority.

**The Locality Budgets** – each of the four localities has retained an element of their original adoption budget which covers staff mileage, local Adoption Panel expenses, support funds for adopters and adopter expenses.

**The Central Budget** – included within the central budget are the employment costs of the very small group of hub staff, the Head of Service, a full-time business support officer and a part-time data and performance analyst. There is no additional funding for these posts, the cost has to be found through underspends on the existing budget. The Central budget includes the inter-agency budgets for all 4 areas, the budget which covered the commissioned services for all 4 areas and a small central marketing budget for local events and activities.

The main marketing and communication strategy is managed through a commissioned service from Leeds City Council which covers the management of the OneAdoption web-site on behalf of all 3 of the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Adoption Agencies.

## The Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund was transferred from the 4 local agencies to the Central RAA portal on 1.4.21. This has been a substantial piece of work involving setting up new contracting and payment processes and could only have been achieved with the exceptional support of the agency business support officer assisted by the Finance Officers and social workers from all the teams.

The Adoption Support Fund is a substantial funding commitment by central government to adoptive families and the management of this fund is a substantial undertaking. In 20/21 the area now covered by OneAdoptionSouthYorkshire claimed around £1.5 million for therapy for individual families.

Currently the funding is agreed from year to year which makes forward planning extremely difficult but there are already clear opportunities arising from bringing the arrangements together under the RAA as it is much easier to oversee the kinds of therapies being sought and the range of providers and in the future it should be much better planned and better coordinated enabling us to make the best use of the funds available.



# Future Development

There are so many opportunities for future development that it is a challenge to know where to start.

The basis of the South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency was to set up with everything as it was, with minimal disruption to staff, to agencies, to adopters and most importantly to children. There were clear benefits to working together but these had not been translated into practice at the point of implementation.

Now that matching is well-established across the RAA and everyone is using Link-maker to identify suitable matches across the sub-region rather than just within their own team children are being placed more quickly and the reduction in waiting times for adopters is beginning to be evident. The central web-site and the electronic expression of interest has seen a significant increase in the number of adopters coming forward. Training has been offered centrally for some time and now the service is now offering joint marketing and joint introduction meetings. With the basic service functioning well we can now move on to consider those areas where we need to improve:-

- Recruiting a more diverse range of adopters to meet the specific needs of many of the children we are family-finding for. There are multi-ethnic and multi-cultural communities in South Yorkshire and as a RAA we need to be promoting ourselves, making ourselves more approachable if that is the issue and finding the right families for children
- Post Adoption Support – the quality of our post adoption support is key to adopters having confidence to adopt with us in the first place and key to keeping families together as the vicissitudes of life take their course. At the moment each area team has its own approach to settling in grants, allowances, training and initial support – we need to come together with a consistent offer right across the RAA.
- Support for birth parents and more direct approaches to post adoption contact. At the moment most arrangements for post adoption contact is via the letter-box scheme but with the advent of social networking and the increased use of Early Permanence Placements where adopters have more contact with birth parents we need to be considering and refining our approach.

Over the rest of this year we need to continue to review our performance, review the budgets, receive feedback from adopters and consider what changes we can and should be making to produce the outstanding service we envisage.



OASY plan 21 -  
24.pdf

If you are able to open this link this is the One Adoption Three  
Year Development Plan







## Report to Children, Young People & Family Support Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021

**Report of:** Carly Speechley, Director, Children and Families

**Subject:** Annual Fostering Service Report

**Author of Report:** Anne-Marie Banks, Fostering Service Manager  
anne-marie.banks@sheffield.gov.uk

This is the annual report of Sheffield City Council's Fostering Service. It reports on activity and performance in the Service during 2020/21, and details developments that have taken place during the reporting year, and developments planned for the service moving through 2021/22.

The report details that between the end of March 2020 and the end of March 2021 Sheffield's looked after children population increased from 628 children to 674. The extra demand placed increased pressure on the Fostering Service while the Covid pandemic was restricting the number of care placements that some foster carers could offer, for example if they had Covid, or were clinically vulnerable. Despite this the number of children placed with in-house foster carers increased from 319 to 336, largely because of an increase in connected persons foster carer placements (children placed with relatives of friends). Including those placed with independent fostering agencies, the total number of children placed in foster placements at the end of March 2021 was 469, 70% of the looked after children population.

The service recruited 37 new mainstream foster carers in 2020/21, an increase from 32 the previous year. A key development in the Service during the year was that of the Mockingbird Family Model of Fostering

**Type of item:** The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Performance / budget monitoring report	<b>x</b>
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Other	

**The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:**

- Note the activity and the performance of Sheffield City Council's Fostering Service in 2020/21

**Background Papers:** None

**Category of Report:** OPEN

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## **SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL**

People Services

Children & Families

Fostering Service

Annual Report 2020/21

**Sheffield Fostering Service**

**Floor 7**

**East Wing**

**Moorfoot Building**

**Sheffield**

**S1 4PL**

**Tel: 0114 2734601**

## 1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report is an annual report on the business and activity within Sheffield City Council's Fostering Service in 2020/21.
- 1.2 The report provides performance and activity data on the service, reports on the activity and functioning of the Fostering Panel, and details service developments that have occurred in 2020/21 and those planned for 2021/22.

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 Sheffield City Council Fostering Service operates within the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (the "2011 Regulations"), and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, which form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of fostering services.
- 2.2 It is a legislative requirement that the Fostering Service reports on its activity and performance to Elected Members.
- 2.3 Sheffield City Council Fostering Service's remit is to provide family-based placements for Sheffield's children in care. The Service recruits and approves prospective foster carers, matches and places children with approved foster carers, and provides support and supervision to approved foster carers.
- 2.4 At the end of reporting year Sheffield City Councils' Fostering Service comprised of:
  - three fostering social work teams who support and supervise our foster carers
  - a recruitment team which focuses on the recruitment and assessment of prospective foster carers,
  - a placement team whose role is to accept and quality assure referrals for children requiring placement provision, and
  - a dedicated connected carers team. The connected carers team undertake Regulation 24, (temporary approval of a foster carer) assessments through to full Connected Persons Foster Carer approval. Childcare legislation requires



that these connected carers, who are most often grandparents to the child, be assessed and approved, where suitable, as local authority foster carers. Many of these connected carers go on to provide permanence for these children outside of care by becoming Special Guardians and the team maintain responsibility for providing this ongoing support where it is required. This team also undertakes Private Fostering assessment and support.

- 2.6 Our foster carers do a remarkable job for Sheffield's children in care and in transforming the lives of so many of children.

### 3 Our Vision and Aims

- 3.1 Our City's 'Big Ambition' is that every child, young person and family achieves their full potential. We are determined to ensure our children and young people in care, adopted children and care leavers succeed. Our vision is that 'children and young people are safe and supported to achieve their full potential'. We set out four elements to how we will work to achieve this, as follows:

- Children are at the centre of our practice
- We intervene at the earliest opportunity
- Our workforce is skilled and supported to do the work that they need to
- Children and families benefit from high performing and high-quality services

- 3.3 The Fostering Service supports the department's policy to enable children and young people to stay with their birth families wherever this is safe and possible and where they cannot, to place them without delay with alternative carers.

- 3.4 The aim of Sheffield's Fostering Service is to provide high quality foster care as part of a full range of accommodation provision for children in children and provide the best possible standards of care, safety and protection for children who cannot live with their own families. In doing so the service strives to:
- Provide a service that is local, accessible, and inclusive
  - Provide a choice of high-quality foster placements to meet the individual needs of children and young people

- Ensure foster carers provide a high quality parenting to all children in foster care and assist children and young people to engage in their care and placement planning
- Work together with partner agencies to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people, to enhance and develop health, education & well-being
- Work with foster carers to support 'staying put' placements for children remaining in the family home post 18
- Provide support and assessments for family and friends of foster carers

## 4 Looked After Children and Foster Placement Data

4.1 At the beginning of this reporting year the UK was in lockdown as a response to the Covid19 pandemic. Like other areas of the Council and Country in general, this has not gone without significant disruption within the fostering community. The impact of Covid meant that our available foster carers and foster placements reduced both in-house and within the independent sector throughout the course of the year. At the beginning of the year, 66 of our fostering beds were blocked due to the age and/or health of carers which made them clinically vulnerable. Many of these blocked beds related to potential second or third placements in the fostering household or to support care placements as carers generally maintained the placements of children already in their care at the time the pandemic began and locked down together. This demonstrated the remarkable commitment of our foster carers towards our children in care. With the ease of lockdown and the vaccination roll out, carers have gradually again started to take new placements during this reporting year.

4.1 At the same time as placement availability reducing, the numbers of children entering care began to increase. By the end of this reporting year, Sheffield City Council cared for a population of 674 children in care: an increase from 628 in the previous year. 70% (469) of these children benefitted from family based foster care provision, however this is a drop of 2% from the previous year, which relates to the demands in placements.

- 4.2 Of the 469 children in foster care, 72% were placed within Sheffield City Council fostering provision and 28% within Independent Fostering Arrangements, (IFA). Sheffield has seen a slight decrease in the % and numbers of children placed in IFAs over this year. Within Sheffield City Council fostering provision, whilst the overall % has reduced the actual number of children placed with them has increased from 319 children to 336 children in this reporting year. The Service has seen a slight drop in the placements of children in Sheffield City Council mainstream provision from 254 children in placements to 247 in this year; (7 placements), which is related to the numbers of carers who were isolating during this reporting year. In contrast, the use of connected person's foster care continues to increase; a trend noted in the last three years. At the end of this reporting year, there were 89 children placed within connected person's foster placements compared with 65 in the previous year.
- 4.3 It is worthy of note that there has been a significant rise in the use of connected person's placements that isn't fully reflected in the end of year data. This is because many of these carers go on to secure other arrangements outside of care, such as Child Arrangement Orders or Special Guardianship Orders. During the previous reporting year, 110 children were placed with connected persons foster carers through the year, this figure grew to 151 in this reporting year. The outcome for these children is that they remain with extended families or friends maintaining their sense of identity with the people they know well and outside of care. In 2020/21 44 children left care as a result of Special Guardianship Orders being granted, with another 41 children also ceasing to be looked after as a result of Child Arrangement Orders being granted, equating to 31% of the population of children who ceased to be looked after in the reporting year. Of these 81 children, 53 lived with connected persons foster carers.
- 4.4 From the age of eighteen young people are no longer legally 'in care' or 'looked after' and therefore fostering arrangements and legislation relating to children placed with foster carers no longer applies. However, it is also recognised that young people of 18 years are still vulnerable and for these young people it is important that wherever possible, they can continue to live with their foster

family where it is right to do so. These arrangements are called “Staying Put” arrangements. In 2020/21 there were 44 children in Staying Put arrangements with local authority foster carers compared with 33 arrangements in the previous year. For these young people, this is the right outcome for them and also demonstrates the variety of provision provided by the Fostering Service outside of the care provision.

- 4.4 In addition to provision for children in care, the Fostering Service also provide short break care for disabled children and support care intervention for families on the edge of care including adoptive families and special guardians. Support care is also utilised to support other foster carers where placements are complex or fragile. During the year 2020/21 The Service provided support care to 35 fostering families, including 2 IFA placements, 10 adopted families, 5 kinship carers and 9 short breaks for disabled children. During 2020/21, there were occasions where support carer was reduced or ceased due to the pandemic, however, where this intervention reduced stress for families, we maintained this in the best interest of the child. The service recognises the benefits of providing family-based support for these children and are keen to develop this service further in 2021/22.

## 5 Placement Stability

- 5.1 Despite the challenging year we encountered in 2020/21, we have managed to improve the performance in both the short term and long-term stability for our children in care. In 2020/21, 11.6% of children in care had 3 placements moves in a year, down from 13% in 2019/20 and closer to the national and statistical neighbour average of 11% in 2019/20. In relation to long term stability, 73.5% of children who had been in care at least 2.5 years had been in their current placement for at least 2 years. This was an improvement on our performance of 71% in 2019/20 and stronger than the latest national average of 68% and statistical neighbour average of 67%.

### **Mockingbird Family Based Model of Foster Care**

- 6.1 The Mockingbird Family Model, supported by The Fostering Network, brings 'satellite' fostering families together in groups, known as 'constellations' with a 'hub' home at its centre. The hub foster carer is a suitably experienced foster carer who lives in close proximity to the other fostering families and acts as coordinator for constellation activity, and support and mentor to the other fostering households. Based on the premise that 'it takes a village to raise a child' the family-based model gives foster carers a support network to turn to during difficult times, thereby promoting placement stability and carer retention.
- 6.2 In 2019 the Department for Education, (Dfe) announced further innovation funding to expand the Mockingbird approach across the UK and Sheffield along with 9 other areas made successful bids and we successfully secured £300K innovation funding to establish Mockingbird in Sheffield.
- 6.3 In November 2019, we began to work collaboratively with Fostering Network in developing and implementing this model of fostering in Sheffield City Council in consultation with the fostering community. Communication work began across the wider workforce in early 2020, and by the beginning of the reporting year we were in a position to launch our first constellation, when progress was disrupted due to Covid19 and lockdown. The advice from the Dfe was to suspend innovation work, and this was echoed in advice from Fostering Network. The Service challenged this, given that the model was aimed at supporting foster cares through crisis, and taking into consideration that this pandemic was a significant crisis. Dfe and Fostering Network later agreed for us to resume work and in May we therefore were able to launch our first constellation in that month. Mockingbird 1 has one hub home foster carer, supporting a constellation comprising of 8 fostering families and 13 children in care, between the ages of 1 year – 18, 3 sons and daughters of foster carers, 1 adopted child and 1 staying put child. Each constellation is supported by a liaison worker, and in Sheffield City Council the liaison worker is also the supervising social worker for the constellation. Sheffield was the first Local

Authority to launch in lock down and because of this success other Local Authorities followed our practice.

- 6.4 With the support from the liaison worker, the hub home foster carer was flexible in communication with the satellite but responsive to the various guidance at the different stages through the pandemic. Initially, much of the activity was undertaken remotely, support groups and activities with the adults were held online on a weekly rather than monthly basis, and as restrictions reduced the hub carer made doorstep visits to the carers to introduce herself with gifts of baked goods, followed by face-to-face events. The hub carer held 'bubble activities' for satellite carers, inviting one or two carers and their children into her garden for mockingbird gatherings. This was to allow the children to meet each other in person in a secure but as low risk way as possible. One such meeting allowed for the children who are currently in a permanent placement to spend some time with their previous carers who are part of the constellation thereby maintaining links and bonds. As restrictions eased, outings and picnics have taken place, and more recently 'stay overs' for children in the constellation have taken place at the hub home in line with the model.
- 6.5 The feedback from foster carers is that they feel really supported and benefit from the swift, carer led response to issues. One example of family support within the model was where the satellite swung into action when one of their carers tested positive for Covid, shopping, cooking and baking for the family and hosting daily support calls. Another example was a carer who was able to coach and mentor another satellite carer nervous to facilitate a transition plan to adoption in order that this plan could be achieved during lockdown.
- 6.4 Whilst outside of this reporting year, the Service launched the second constellation in June 2021 and aim to launch its third by December 2021 and fourth by end of March 2022.

### **Aspire Project**

- 6.5 The overall vision of Project Aspire is that for children and young people in care, residential provision should only be a temporary measure with permanence for children being secured in a family. It challenges the notion that for some young

people, fostering isn't right but rather we haven't found the right placement 'yet'. Sheffield City Council has two Aspire hub homes, who have a dedicated team of support which includes a life coach who is a clinical psychologist, a speech therapist and outreach workers. The model recruits foster carers who then go on to be employed as residential workers, and in this environment more natural relationships evolve leading to links and matches being made for children outside of residential provision into family-based care.

- 6.5 In 2020/21 the Fostering Service assessed and approved one Aspire foster carer, who was also later recruited as an Aspire residential worker. Whilst outside of this reporting year, the carer has since been matched and linked with a young person and plans are in place for this young person to step down from residential provision into family-based. The Aspire support will remain in place to ensure continuity and support for this young person with the foster carer.

## 7 Recruitment and Retention Activity and Outcomes in 20/21

- 7.1 Recruitment and retention of foster carers is probably the most important factor for any fostering organisation in delivering an effective fostering service for children in care. In achieving this, Sheffield City Council has invested in the fostering service 'offer' which includes attractive financial incentives and wrap around support to carers with an ambition to recruit and retain Sheffield City Council foster carers looking after Sheffield's children.
- 7.2 The target set for the service in 2020/2021 was to approve 40 new mainstream foster carers. The Service fell short of this target with 37 foster carers were approved. This is an increase from the previous year's performance of 32 foster carer approvals. Given the pandemic and the impact that this had globally, the service feels that this was a success. Of the 37 fostering households approved:
- 18 were approved to offer task placements
  - 15 were approved to offer holiday and support care placements
  - 2 were approved to offer permanence placements
  - 1 was approved to offered Aspire care

- 1 was approved for UASC

7.3 Whilst it is clearly important that we maintain a focus on our recruitment activity, it is equally important that we consider the retention of our Sheffield City mainstream fostering population. In 20/21, 27 of these fostering households were 'lost' to the Service through resignation, deregistration, or retirement. A net gain of 10 fostering households.

7.4 It is important to note that all fostering services lose carers during any one-year. Carers may decide fostering is no longer for them, or that their family circumstances have changed, so there is a need to continually recruit significantly just to maintain capacity. In this particular year, the impact of Covid19 would have invariably led foster carers to question their ongoing commitment to the Service and leave sooner than they would have otherwise intended. In this reporting year, 5 foster carers decided to retire from fostering as a result of age and health. Together those foster carers had provided over 100 years of fostering for our children. 4 foster carers left as a result of practice standards being explored with them. In addition, 8 foster carers left as a result of securing permanence orders for children in their care; one child remained under staying put arrangements and 7 other children's' permanency was secured via either SGO or adoption. A great outcome for those children despite this being a loss to the Service. Other carers personal circumstances changed meaning they were no longer available to foster for Sheffield, including relocating, returning to employment, or separating from partners.

<b>Number</b>	<b>Reason for leaving</b>
4	Allegations/practice concerns
7	SGO / adoption
1	Child remained under staying put arrangements
10	Change in personal circumstances
5	Retired due to age and health



## 8 Recruitment Plans for 2020/21

- 8.1 A full and detailed Recruitment and Retention Strategy for 2020/21 has been produced based upon the channels and target audiences agreed with the Councils' Communications and Marketing Team. Recruitment events have been affected by the current Covid-19 lockdown restrictions and recruitment event focus has been channelled solely on social media during this time. This has meant a significant saving on the agreed budget for advertising and marketing.
- 8.2 The service continued to have high visibility on Facebook/Twitter updating posts 2-3 times per week and throughout this pandemic fostering enquires remained consistent with previous years with 519 enquires in 2019/20 compared with 429 in this reporting year.
- 8.3 The Service adapted Information evenings to enable them to be delivered virtually via zoom, these were increased to monthly events as opposed to 6 weekly and these proved successful. These events continue to be hosted this way to date. The team adapted preparation training to be hosted online to avoid delay in assessment and approval, ensuring this training was interactive, utilising video clips, discussion break out rooms, and case studies. This remote training continues to date.
- 8.4 At the beginning of the year fostering assessment sessions were undertaken remotely on teams. skype or zoom with the agreement that at least one assessment session would be completed face to face subject to Covid risk assessment prior to presentation to Foster Panel. As restrictions eased a hybrid model was introduced combining a mixture of remote and home based assessment.

## 9 Support and supervision for carers:

- 9.1 All carers are allocated a fostering social worker who undertakes their assessment; where possible for consistency they will maintain some

involvement until the point of first placement being made. A supervising social worker will be identified pre approval and allocated post approval, who will continue to support and supervise the foster carer in their journey as foster carers.

- 9.2 Our policy states that carers are visited a minimum of every 6 weeks and 12 weeks if providing support care. At the beginning of April, we ceased all face-to-face supervisory visits were restricted to zoom, skype and telephone support. The level of this support was increased in recognition of the difficult times the carers were facing. As restrictions eased home supervisory visits were reintroduced. Throughout lock down, in emergency situations, home visits were undertaken for example to aid transition to adoptive and other permanence placements, or where placements were in crisis.
- 9.3 Throughout the year, the Service has maintained a limited 'in-office' presence to a maximum of 12 workers/managers. This was to be enable a swift response to any needs that might arise and to maintain a close and responsive link with foster carers. We wanted our carers to know that whilst we had gone into lock down, we were still there. We opened a 'closed' Sheffield City Foster Care Facebook site and monitored this to communicate with our carers, and this has proved invaluable in terms of communicating with foster carers in a flexible and responsive way. The closed Facebook page continues to be a very interactive and well used resource to the extent that we aim to maintain this through this calendar year.
- 9.4 During office hours we have a duty service available to carers and outside working hours we have a foster carer's telephone helpline. This was maintained throughout the pandemic.
- 9.5 Sheffield City Council has invested in a Clinical Psychologist within the Fostering Service. This enables a better understanding for foster carers on the impact of trauma and abuse on children and the significance of building healthy attachment relationships. During this year, there has been a more intensive focus on remote consultation for foster carers in addition to providing team

around the placement meetings to give a therapeutic perspective of the needs of children and carers, and how best to support everyone.

- 9.6 There has been additional investment in training and development and the Fostering Service recruited a second part-time training and development officer in 2019. This worker who is a qualified psychologist and has been a real asset to the Service during the Covid19 pandemic. Together, the Clinical Psychologist and training development officer have worked closely together and under the supervision of our clinical lead, have provided on-line consultations to fostering families in crisis during this period in order to promote placement stability across the service during this difficult time.
- 9.7 At the beginning of the year, the Service cancelled all formal 'face to face' training but increased on-line training activity to account for this. During this period of time there has been a high take up of these opportunities as foster carers have found the online access easier to attend without the added complications of juggling childcare needs with attending training. By the end of the year, of our core training, 94% safeguarding training, 90% therapeutic parenting, 85% GDPR and 75% education training has been completed in timescale. There was a delay in commissioning on line First Aid training but towards the end of the year, this was sourced and currently 69% of our foster carers are up to date with the requirement. As we ease out of the restrictions, our carers tell us that they would hope that we maintain a hybrid model of training, which combines online and face to face training events.
- 9.8 The service also recruited a part time speech and language therapist who started in post in September 2020. The speech and language lead provides training to carers and workers, consultation to carers, intervention with families and has hosted a series of 'sing and sign' events for carers and children during this year which has proved successful.
- 9.9 As with training, at the beginning of the year, our 7 support groups hosted across the Council were cancelled, but by May, the Service reintroduced the same range of support groups previously held across the borough albeit

remotely and found these to be well attended and well received. The Service worked closely with our Foster Care Associate; 'Voices' who have met with senior managers on a fortnightly basis, and who in turn held drop-in workshops for carers on a weekly basis. Foster carer forums were hosted on zoom and were well attended where contentious and thorny issues such as the reintroduction of family time and the vaccination programme could be discussed with the carers, so they felt part of the plan.

- 9.10 All engagement activities planned for the year were cancelled, including our children's achievement event; 'Star Awards', Easter celebration, and Christmas parties. The Service adapted to new technology and in October we hosted our virtual 'Star Awards' entitled 'The Big Night In!'. the event took a lot of coordination but feedback on the evening was that this was a great success. The Service also hosted on zoom a children's Christmas party to bring a little magic to our children and again this was well attended and well received. Care packages were distributed to all our fostering families along with Easter eggs, Eid gifts and Christmas sweet packs. One carer told us that opening the care package she had received, for her and the children she was caring for was like opening Christmas presents on Christmas day and that everyone in the family were all as equally excited about what was in their gift box.

## 10 Fostering Panel:

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### 10.1 Panel Functions

- 10.1.1 Regulation 23(1) of the 2011 Regulations states that "*the fostering service must maintain a list of persons who are considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering Panel ("the central list"), including one or more social workers who have at least three years' relevant post qualifying experience.*"

- 10.1.2 Regulation 23(4) states that "*...the fostering service must constitute one or more fostering Panels, as necessary, to perform the functions of a fostering Panel under these Regulations, and must appoint Panel members including:*

- (i) *A person to chair the Panel who, in the case of any appointment made after 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011, must be independent of the fostering service provider, and;*

- (ii) *One or two persons who may act as chair if the person appointed to chair the Panel is absent or that office is vacant (“the vice chairs”) from the persons on the central list.*

10.1.3 Sheffield City Foster Panel has the following primary functions (under Regulation 25(1) of the Fostering Regulations 2011:

- To consider each application for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster parent (including “connected persons” under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010).
- Where it recommends approval of an application, to recommend any terms on which the approval is to be given.
- It is to recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster carer, and whether or not the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate - (i) on the first review and (ii) on the occasion of any other review, if requested to do so by the fostering service (e.g. following allegations or complaints against foster carers).

## **10.2 Sheffield Panel Business 2020/21**

10.2.1 in 2020/1 the Service increased the number of panels to three each with different membership. Each Panel has an independent chair with significant knowledge and experience of fostering issues and all panel meetings have been quorate which reflects the excellent commitment of the panel members. During 2020/21 Panel meeting were held on a weekly basis to reflect the number of Reg 24/ Connected Carer assessments, approvals, reviews and changes of approvals presented to Panel. Each Panel was supported by a Panel Chair and Panel Advisor. Despite some relaxing of regulations in terms of quoracy as a result of Covid, Sheffield City Council have maintained original quoracy numbers of five sitting panel members for each meeting.

10.2.2 Panel members were all subject to annual appraisals in the year, and the Panel Chairs presented a Panel Report to the ADM in February 2021.

10.2.3 The Service recruited 4 new panel members in the year all of whom had an induction to panel comprising a welcome pack, the opportunity to observe panel and a mentor who is an experienced panel member.

### 10.3. Panel business 20/21

<b>Total (20/21)</b>	<b>Approval</b>	<b>Reg 24</b>	<b>Review</b>	<b>Allegation</b>	<b>Resignation/ deregistration's (mainstream)</b>	<b>Permanence</b>
April 2020	1	6			1	
May 2020	3	1	2			
June 2020	1	1	2			
July 2020	3	3	2	1		
August 2020	4	2	3			
September 2020	1	3				
October 2020	4	4			1	
November 2020	3	3	1	1		
December 2020	4	3	2	1		
January 2021	2	3	8	1		1
February 2021	6	6	5	1		
March 2021	8	6	7	1		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

10.3.1 40 fostering assessments were presented to panel, this included 37 foster carer approvals, partner assessments and brief reports.

10.3.2 It is a requirement that a foster carer first review must take place not more than one year after approval and thereafter whenever the fostering service feels it is necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. In 2019/20, the Service introduced face to face Reviews of foster carers in the fostering home. This proved very successful. However, in 2020/21 the Service revised this as a response to the Pandemic, and Reviews took place remotely. In 2019, there were 32 foster carers approved, and in 2020/21 32 first reviews were taken to Panel in the year.

10.3.3 Due to the demand of Panel, it was agreed that resignations would not be formally presented to Panel as there is no legal requirement to do so and no decision to be made. There was also agreement that permanence matching would be formalised outside of panel in the reporting year, this accounts for the low numbers of permanence and resignations presented to Panel in the year.

## **11 Developments in 2020/21**

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### **11.1 As previously stated we have:**

- Recruited 37 mainstream foster carers, giving a net gain of 10
- Worked flexibly and creatively as we worked through the Covid19 pandemic and the Government guidance and restrictions
- Maintained a small skeleton in-office presence to maintain a focus on supporting and maintaining placements for children
- Develop new ways of communicating and engaging with foster carers during lock down and restrictions.
- Revised our Communications and recruitment plan to enable us to:
  - Host remote information events, skills to foster training and the assessment of foster carers
  - Maintain a functioning and complaint Fostering Panel
  - Increased recruitment of new mainstream foster
  - Recruited 1 Aspire Carer
- Developed Mockingbird Model of Fostering
- Embed the new fostering review and audit process and improve quality in addition to timeliness of reviews in general, but specifically, first reviews being presented to panel

## **12 Developments and Improvement for 2021/22**

- Continue to be flexible and creative as we work through the Covid19 pandemic and the Government guidance and restrictions
- Recruit 40 foster carers, with a focus on carers for sibling groups and older children, Aspire Carers, short break carers for disabled children and edge of care support carers
- Undertake a 'stock take' of blocked carers to maximise placement sufficiency in service
- Recruit an additional manager to develop the short break and support service, with a specific emphasis in increasing provision for short break care for disabled children and edge of care intervention
- Review and expand the Connected Carers Team given the growth in workload in this team
- Launch 3 x Mockingbird Constellations
- Utilise findings from the recent 'Bright Spots' Survey to inform the Fostering Development and Action plan.
- Develop a foster carers satisfaction survey and use the findings to inform our fostering development and action plan.

**Approved and signed off by the Senior Leadership Team: (Date)**

**(signature)**

**Paul Dempsey**

**Assistant Director, Provider Services**

**Children and Families**

**Sheffield City Council**





## Report to Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021

**Report of:** Policy and Improvement Officer

**Subject:** Draft Work Programme 2021/22

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This report sets out the Committee's draft work programme for consideration and discussion.

**Type of item:** The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	
Other	X

**The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:**

- Consider and comment on the work programme

**Background Papers:** [Sheffield Council Constitution](#)

**Category of Report:** OPEN

## **Draft Work Programme 2021/22: Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny Committee – Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

### **1.0 What is the role of Scrutiny?**

- 1.1 Scrutiny Committees exist to hold decision makers to account, investigate issues of local concern, and make recommendations for improvement.
- 1.2 Scrutiny Committees can operate in a number of ways – through formal meetings with several agenda items, single item ‘select committee’ style meetings, task and finish groups, and informal visits and meetings to gather evidence to inform scrutiny work. Committees can hear from Council Officers, Cabinet Members, partner organisations, expert witnesses, members of the public. This Scrutiny Committee includes parent governor representatives. Scrutiny Committees are not decision making bodies but can make recommendations to decision makers.

### **2.0 The Scrutiny Work Programme**

- 2.1 Attached is the draft work programme for the Committee’s consideration. We will take a flexible approach in planning scrutiny work, to enable us to respond appropriately as new issues emerge.
- 2.2 Members of the Committee can also raise any issues relating to the work programme via the Chair or Policy and Improvement Officer at any time.

### **3.0 Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:

- Consider and comment on the draft work programme

<b>Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny Committee 2021/22</b>			
<b>Item</b>	<b>Reason</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
Review of impact of Covid-19 pandemic on Young People in Sheffield - Update on Scrutiny Recommendations of 2020/2, and current view of young people	Continuation of established collaborative working with Youth Cabinet	Youth Cabinet Representatives	October 2021
Adoption Service - Annual Report	Holding to account – consider Annual Report	Carly Speechley, Director of Children and Families, Paul Dempsey, Assistant Director	November 2021
Fostering Service - Annual Report	Holding to account – consider Annual Report	Carly Speechley, Director of Children and Families, Paul Dempsey, Assistant Director	November 2021
SEND – Review of Sheffield Inclusion Strategy, including pandemic impact on needs or service delivery	Holding to account - progress of Sheffield Inclusion Strategy		TBC
Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report	Holding to account - consider Annual Report	David Ashcroft (Independent Chair of Sheffield Children Safeguarding Partnership); Tina Gilbert (Safeguarding Board Manager); Jayne Dunn - Co-operative Executive Member for Education Children and Families	TBC - 2022
Sheffield Sexual Exploitation Service Annual Report	Holding to account - consider Annual Report	Dan White (Head of Health and Targeted Services)	TBC – 2022
Amber Project Update	Briefing on Amber Project, contextualised safeguarding and signs of safety – follow up of committee ask 2020/21		TBC – agenda item or briefing
Review of early help services	Follow up of Committee ask 2021/21		TBC agenda item or briefing

