



CHESHIRE EAST – 12 Month Adoption Report

Performance 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

(NOTE: On Graphs FY2024 refers to 2023/2024 and FY2025 2024/2025)

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report

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

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 31 March 2025. Plans for children are dynamic and develop every day and the picture will have changed at the point that this report is read.

2. Working with Cheshire East Council

Since going live in 2017, Adoption Counts has undertaken to discharge Cheshire East’s responsibilities as an Adoption Agency. The working relationship between the local authority (LA) and the RAA (Regional Adoption Agency) has been fundamental to the success so far of the partnership working and has been embedded within established processes to maintain good working relationships and communicate as necessary.

In addition, the Director of Children's Social care and the Interim Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers sit as members of the Adoption Counts Board. The Interim Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers with a link to adoption is invited to attend the six weekly Operations Group meetings which provides an important opportunity for operational issues to be raised and shared with equivalent managers from the other partner LAs and with the senior managers in the RAA.

Adoption Counts feeds into Cheshire East’s permanence tracking of their children, from the information collated at Adoption Counts tracking meetings when requested. There is opportunity for the Cheshire East management team linked to adoption to meet with the management team from Adoption Counts as and when needed to discuss performance and any issues or themes that may be arising. There have been a number of staffing changes

during this period within Cheshire East's Children Services provision. Both Adoption Counts and Cheshire East recognise the importance of maintaining positive working relationships and working together at all levels with Adoption Counts offering advice, guidance, and support in relation to any adoption related issues.

A designated manager is invited to and has attended the monthly Adoption Counts tracking meetings, actively participating and following up cases. Cheshire East's involvement in the tracking meetings is an opportunity for scrutiny and performance management following the whole cohort of Cheshire East children where there is or may be a plan of adoption.

The tracking meetings focus upon:

- Children now adopted to ensure that life story books and later life letters are received
- Children placed for adoption but not yet adopted to track the progress of placements and the timeliness of adoption order applications
- Children where a family has been identified to ensure that there is no avoidable delay in the shortlisting and matching process and through into the planning of introductions and placement
- Children subject to a Placement Order where a family has not yet been identified. This cohort is rigorously discussed to ensure that the family finding strategy is being carried out effectively and is the forum for escalation of agreements regarding family finding within the RAA, other LAs or in the voluntary sector.
- Children in care proceedings where there may be a plan of adoption as their final care plan. These children are tracked closely both in the LA and the RAA to ensure that there is timely progression of the plan from Agency Decision that they Should Be Placed for Adoption, through profiling and the identification of a family.
- Children under the Public Law Outline where there may be a plan of adoption should care proceedings be initiated.
- Children under the Public Law Outline where there may be a plan of adoption should care proceedings be initiated.

The RAA tracking meeting enables any children of concern to be discussed with the Cheshire East managers. This can range from children adopted but with no life story work or later in life letter, to children waiting for care planning decisions to be implemented and is also used to provide updates about children for whom family finding has been problematical.

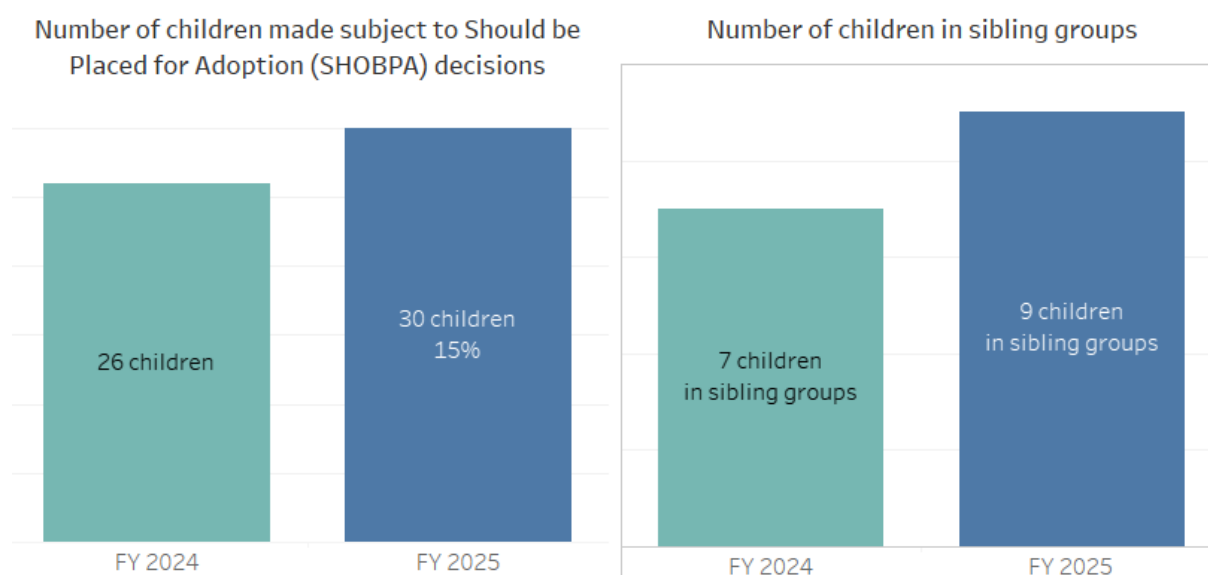
At the end of the period, we had 89 children on our tracker, during this period of time we have tracked between 81– 115 children each month. There is no doubt that the efficacy of these meetings is improved when care planning representatives from the local authority (LA) attend as this ensures a robust joint approach.

This is evidenced by the fact that at the start of this period we were tracking twenty one children where the adoption order had been granted but later in life letters and life story books were outstanding. At the end of the period we were tracking eleven children. Five of these children have now received their later in life letters and life story books.

The team manager in the RAA linked to Cheshire East attends the monthly tracking meetings and she, alongside the dedicated family finders, work in the Cheshire East office bases alongside some of the social work teams, attend legal gateway meetings and pre-filing meetings to provide advice and a view where required.

3. Adoption Performance

3.1 Children made Subject to Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions.



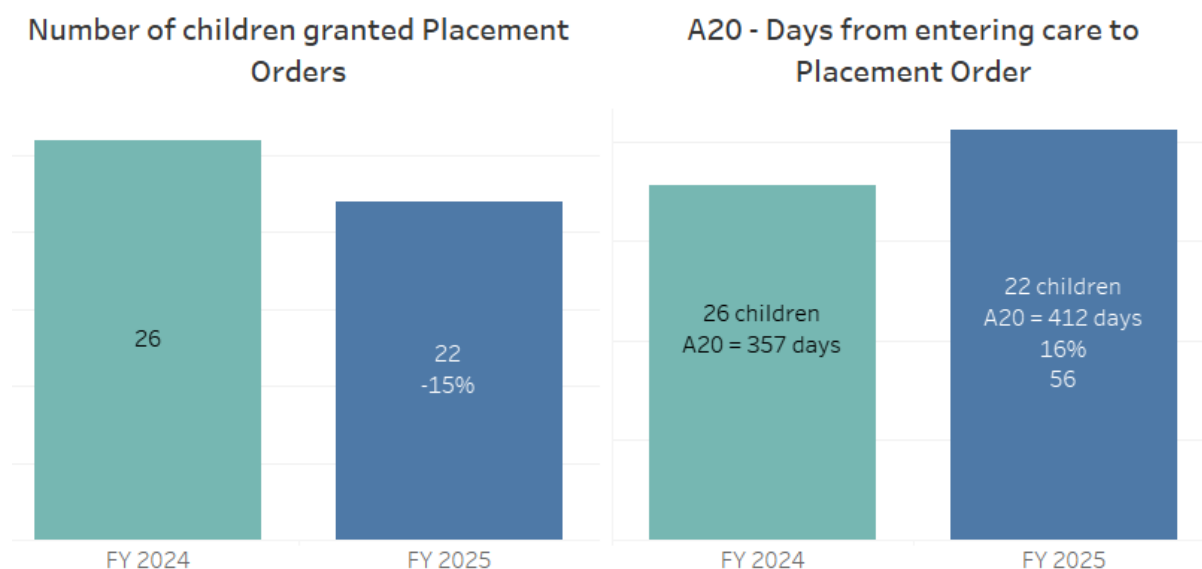
Thirty children had a care plan of adoption and SHOBPA (should be placed for adoption) was agreed by the ADM (Agency Decision Maker). The decision that adoption would be in the child's best interest was made following the Local Authority having ruled out all other permanence options for the child.

The number of SHOBPA decisions agreed in this period has increased by four (15%) compared to last year.

Nine children were part of sibling groups with a care plan to be placed together – this is an increase of two from last year. These were made up of three sibling pairs and three children to be placed with / join their older adopted siblings.

In addition to these children a sibling group of three aged 4, 5 and 6 received a SHOBPA decision, but the care plan for these children is to be placed separately in line with their assessed needs.

3.2 Children subject to Placement Orders



Cheshire East A20 Score = 412 Days
National Average A20 Score in the period = 320 days

Twenty Two Placement Orders were granted in the period, a decrease of four from the year before (-15%).

The length of time from a child entering care to receiving their placement order (A20) is now 412 days and has increased by 56 days (16%) compared to the same period last year.

There are children with higher timings that affect these figures as detailed below.

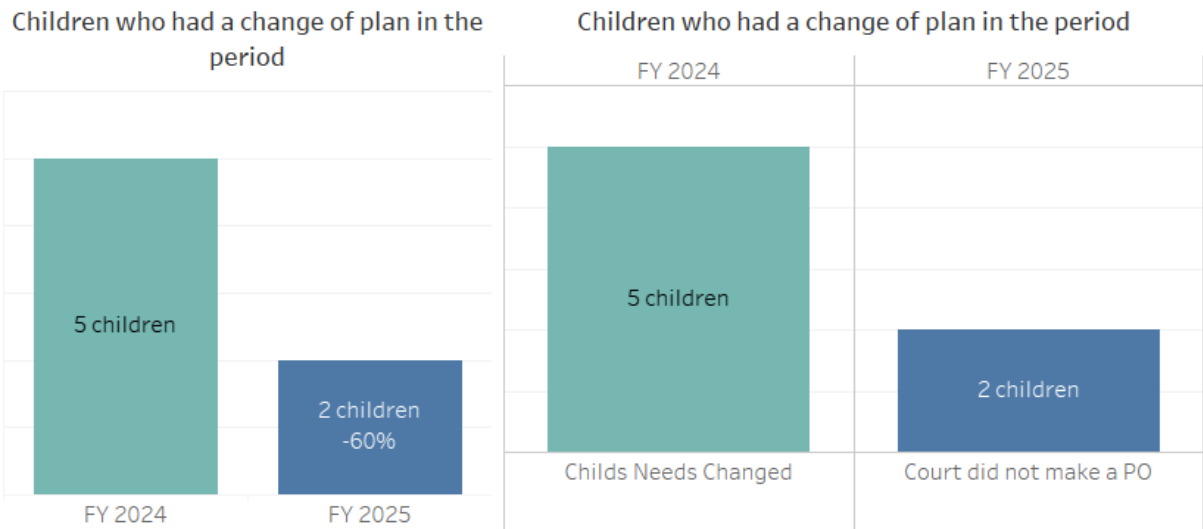
One child had an exceptionally long timing of 1323 days. This child was in a mother & baby unit, then a supported placement before this ended. Proceedings were extended whilst further assessments were completed as there were differing professional views between parties about the plan of permanence via adoption for the child. The average A20 measure without this child's timing would be 369 days.

There is one child with a timing of 600 days. The delays were due to the child's birth father residing in a different country and not participating within the care planning processes. A number of connected persons were also explored, this was a longer process than usual, due to the geographical distance.

There are also three children, a sibling group, who each had a timing of 565 days. These children are part of a wider sibling group and had experienced significant early life trauma, care planning decisions needed to reflect and address the unique needs identified for each individual child. A family member expressed interest in caring for children but later withdrew and a plan of adoption was then decided for three of the children.

One child had a timing of 573 days, there were several contested hearings and a number of connected persons assessments completed which extended the proceedings. This child was placed with early permanence carers at the age of 3 months so the overall length of the care proceedings did not impact on his permanence.

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



Two children had a change of care plan away from adoption, compared to five in the same period last year. One child was rehabilitated home to their birth family and the second child went to live with an extended family member. The SHOBPA decisions for these children were made in 2023.

3.4 The Numbers of Children who wait longer than 12 months after PO for an adoptive family.

The number of children placed in the period who have waited more than twelve months from Placement Order to be placed with their adoptive family has decreased from the same period last year. Two children have waited more than twelve months this year, compared to five last year.

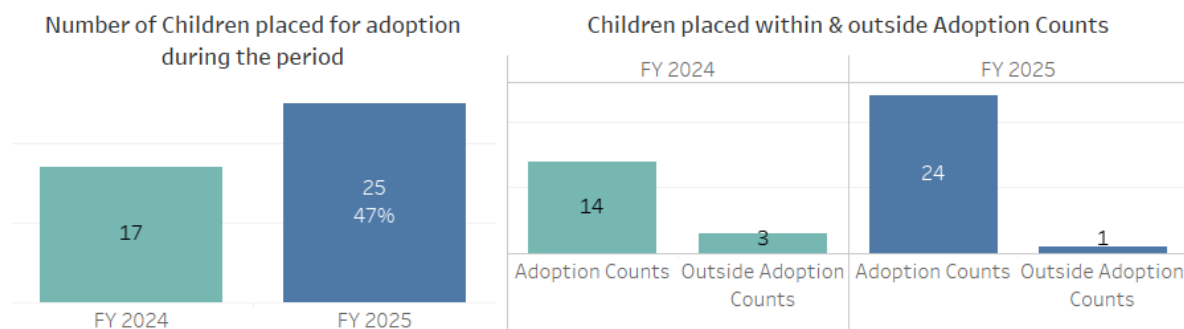
One child had experienced two previous disruptions and the other child was part of a sibling pair with the older sibling having complex care needs. It was agreed that initially family finding would be for both children together and following an agreed time period, if an adoptive family could not be identified, the children would be placed individually.

At period end, there are six children waiting to be placed who have had their placement order over 12 months. All six children are from the specific groups identified as likely to wait longer:

- Children aged five and over

- Children with additional and/or complex needs
- Siblings
- Children from a black and mixed heritage background

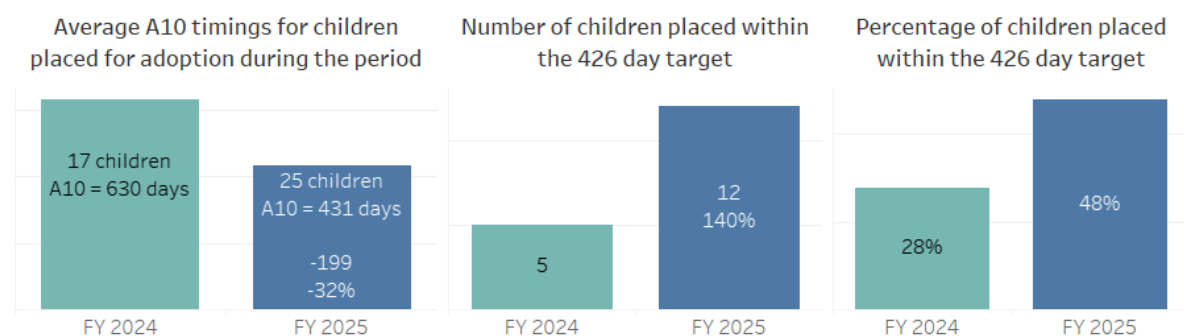
3.5 Number of Children Placed for Adoption during the period.



Twenty-Five children were placed for adoption during the period which is a 47% increase from last year.

All but one of these children were placed with adopters approved by Adoption Counts.

A10 National Indicator = 426 days
Cheshire East A10 timing = 431 days
The national average A10 timing in the period was 491 days

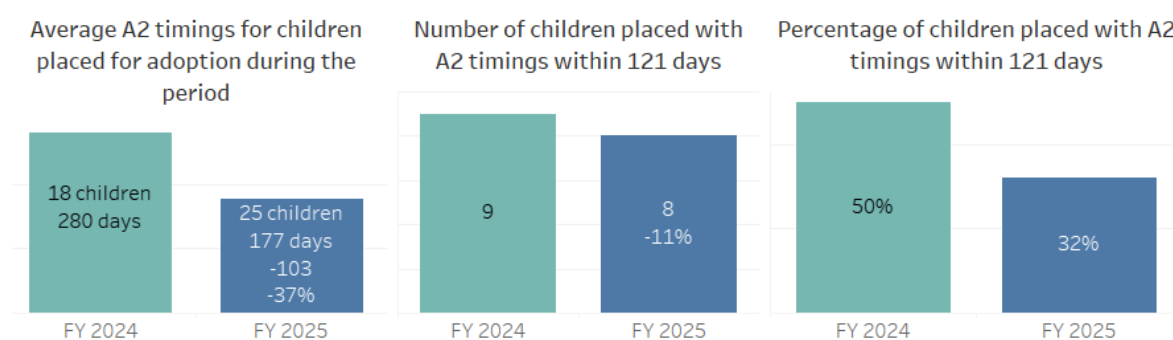


The A10 timings (days from entering care to placement – adjusted for Foster Carer adoptions) for this cohort of children have decreased by 199 days (-32%) and seven more children were placed within the target A10 measure of 426 days compared to the previous year. We are now performing just 5 days over the National Indicator and two months below the national average. The percentage of children placed within the 426 day target is now 48%.

Whilst this is already a positive outcome, one child placed in this period had an exceptionally high A10 score of 954 days after being involved in two disruptions. The average A10 measure without this child's timing would be 409 days.

It is also positive that we had three children with exceptionally low A10 measures in the period. One child was adopted by their foster carer who had cared for her from the age of 3 days old. Two other children were placed in early permanence placements, one after 24 days and the other after 86 days. As the A10 measure looks at when the child achieved permanence rather than when they were officially placed for adoption, these timings are very low.

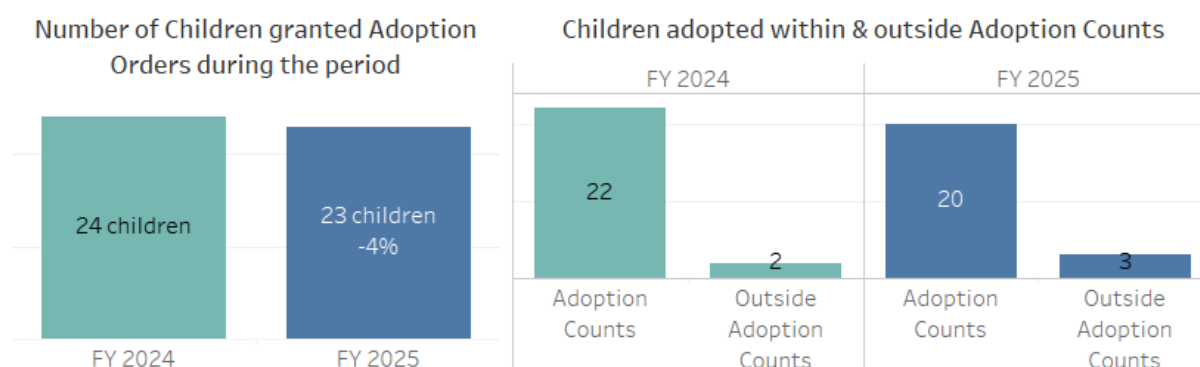
A2 National Indicator = 121 days Cheshire East A2 timing = 177 days The national average A2 score in the period was 218 days
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A2 timings (days from placement order to match) within this period have improved by 103 days (-37%) compared to the previous year. Eight children were placed within the target of 121 days (-11% compared to last year) and the percentage of total placements meeting the target has fallen to 32%.

Two children had exceptionally long A2 timings. One was the child mentioned above who experience two previous disruptions (654 days) and the other child (also mentioned within section 3.4) whose care plan changed to being placed as a single child (482 days). The average A2 measures without these children's timings would be 143 days – still below the national average for the period.

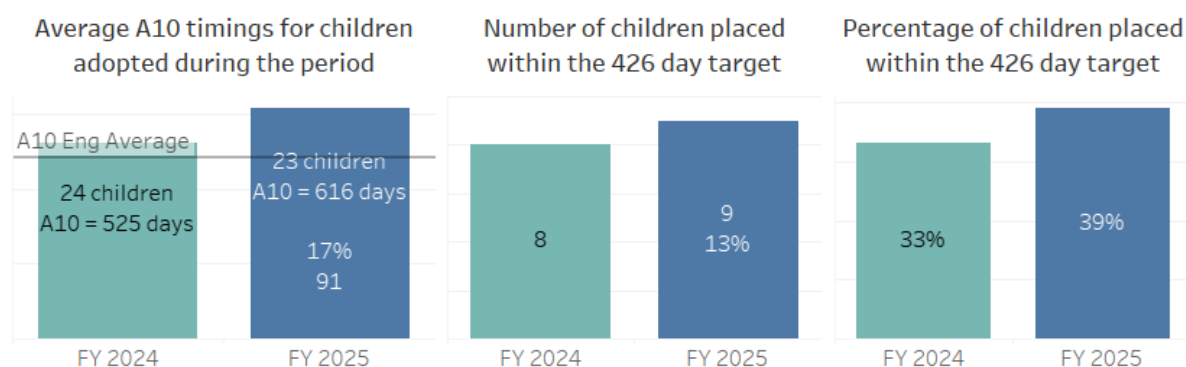
3.6 Number of children adopted.



Twenty-three children were adopted in 2024/2025 which is a similar number to last year (one less).

Three children were adopted by families outside Adoption Counts. Each of these three children were identified as likely to wait longer due to either their needs, age or ethnicity, and one of the children needed to maintain direct contact with their birth family.

A10 National Indicator = 426 days Cheshire East A10 timing = 616 days The national average A10 timing in the period was 491 days
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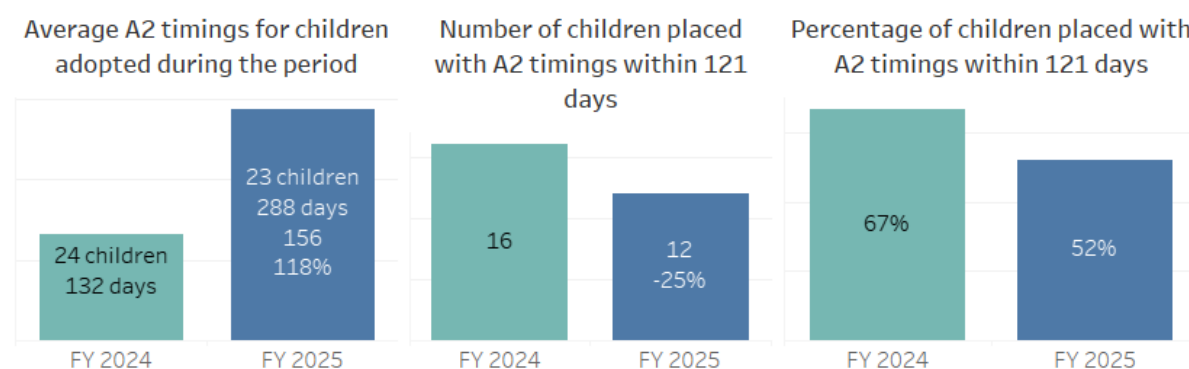
For the twenty- three children adopted, the average number of days for A10 is 616 days, which is an increase in 91 days (17%) compared to the same period last year and 125 days over the national average for the period. From this cohort of children nine were placed within the threshold of 426 days and 39% of the children granted Adoption Orders in the period had A10 timings within the 426-day target: 6% higher than last year.

There were eight children with exceptionally high or low A10 measures. Three children with low timings were placed within early permanence placements. Two of the children with high measures had experienced previous disruptions and for the remaining three children despite robust family finding, it took longer to find a family with the skills deemed necessary to meet

the children's identified needs. The average A10 measure without inclusion of the exceptionally high measures would be under the national average at 444 days.

The average A10 score without both - the exceptionally high and low measures would be 497 days – just six days over the national average.

A2 National Indicator = 121 days Cheshire East A2 timing = 156 days The national average A2 timing in the period was 218 days



The average number of days for A2 in the period is 288 Days, 156 days above the threshold. Whilst this may seem a significant increase, there are a number of children, as detailed above, with exceptionally high measures which have contributed to the higher average. In addition another child not previously mentioned, had their family finding intentionally paused for an agreed period of time whilst further assessments of long term needs following a disruption were completed. His measure was 662 days.

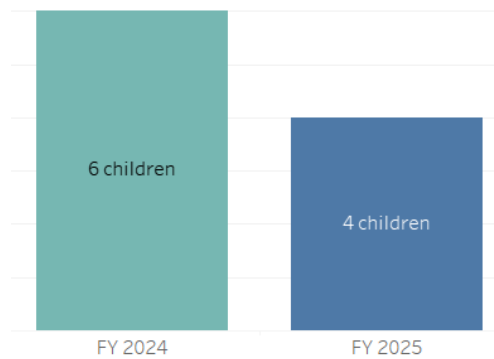
The average A2 measure without the exceptionally high timings would be below the national indicator at 115 days.

From this cohort of children twelve were adopted within the threshold of 121 days and 52% of children had A2 timings within 121 days.

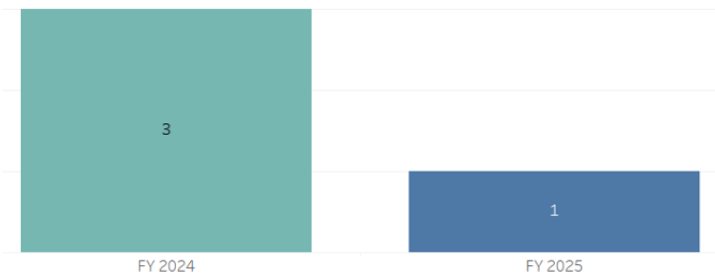
3.7 Early Permanency

Four children were placed in early permanence placements during this period – two less than last year. These children were placed with carers temporarily approved by Cheshire East's Agency Decision Maker as foster carers under regulation 25A of the Care Planning Regulations. All four have since been placed under adoption regulations.

Number of children placed in Early Permanence Placements



3.8 Number of Children experiencing a disruption

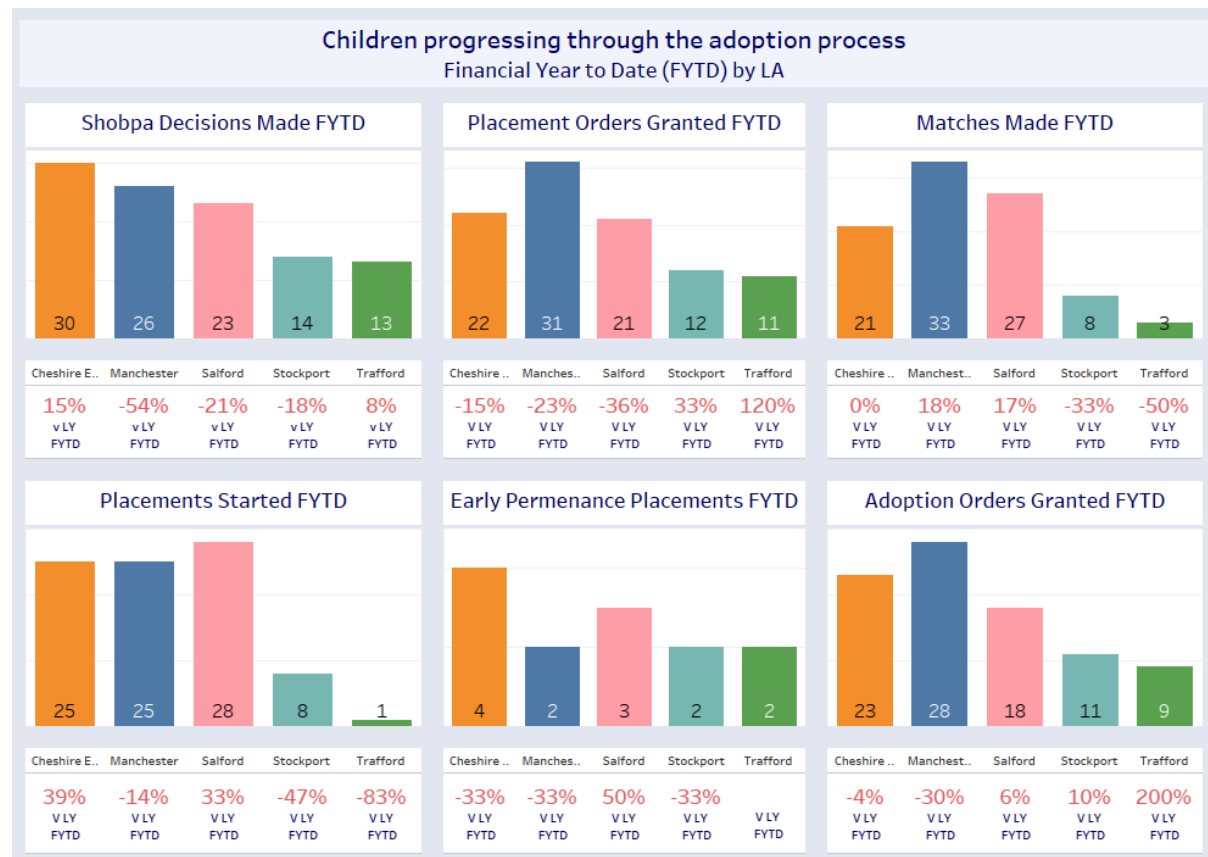


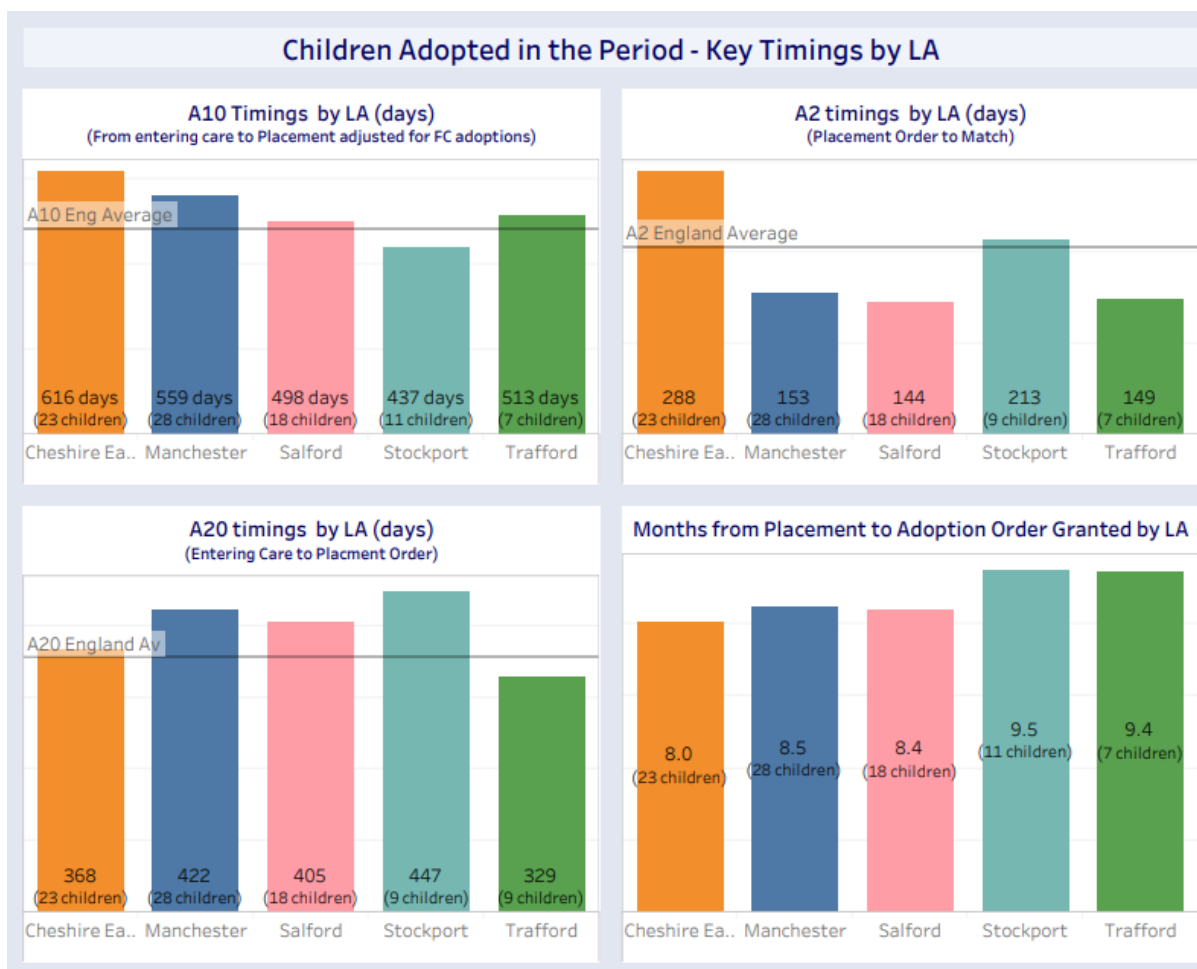
There has been one adoption disruption in the period compared to three in the same period last year. The child was placed in January 2025 with a single carer following what was considered an extremely positive transition. Sadly, the adopter advised two weeks later that she could not continue to care for the child and wished the placement to end.

Causal factors identified that placing the child triggered traumatic feelings for the adopter in relation to past life events. Although this had been explored in the assessment and support offered to the placement, the adopter made the decision she could not continue to care for child whilst being very clear this was a positive match and the disruption was not related in any way to the child or her needs.

3.9 Comparative Children's Data – other LA's in the RAA

Key Metrics for the period April 2024 to March 2025 by LA



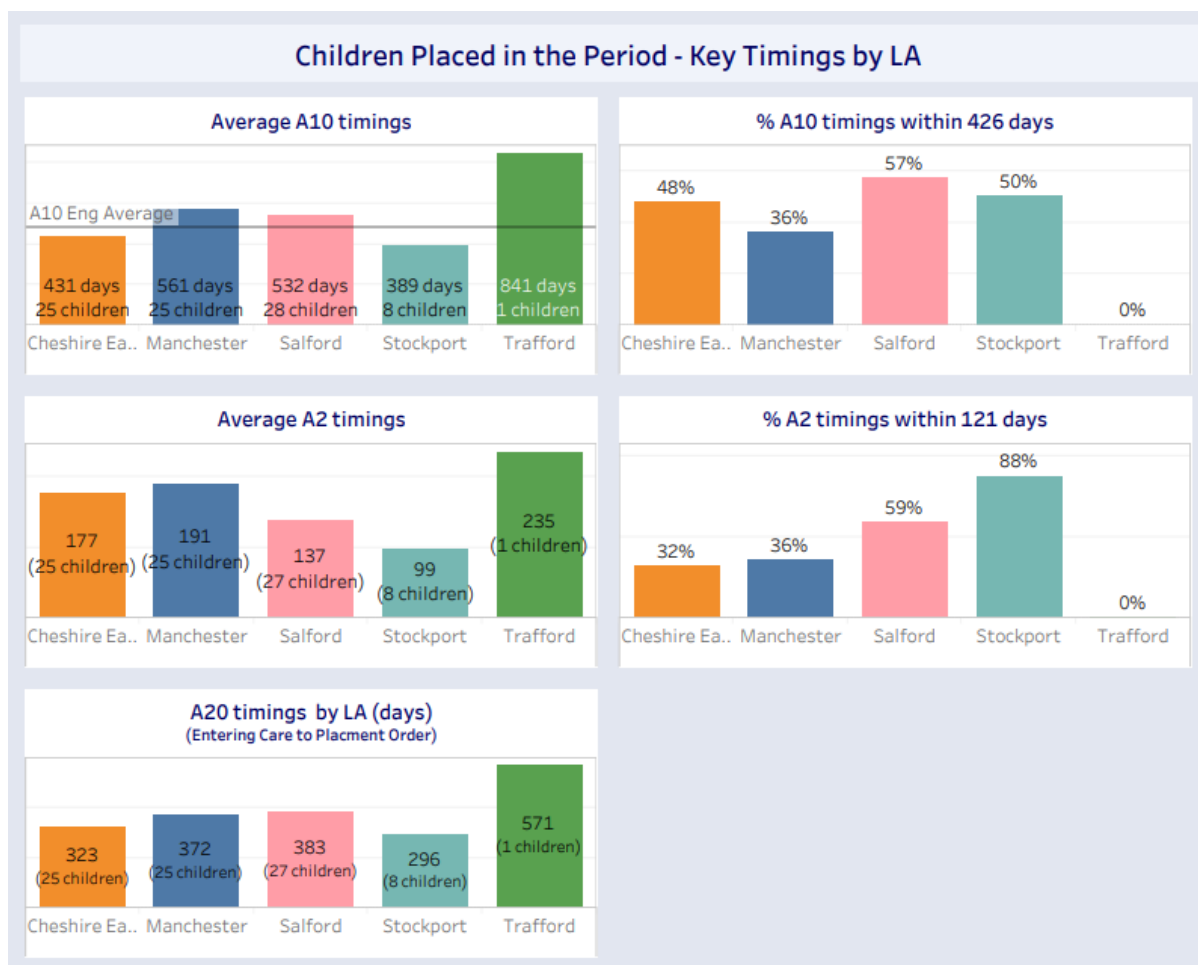


England Averages for 2024/2025

A10: 491 days

A2: 218 days

A20: 320 days



England Averages for 2024/2025

A10: 491 days

A2: 218 days

A20: 320 days

4. Quality of Reports

CPRs (child permanence reports) are audited by the Adoption Counts Team, prior to SHOBPA consideration for the child and then again by either the Team Manager, Family Finding social worker or Senior Practitioner before matching panel. This is to ensure that CPRs are graded as being 'Good' as a minimum and that the final report is submitted to panel rather than reports still requiring amendments. The CPR is then graded by the panel considering the match.

Eighteen child permanence reports (CPR's) audits have been completed during this period. Of those:

Rating	Outstanding	Good with outstanding features	Good	In need of improvement	Inadequate	No Grading	Grand Total
SHOBPA	0	0	10	8	0	0	18
Panel	1	2	9	6	0	0	18

Children's CPR reports presented to adoption panel consider gradings at the child's match, as opposed to the gradings prior to matching panel from the team Managers. The figures presented above are based on panel gradings, given their independence and impartiality.

Support and training are offered to children's social workers in completing children's CPR's. This includes specific training that can be delivered to teams, one to one support with social workers and advice with a robust quality assurance system with the ADM and Panel Adviser to SHOBPA. As can be seen by the figures above, the improvement of children's CPR's from SHOBPA to Adoption Panel is significant, with increased focus on achieving good quality CPR's for SHOBPA.

5. Recruitment of Adopters

5.1 Approvals

We have approved 63 adopters in this period, a decrease of 9 (-13%) from the same period last year. The number of children with placement orders has also decreased (by -16%), but as we still have children waiting to be placed, we are aware of the need to increase our approvals moving forward. Our adoption sufficiency has dropped from a 4% surplus at the end of 2023/2024 to a 17% deficit at the end of 2024/2025. This mirrors the national picture and although we are slightly below the national average in terms of our current sufficiency, we are performing above our regional neighbours. It is important to note that the decrease in approvals / sufficiency has not impacted upon children needing adoptive placements in this period. This is evidenced by the low number of children who have waited longer than 12 months and we are performing within the national averages for our A10 & A2 measures.

Pre-Assessment – Interest in adoption

Numbers of Prospective Adoptive Families in the period	April to Mar 23/24	April to Mar 24/25	Difference Year on Year
Enquiries	1477	1234	-16%
Attendance at Online information sessions	214	207	-3%
Initial Meetings	132	117	-11%
Registrations of Interest Received to start the adoption process	92	71	-23%
Fast Track Assessments	18	18	0%

Attendance at information sessions has dipped by 3% but the main concern is the decrease in families entering the assessment process.

Nationally ROI's decreased by 0.6% in 2024/2025 compared to the same period last year, but our decrease was much higher at -23%, which is a concern.

Assessment Period

Numbers of Prospective Adoptive Families in each stage at period end	April to Mar 23/24	April to Mar 24/25	Difference Year on Year
In Stage One of Assessment	31	26	-16%
In-between Stage One & Two at period end	9	5	-44%
In Stage Two of Assessment	36	28	-22%
Total in Application Process	76	59	-22%

The reduction in families entering the assessment process has led to a -22% reduction in the number of families in assessment compared to the same period last year. Nationally, the reduction is just -1% so again, we are seeing a greater reduction compared to national trends.

Approvals

Numbers of Prospective Adoptive Families in the period	April to Mar 23/24	April to Mar 24/25	Difference Year on Year
Approved as adopters	72	63	-13%
Matched with Children	79	78	-1%
Had children Placed for adoption (From LA's included in Adoption Counts)	78	76	-3%
Had children Placed for adoption (From outside Adoption Counts)	12	7	-42%
Adoption Orders Granted	84	77	-8%

Approvals are down by -13% compared to the same period last year and slightly less families are having children matched and placed with them. Due to the shortage of adopters we are encouraging our approved adopters to consider matches within Adoption Counts instead of looking externally, so placements from outside Adoption Counts are down -42%.

The number of Adoption Orders granted are down -8% compared to last year.

Withdrawals

Numbers of Prospective Adoptive Families in the period	April to Mar 23/24	April to Mar 24/25	Difference Year on Year
During the assessment process	51	35	-31%
After Approval	13	14	8%

Withdrawals are 31% down on this time last year.

Stage One Reasons:

- Timing is not right to proceed
- Health issues to address before stage 2
- An arrest
- Foster carers choosing to go down the private adoption route

Stage 2 reasons:

- A change of heart
- One couple separated
- Foster carer chose the non-agency adoption route
- Health reasons
- Bereavement
- Ability to take adoption leave

We are constantly reviewing our Recruitment and Marketing plan to ensure we are attracting potential adopters to our agency. We will continue to raise the profile of our agency to achieve adopter sufficiency for our children across our five local authorities, with a surplus to generate income and offset the cost of inter-agency placements for our children who need them.

Monthly Adopter Sufficiency meetings continue with the Head of Service, the Operations Managers, the Recruitment and Enquiries Manager and the Marketing Officer meeting to plan and review our progress.

Performance in relation to timescales for Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the assessment process: 9% were within timescales for stage 1 (was 7% last year) and 35% were within timescales for stage 2 (38% last year).

The average length of stage one was 151 days (nine days less than the same period last year) but is still way over the national target of 60 days (please note the England average is higher than the national target set at 133 days) The average length of stage two is 160 days, which is not far from the England average of 149 days, but higher than the national target of 121 days .

To address the challenges relating to stage 1 timescales, we have developed a stage 1 team of social workers who primarily undertake initial meetings and stage 1 pre assessments and work alongside the Business Support admin team to reduce delays to statutory checks, references and processes. Early indicators show this is having a positive impact and timescales are reducing slightly. We are still reliant on external agencies to return statutory checks, references and medicals within reasonable timescales, which directly impact on our stage 1 targets.

5.2 Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

No referrals were made to the IRM during this period.

5.3 Partner/step-parent adoption enquiries

Enquiries		
23-24	24-25	Change YOY
24	15	-38%

Social Worker meetings allocated		
23-24	24-25	Change YOY
15	4	-73%

Applications received		
23-24	24-25	Change YOY
7	3	-57%

Cheshire East had nine less enquiries in the period with four progressing to social worker meeting stage where the families can discuss the process further. Three applications were received following these meetings compared to seven in the same period last year.

5.4 Marketing and Recruitment Campaigns

At the start of 2024/2025, we reviewed our marketing budget and have identified key areas where investment is more cost-effective. As a result, we are focusing our efforts on specific activities. Our main priority now is online and social media advertising, which has proven to be the most effective way to reach a broad audience.

We are closely monitoring the impact of these changes so that will take the analysis into account when it's time to assess the budget for the upcoming year.

Alongside online advertising, we are utilising limited print media (magazines and newspapers) and outdoor advertising to retain brand awareness amongst the public within our region.

Google Ads

Google Ads, along with online organic searches, remain our primary source of enquiries, supported by a brand awareness campaign that runs consistently throughout the year. Previous analyses show that Google searches directing people to www.adoptioncounts.org.uk generate the highest number of enquiries. We are committed to using this tool to its full potential to align with our current needs.

Currently, we manage Google Ads in-house, with a geographical targeting strategy that helps us focus on prospective adopters within our region. Despite this, we still receive a small number of enquiries from outside our target area due to the nature of online advertising. While we can consider some of these enquiries, we direct others to agencies closer to their location if they fall outside of our usual travel range.

Website

The improved adoptioncounts.org.uk website is now more effective in delivering key information to potential adopters.

The updated website continues to respect brand guidelines, including our colours and fonts, but features a new structure and content layout. From our website creators' analysis, we now know that 70% of visitors access our site via mobile devices. This insight is reflected in the new structure, which provides a far better experience for mobile users. We also feature videography showcasing staff and adopters, helping to present a welcoming, honest image that encourages more enquiries.

We are currently working on including more organic stories featuring more adopters, which are aimed directly at prospective adopters or those interested in the adoption process or children awaiting adoption.

Additionally, we are working to improve our dedicated adoption support "hub" to help families reach our support team more efficiently. By segmenting this audience, we hope to ensure that the right individuals are directed to the right team, reducing confusion and improving overall experience.

Social Media

We are continuing to focus on expanding our social media presence. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) are key to reaching our target audience.

Social media is an invaluable tool for building brand awareness, driving traffic, and connecting with potential adopters. We've seen particularly good results from Facebook advertising, especially in promoting high-priority messages, such as the need for sibling adopters/Black adopters and children 4+.

Platform	May-20	May-21	May-22	Sep-23	Sep-24	Aug-25
Facebook	2017	2216	2486	3060	3,643	3,641
X (Twitter)	1441	1519	1585	1703	1634	1604
Instagram	N/A	N/A	320	448	636	732
LinkedIn						305

The downside of social media is that it has become saturated – both with competitors in the adoption space but also advertising more generally. This is particularly true of the Meta platforms, Facebook and Instagram. To help combat this, in 2025/26 we will remain on our core platforms but also increase posting on alternative social channels. In this coming year we will also be looking to build our engagement on BlueSky and LinkedIn. LinkedIn already has some engagement with 290 followers, and BlueSky is a new account.

The hope is that by being active on these alternatives we will be able to stand out in what is a busy and competitive market.

We will also continue to use podcasts which prove popular to engage prospective adopters for those priority children – for example Black children waiting and sibling groups.

Working with Local Authorities

Some prospective adopters still approach their Local Authority (LA) for information when considering adoption. We stay in regular contact with each LA's Communications department, by providing the Comms team with social media message to post on our behalf. Each LA adoption service webpage links to Adoption Counts, guiding enquiries our way. This demonstrates the importance of the "regional" model and reminds people that Adoption Counts is a collaboration among five Local Authorities.

Events

Given our budget focus, we still prioritise community events such as Pride celebrations to spread awareness and engage diverse communities. In the summer of 2025, we have attended the following events:

- Salford Pride
- Trafford Pride
- Stockport Pride
- Crewe Pride
- Congleton Pride
- Proud Fest at Manchester Pride

At these events, staff are available to answer questions, distribute merchandise like tote bags and pens, and hand out informational flyers.

Working with Independent Organisations

We continue to build partnerships with independent organisations that help us reach diverse communities. Like in previous years, we continue our partnership with **Proud2BeParents**, an inclusive organisation supporting LGBT+ parents and carers in Greater Manchester and the Northwest.

Working alongside Adoption Northwest and Adoption England

We continue to work alongside Adoption England on the *You Can Adopt* campaigns to raise awareness about adoption and encourage more people to consider providing a loving, permanent home for children in need. By collaborating with Adoption England, we benefit from both regional insight and national resources. Adoption England provides a strategic framework and wider outreach, while we offer localised support and expertise, ensuring that the adoption process is as smooth and accessible as possible for everyone.

In March 2025 we joined with other RAAs and VAAs as part of the Adoption North West campaign, 'Nobody Knows Me Better', to promote sibling adoption. The campaign was based around an animation featuring the voices of siblings who have been adopted in the region. The campaign received strong press coverage and high levels of engagement online. This directly transferred to 37 website users from Adoption North West to adoptioncounts.org.uk across March and April.

How We Evaluate Our Activities:

- Regular monitoring of enquiries, including demographic data
- Tracking website visits during specific campaigns
- Monitoring of initial meetings, registrations of interest, and approvals
- Analysing conversion rates from enquiry to approval
- Reviewing Google Ads click-through rates
- Assessing social media reach and engagement

6. Compliments, comments, and complaints

April 24 to March 25

Description – compliments
July 24 Feedback from adopters to express their gratitude in relation to the Tatton Park funday arranged by the Adoption Support Service. They stated it was enjoyable and beneficial for both adults and children.
Description – complaints

June 24 A Foster carer being assessed to adopt a child in their care complained about the Social Workers attitude and behaviour towards her. The complaint was not upheld.
July 2024 Potential adopters from outside our agency complained about the timeliness of responses / treatment of prospective adopters on link maker. The complaint was partially upheld.
August 24 Prospective adopters who had been matched with an interagency child were unhappy with the length of time it was taking for the adoption process to complete. Birth parent had contested orders made by the court and this resulted in ongoing delay. The adopters believed Adoption Counts was to blame for the delay through, amongst other things, what they considered poor communication. The complaint was withdrawn.
December 24 Foster carer unhappy that an application to Adoption Counts for DDP has not been accepted and processed.
February 25 Complaint from prospective adopters regarding conduct of their social worker and alleged inaccurate information in reports. Complaint was partially upheld.
February 25 Mum is unhappy that she has not received her son's Child Performance Report (CPR) and stated the delay had hindered an investigation into FASD.
February 25 REPRESENTATION: Potential adopters requested a meeting to discuss concerns around their assessment.
February 25 Birth mum is unhappy with the lack of letter box contact from her three children.

7. Practice Developments in Adoption Counts for Family Finding and Recruitment and Assessment

We have held quarterly development days with both our family finders and recruitment and assessment social workers during this period. Areas of practice focused upon include – sufficiency, maintaining connections for adopted children, evaluating health issues in relation to BMI, childhood trauma – a presentation from a former care leaver about their experiences in care, adoption support plans, disruptions, support for birth parents via PAC-UK.

These events have resulted in positive practice changes for example a PAC-UK birth parent will be attending our preparation training for prospective adopters moving forward which will enable our prospective adopters to hear her perspective first-hand and hopefully break down common pre-conceptions held about birth parents, which can form a barrier to maintaining connections.

As part of our ongoing development of Family Finding practice we have:

- Continued to work alongside children's SWs and foster carers to create children's profiles which offer a clear, honest and insightful reflection of the children's needs to share with adopters. Some of these are interactive profiles, to really bring the child alive and to draw adopters towards seeing them as little people with great personalities
- We have hosted activity days to ensure in house matches for our children alongside attending regional and national exchange and activity days to maximise their chances of finding the right family for them.
- We feature our children regularly at national exchange profiling events both in the Northwest and nationally. Whilst we do not, in the main, have links / matches progress from these events, it is positive, that following a profiling event this year, a link was identified for a sibling pair who had previously experienced a disruption, this was explored, and the children are currently in transitions. Two national online profiling events hosted by Adoption England have taken place this year with further events planned. We also continue to attend / feature our children at CoramBaaf activity days and northwest picnic events, although it is worth noting that a high number of children are referred to these events and so places are often limited.
- Family Finders have provided training to children's social workers about the adoption process, quality CPR's and life story books. Regular drop-in sessions are held to assist on an on an ongoing basis.

- We have developed prompt questions for children's SW to use particularly in relation to a child's race, culture and ethnicity, ensuring their birth family contribute so vital details are not lost or assumed.
- We have worked with our colleagues across the NW RAAs and are pleased that in collaboration we have launched a NW campaign for sibling groups, regional and voluntary Adoption Agencies are working together to raise awareness of the need for adopters of brothers and sisters staying together, across the Northwest. The Growing Families Together campaign was to raise awareness of the need for more people to consider adoption in the Northwest and to help those already thinking about adoption, to consider siblings.
- Following the review of our strategic matching process, these meetings have continued to take place monthly and are face to face. The focus of the meeting is to ensure all our priority children are profiled and have equal opportunities in terms of potential links / matches. This continues to be a successful approach to achieving best outcomes for children, particularly at a time when there are fewer approved adopters, both inhouse and nationally. Whilst we are seeing some children beginning to wait longer, this approach ensures all children are considered by our approved adopters in line with the length of time following PO / their identified needs. We continue to incorporate the collective matching tool within our strategic matching process. The pilot has now ended but we have found it helpful to use this tool to run a report for our priority children / approved adopters for each meeting so we can share the suggested links to be explored further within the meeting.
- We continue to work in partnership with other regional adoption agencies within the northwest and attend the northwest early permanence consortium meetings and family finding meetings held on a quarterly basis. One operations manager and two team managers also attend a national matching practice working group where key practice areas can be raised, considered and discussed. This group is currently focussing upon transitions practice and meet before match meetings (bump into meetings)

As part of our ongoing development of recruitment and assessment practice we have:

- Continued to deliver Preparation Training - social workers within the Recruitment and Assessment teams are lead facilitators, with colleagues from family finding teams and Adoption support delivering alongside. This delivery is received positively by prospective adopters with a focus on all areas of adoption activity. Our lead Team

Manager and working group for Preparation Training continually review the programme delivered with feedback from attendees and social workers presenting.

- Top up Training is offered to adopters in Stage 2 of the approval process and approved adopters. This training is delivered by the recruitment and assessment team, family finding team and adoption support. We offer a comprehensive programme of training catering to all adopters' needs, enhancing their knowledge and preparation of parenting their child or children through adoption.
- Feedback from approved prospective adopters both pre-and post-approval is positive. We are focussing on parenting siblings training as becoming mandatory to fit in with our sufficiency strategy increasing adopters for our siblings with a plan of adoption.
- Continued to roll out our Race (Rights, Acceptance, Culture and Ethnicity) Matters training for adopters and prospective adopters with the courses being held on a more frequent basis. This will enable prospective adopters to challenge their views in relation to race and diversity, therefore increasing their knowledge and understanding on a personal basis and more importantly in the parenting of their children. This year the team have won an award in the Ambitious Stockport awards in the Fair and Inclusive category, affirming the excellent co production of the training with an adopted adult.
- continued to complete Attachment Style Interviews (ASI) these are used for families where there is evidence of exposure to ACEs , they have a small support network or have experienced significant life stressors more recently. The feedback from panel is that the information provided through completion of the interviews greatly assists in our understanding of how as adoptive parents they will reach out for support during the parenting of a child or young person through adoption. During this period nine Adult Attachment style Interviews have been requested and completed. This is an increase to last year and moving forward we will be training an additional 2 ASI practitioners.
- Integrated family and friends network meetings into the stage 2 assessment process. They ensure that the support network know about the impact of trauma on children being adopted and how to raise concerns if they are worried about a child, They receive training on the impact of early trauma and therapeutic parenting to be able to fully support the family.
- are currently working with our health colleagues to agree a practice guidance around assessing obesity / health issues and impact on parenting ability.

- implemented the Initial meeting & stage 1 team within the recruitment and assessment teams to start to address the poor timings and allocation issues. Social Workers in this team primarily undertake initial meetings and stage 1 assessments, work alongside the Business Support admin team to reduce delays to statutory checks, references and processes. Early indications show this is having a positive impact on timescales. A formal review of this service will take place over the next 6 months.
- continue to hold monthly adopter tracking meetings to monitor progress and blockages of assessments and to assist with keeping to timescales for stage 1 and stage 2 of the assessment.

Adoption Panels

Information regarding Adoption Panel activity will be covered in full in the Chairs reports.

Nicola Booth

Aug 2025

8. ADOPTION SUPPORT

8.1 Adoption Support update

The team had 1003 open cases at year end. These cases were:

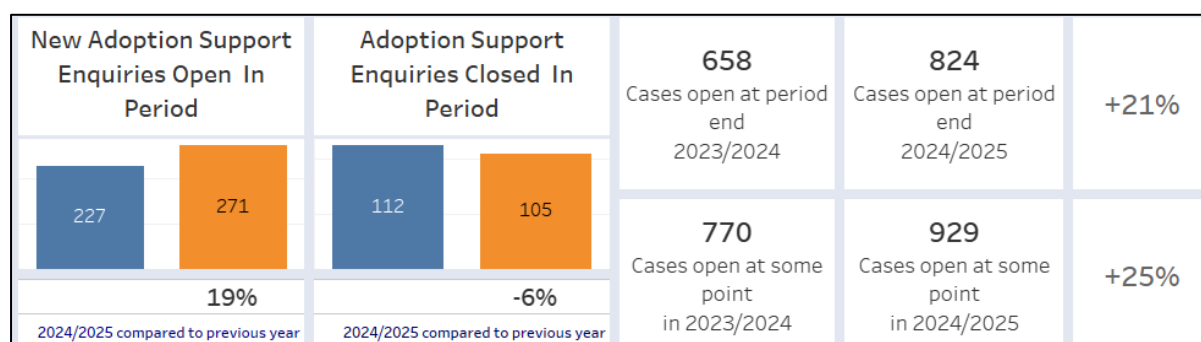
	Q4 23/24	Q1 24 /25	Q2 24 /25	Q3 24 /25	Q4 24 /25	Comments
Open cases (these are broken down into categories below)	934	948	938	966	1003	First Response, Long term and adopted adults cases
First Response / Advice Team	184	194	187	123	147	Q4 first period as Advice Team
Long term	538	552	563	682	677	
Adopted adults open cases	212	202	188	161	179	
KITT (not in figure above)	1349	1388	1415	1415		See breakdown below

Further information about the case numbers, including specialist workers:

	Q4 23/24	Q1 24 /25	Q2 24 /25	Q3 24 /25	Q4 24 /25
Therapeutic social worker (cases counted in long term team above)	68	77	74	76	71
Education advisor 0.5 FTE	36	37	24	26	25
Adoption "Surgeries" completed *	111		18 ASA 18 FRT 13 financial assessment	23 ASA 20 FRT FA 4	-

* In Q4 this data is no longer be reported in this format as the Advice Team began in January.

Adoption Support First Response & Long-Term Cases



In 2024/2025 we had 19% more new enquiries open in the period. We also had 6% less cases closed in the period resulting in 21% more cases open at period end and 25% more cases open at some point during 2024/2025 compared to the previous year.

RAG rating for families held on the Adoption Support Team (excluding Advice and KIT)				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Red	188	164	172	162
Amber	375	348	318	332
Green	115	153	101	138

At the end of 2024/2025 26% of cases were rated as 'red', 53% 'amber' and 22% 'green'. We are unable to compare to last year as this is a new measure we are tracking.

Case numbers broken down by LA:

LA	Access To Records	First Response	Long Term	Open Cases
CEAST	4	40	159	203

Keeping in touch (formerly Letterbox):

	Q4 23/24	Q1 24 /25	Q2 24 /25	Q3 24 /25	Q4 24 /25	Comments
Cheshire East	230	237	237	246	246	

Manchester and Stockport data are now migrated on to Charms. We are working on adding Trafford data and Salford. Charms informs us this will be ready by September. This will enable us to measure and access KIT information in more detail.

Once all LA data is added, we intend to develop the use of Charms to support email exchanges between adopters and birth parents. This is in response to the Letter Swop trial where some parents reported that the opportunity to have control over their own exchange, via an anonymous portal, enabled better communication, reduced delay, and built stronger relationships with birth relatives/ adopters.

8.2 Performance management

Ongoing support is offered to 824 children and their families. Social workers offer support around parenting, education, therapeutic interventions, and contribute to CIN, TAC, Safeguarding meetings and Children with disabilities colleagues.

The First Response team went through a re-design process during 2024, and were named the Advice Team, which started in January 2025. This team is made up from 2.6 FTE social workers and a 0.6 family support worker, supported by business support, who assess all requests for adoption support. The team will direct low- and medium-risk (green and amber) families to use the online webinars, evening training for parents and therapeutic parenting approaches to empower parents to take the lead on learning and supporting their child/ren. During a period of three months there can be planned telephone support to ensure families are embedding the offered services. Once this has been completed, it will be reviewed to consider if more support is required at that stage.

The Advice Team also now supports all young people who are 18 and over, and who access therapeutic support through the ASGSF. This is to differentiate the support available to under 18's and post-18's.

Despite staffing challenges, the Advice Team currently is offering an assessment to all families within 5 working days, a significant improvement on the 22 weeks with the previous model.

Advice team information from June 2025:

Families & Children currently supported	73
Young Adults (Post-18 Service)	56
Cases Closed: (10 are over 18)	26

Passed to Adoption Support SWs	13
Transferred Out	2
Transferred In	4

Demand from adults accessing their records has remained steady and the team (0.6 FTE) continue to respond to the requests as soon as possible. There still remains a waiting period for many requests but most a dealt with within six months (this doesn't include any period of waiting to recover records from other LA's, VAA's or RAA's). Those who need a priority service receive this.

In 2025 we will take up “train the trainer” offer from the regional development opportunity, which will focus on post-commencement access to records. These are adults who, as children, were placed after 2005. This is a different set of needs and fall under other legislation to older adults. These young people who access their records are likely to have experienced more complex family backgrounds and are reading more detailed records and information about abuse and neglect – consequently this has an impact on how we share and support these young people.

The Keeping in Touch Team are holding all contact referrals; this has 1415 active exchanges, with some having exchanges several times a year involving multiple birth family members. We write to all who reach 18 and have an active letterbox arrangement and offer ongoing support, so a small number of the cases above relate to young people aged 18+. The team is working under pressure as rising numbers of families are requesting support with new in-person (direct contact) arrangements. We have developed guidance for social workers, families, and are contributing to national developments around maintaining relationships. This includes emphasising the value of relationships for adopted children from the preparation groups through to matching and placement.

We continue to promote building relationships between adoptive and birth families with a view to increased direct contact, if possible and right for the child. We are using the Adoption England guidance to improve our training and information given to prospective adopters at training stage, as well as supporting more direct contact arrangements.

8.3 Management oversight of practice and quality

To support good practice we have ongoing Adoption Psychology input for open to social workers from across the service, looking systemically at the way families receive support and responding to particularly challenging situations.

Managers continue to oversee and sign off all Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund applications, ensuring quality of application and consistency of requests. Our service was significantly impacted by the delay in the ASGSF renewal process from April 2025, including changes in the Fair Access Limit (reduced from £7500 specialist assessment and therapy, to £3000) and we worked hard to support families and therapists in responding to

these changes. We spoke to families and providers and quickly developed a strategy to support this change.

RAG rating enables us to oversee caseloads and ensure that the families at highest risk receive a focussed intervention. Managers ensure quality of work through signing off assessments and regular supervision.

Nearly all regular providers are now registered on the Flexible Purchase System (FPS or The Chest). All have been evaluated by managers to ensure quality of providers for therapeutic provision. We have more than 60 services registered and will offer a further opportunity to register late in 2025 before all providers are required to renew in 2026.

Practice oversight is also given by Adoption Psychology service, with consultations and supervision to workers and therapeutic social workers. Their input is beneficial when evaluating new therapies and requests from providers. The Multi-Agency Resource Panel (MARP) scrutinises applications over the fair access limit and offers quality control.

We have recently allocated Adoption Support work to our Recruitment and Assessment social workers. This is in response to several adoption support team members being away from work (maternity / adoption leave) and budget restrictions meaning we are unable to recruit temporary cover. This has required additional training and support to our colleagues who are also delivering recruitment and assessment services.

Our updated closure policy encourages social workers to review therapy after three years, to ensure the family are still receiving the most appropriate support. Consultations with Adoption Psychology can be used for these reviews to obtain an expert, independent view for families who are using external providers.

8.4 Partnership working

Adopter Voice are commissioned by Adoption UK to offer our adoptive parents a way to feed back to our service. We have 4 forums which have taken place in early 2025 as well as our AAB meetings and look forward to continuing to engage with our adopter voice community. The family rambles are well received with good attendance. 2 new adopter voice champions were recruited by Adoption UK in December 2024 and have started new events including stay and play.

A forum in January 25 on “adopter training” was held and despite only two adopters attending, it was a useful discussion which highlighted barriers to adopters accessing the training opportunities we offer. We have incorporated this into our Advice Team service which now signposts families to the relevant training via CATCH or in-person and follows up afterwards to consolidate learning.

We have renewed the Adopter Voice contract, which will be a 12-month contract from the 1st June 2025. As part of the new service level agreement from June we intend to hold adopter voice forums over a lunch time slot when it is hoped more adopters may be able to join discussions. In addition to forums the programme will also continue to include the AAB meetings as well as a programme of events hosted by our champions. We hope to see the

event offer grow, as we know adopters really value events where they can build networks and peer support.

PAC-UK offer our independent birth parent counselling for all 5 LA's. We continue to have a positive working relationship with PAC-UK who continue to offer 1:1 support and an in-person parent group. PAC-UK new referral numbers are below and the PAC quarterly report is available.

	Q1: Apr-Jun 2024	Q2: Jul-Sep 2024	Q3: Oct-Dec 2024	Q4: Jan-Mar 2025	Total 2024-25
Cheshire East	1	5	6	0	12

We have memberships to CATCH with online resources, webinars, training and support as well as a moderated parent forum and "ask the expert" chat. This was reduced due to budget restraints but has continued to offer 100 subscriptions and is fully used.

Adoption Counts continues to work alongside our Adoption Psychology colleagues and offer consultations, training to workers, direct work with families, therapeutic groups for parents and children, and specialist assessments.

The project continues with the Institute of Public Care (Oxford Brookes). This two-year research project has been extended, and looks into the impact of our multi-disciplinary Adoption Psychology service (APS). This has involved research with adoptive parents who have previously used the service. It will aim to evaluate outcomes including the financial benefit of a multi-disciplinary team and has so far interviewed team members, APS colleagues, and families; and completed a case records evaluation activity for 9 families who agreed to provide this. The interim report highlighted that adoptive parents valued the multi-disciplinary input; and gave advice around improving our data capture and outcome measures for therapeutic interventions outside of the core offer. This is being overseen by the DFE and Adoption England with a planned end date of Spring/Summer 2026. Our Adoption Psychology Service lead Dr Kate Bonser is involved in evaluating the other national projects.

Our virtual school colleagues continue to participate in a regular meeting, chaired by our Educational Psychologist, which is topic based and looks at the areas which matter most to adopters and professionals. This brings virtual schools P-LAC leads together to best meet the needs of adopted children. Following our successful "Transitions in education for adopted children" conference in January 25, we have completed a final version of the transition document which gives advice and guidance to professionals supporting children's transition into adoption. We will be delivering a webinar for Adoption England on sharing this and best practice Positive Planning Meeting framework.

The objective of the conference was to bring together school staff who have a direct impact on the experience of adopted children, as well as Virtual School colleagues, social workers, IRO's and more. The conference informed those staff about the reasons why children can

struggle, as well as techniques, services, and support available. It improved links between school teams and adoption support.

Delegates reported this event was “inspiring and motivational”, “informative and helpful”, “amazing”, “wonderful”, “excellent”.

We hold an adoption support sub-board which has invited representatives from each LA to attend, along with education and health colleagues and VAA representatives. As education is one of the main challenges parents tell us about, we agreed that a joint conference would enable us to share knowledge and good practice within our region.

8.5 Use of resources

We continue to access the ASGSF to support adoptive families. This year we made 15% more applications than in previous year and drew down 25% more funding.

For comparison, last year's total figures are included.			
	Year total 2022-2023	Year total 2023-24	Year total 2024-25
Number of applications made	541 / 445	627	723
Amount in £	1,912,477 Includes £48,562.76 matched funding for the highest need families	£2,161,134 Includes £40,526 matched funding for the 21 highest need families	£2,718,394

This is set to reduce in 2025/26 due to ASSG reduction in access amounts.

The service has re-designed the Advice Team and will continue to monitor the impact of this on service users. Since January 25, we have been able to offer all adoptive families an assessment within 5 working days of their sending us completed information; a significant improvement on the 22 weeks that this was previously taking.

Challenges remain around families needing long-term support and receiving this from a named social worker. Workers continue to carry case loads of 50+ (FTE) and are supporting early placements, families at risk of breakdown, young people on the edge of school exclusion, and a range of needs across this area.

Further aspects of the re-design include implementing a new closure policy, and changing the way we deliver services to those who are over 18. We are however observing an increase in need from families who may be unable to access support from other services.

Our service for over 18's is limited to access to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund. Should further resources become available we recommend that services for 18+

adopted young people are looked at as a priority, as Adoption England will be looking at this as an area for development (see pilot of Improving Adoption Services for Adults [Support for Adopted People | Adoption England](#)).

Consultation sessions continue to be offered to professionals, by:

- Schools advisor
- Child Psychiatrist
- Therapeutic social workers
- Adoption Psychology team on transitions, and long-term cases

These offer support and advice on good practice for complex cases, such as placing multiple children into a family, supporting a complex transition plan, or supporting change where a family have become “stuck” with some challenging behaviours or situations. We continue to work on ensuring every family finder accesses these transition consultations, at as early a stage as possible.

8.6 Events

Events for adopters took place. The November music themed event had over 100 adoptive parents and children attending and 160 at Tatton park farm activity day for families. We did not deliver a third fun day due to budget restraint.

Feedback from parents stated:

“[these events] are an invaluable source of support”

“socialisation with other adopted families for my children”

“[Our child is] not alone in being adopted (her words!)”

“Allowing our child to see there are other adopted children and that you can’t tell who is adopted”

“Reinforced identity and wellbeing for my children”

8.7 Workshops

Evening workshops continue for parents, which offer training on specialist areas which affect adopted children. Over the year we have delivered as a mixture of virtual and in person:

- Life story workshop
- How to make the best of your CATCH membership
- Supporting your child’s development through play
- Safety in the virtual world
- Life Story workshop
- Global Majority parenting groups

- Supporting your child at school and understanding the education system
- Supporting your child in education
- Sensory and Motor Development
- Siblings; co-regulation, competition, and trauma bonds
- Staying Connected and Reconnecting: How to support your child and prepare yourself for connection with birth family.
- Navigating the needs of adopted children in school (online) Training for schools – supporting adopted children in your classroom (online)
- Therapeutic parenting for primary-age
- The teenage years and brain development

A selection of feedback from parents to the question; what did you gain from this event?:

“Meeting others and sharing experiences. Finding out how much things have changed since we adopted in terms of contact with birth family.”

“Lots of tips and some strategies plus difference between normal teen behaviour and behaviour of adopted children”

“Meeting other parents and better understanding [of global majority parenting]”

“Lots of information on to how to deal with situations “

“Validation that it’s complex adopting siblings!”

“A good insight into actual parenting and sibling trauma. It was good to hear from people in the same position.”

Two Monthly Teen groups (Big Teen Wednesdays) continue to offer a safe space for 14–16-year-olds who have often found it harder to be part of a group, or not have the high level of support needed to participate in other areas, and a group continues for 12–14-year-olds. Parents have peer support sessions and speak strongly about the benefits of network and peer support from others who understand.

We have held four Global Majority events in the year, to support those who are Global Majority parents or parenting a child of a different ethnicity to themselves.

Adoption Counts professionals have been offered specialist training from our Adoption Psychology service which has covered:

- Supporting parents with educational transitions: positive endings and beginnings
- Child Development and Theraplay
- Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA)
- Looking after yourself
- Neurodevelopmental disorders and the link to developmental trauma

- The teenage brain: Practical support and advice to give parents

Kristen Roberts & Alice Taylor

July 2025

**Adoption Counts Adoption Panel Chair's 6 monthly report:
October 2024 to March 2025**

Introduction

This report is a biennial report completed in rotation by the Independent Panel Chairs for Adoption Counts. The statistics used in the report and the quotations from the Panel feedback process are supplied by the Panel Administration Team, the Data Coordinator and the Panel Advisor for Adoption Counts. Thanks are expressed for their hard work in bringing the information together, as well as their on-going committed and diligent support in the functioning of Panels

Overview of Panels

The arrangements for Panels brought about by the Covid pandemic situation have continued and, whilst most Panels are still being held virtually using Microsoft Teams, there has been a concerted move towards more face-to-face panels which take place on Wednesday mornings at Etrop Court, Wythenshawe. This is in response to the fact that an increasing number of social workers are no longer available on Fridays to attend panel. Accordingly, the move to "in person" panels on Wednesday morning was considered an appropriate alternative. The majority of Panel members have responded positively to a greater number of in person Panels, recognising the benefits of meeting face to face to build upon Panel working relationships as well as providing an enhanced experience to applicants and social workers attending Panel.

Panel members gather at 9.15am for a 9.30 start and can cover from one item to a maximum of five items. They generally happen on a weekly basis. The frequency of Panels supports the timeliness of approvals and matches. There remains the option to arrange additional Panels should that be necessary.

Panel Membership

There have not been any significant changes in Panel membership since the last Chair's report. In December 2024 we had two Panel members leave, one of whom was a longstanding member. We have since been pleased to appoint another Vice chair, Debbie Whitwood, which takes the number of Vice Chairs to two. There have been no new members appointed during this time period.

The issue of Panel member remuneration has been under review and a proposal has been placed before the Board for Panel members fees have been increased.

There is still work to be done to increase the diversity of Panel members, in particular to include greater representation from the global majority and also representation from birth parents and adopted adults.

The situation regarding attendance by the Medical Advisors at Panel is unchanged from the last report. As previously noted, a lack of medical advice makes it more difficult for Panel members to make informed recommendations. It would be beneficial if this function was shared more equally between the 5 authorities to ease the burden of those paediatricians that currently support panel's work.

In terms of social worker representation on Panel, since the last Chair's report one Adoption Counts social worker representative has left as they have moved to a different post. We have one social worker representative each from Manchester, Salford and Cheshire East, and 2 from Stockport. There are still no social worker representatives from Trafford and this is an issue that needs to be addressed to ensure full local authority representation from across the RAA. We have additional interest from 3 more social worker representatives from Stockport. In addition Panel has 3 Local Authority representatives, 2 from Stockport, and 1 from Cheshire East.

Panel Member Appraisals

The number of outstanding appraisals has been an on-going issue over the past twelve month period. During the six monthly period covered within this report appraisals were not all up to date, this is due to a change in Panel Adviser in December 2024 and a period of settling in. Efforts will be made in the remainder of 2025 to bring all appraisals up to date.

Panel Member Training

Adoption Counts continues to run two Panel Development Days per calendar year; the last one took place in January 2025 and there is a further session planned on 14th July 2025.

At the training in January 2025 Gail Spray provided a service update as well as an update on placement disruptions. Colette McGarrigle (Panel Chair) and myself delivered a session entitled "The legal process – a child's journey to adoption" with the objective of providing Panel members with a broader understanding of the statutory framework and procedures which lead to a child being placed for adoption. Kim Scragg (Panel Chair) led a group discussion around the issues that Panel members should be considering in reaching a recommendation and how the welfare checklist should be used as a tool to support this process. Discussion took place between social workers and Panel members regarding questions at Panel and how these could be re-focussed and improved. The day concluded with Amanda Aylward, the Virtual Head for Stockport outlining the remit of her role and that of the Virtual School.

Panel Chair, Adoption Counts managers and ADM meetings

Panel Chairs have continued to meet quarterly with Adoption Counts senior managers. This continues to be helpful and allows all parties to discuss any issues, good practice and areas for development, in a constructive manner. It also enables Chairs to keep in touch with issues and what is happening in the wider agency. The meeting is enhanced by the attendance of ADMs joining the second half of the meeting; this supports collaborative discussion about issues relating to all 5 authorities and promotes consistency of both practice and paperwork. Comments from ADMs are useful and much valued, and it is appreciated when the ADMs can attend and influence practice within their authorities. Discussion is ongoing around the scheduling of these meetings to enable maximum attendance of ADMS from all local authorities.

Panel Business

Cases considered by panels (October 2024-March 2025)

Panel Business							
	No. of panels	No. of items considered	Matches	Approvals	SHOBPA	De-reg	Adopter review
Panels	39	60	36	23	1		

36 matches heard – 35 approved

23 approvals heard - 22 approved

38 children matched – 30 single children and 4 sibling groups of 2

Out of the 35 matches for 38 children, 5 were fostering for adoption – which is 14% of the total matches and 13% of the children.

Panel scrutiny – timescales

Matches (number of children)			Approvals		
A1 met	12	35%	Stage 1 met	1	7%
A1 not met	22	65%	Stage 1 not met	14	93%
A2 met	11	32%	Stage 2 met	6	29%
A2 not met	23	68%	Stage 2 not met	15	71%

*One intro broke down so no A1 score. One child relinquished so no A2 score

** Out of 22 approvals, 6 were fast tracked so did not go through Stage 1 and 1 was a non-agency approval (Scottish Family)

Agency specific data matches					
Agency	Total children matched	A1 met	A1 not met	A2 met	A2 not met
Cheshire East	10	4 =40%	6 =60%	2 =20%	8=80%

++ SHOBPA not included.

Comments

In comparison to the previous six month period there have been a greater number of Panels (39 Panels 10/24-03/25 and 28 4/24-09/24) but within those Panels a smaller number of items have been considered, with Panel considering 60 items within this time period, as oppose to 84 within the period of the last report. It is noticeable that routinely on Panel agendas there are fewer items, with Panels typically considering 3 agenda items, where previously 4 or 5 agenda items was the amount of normal Panel business.

It is of note that there was a decrease in the proportion of placements beginning as fostering for adoption placements in the period Oct-Mar with a reduction from 23% of matches within the previous reporting period to 14% in this period.

Panel scrutiny – Quality of reports at the final audit

RAA data of quality of reports. All agencies					
Matches, 35 CPRs 34*			Approvals, 22 PARs		
Outstanding	2	6%	Outstanding	1	5%
Good	28	82%	Good	16	73%
In need of improvement	4	12%	In need of improvement	5	23%
Inadequate	0	0%	Inadequate	0	0%

*1 CPR was required to be re submitted and 2 are ungraded at panel

CPR Agency specific data within the RAA – as a % out of total of 52 reports				
Agency	Outstanding	Good	In need of improvement	Inadequate
Cheshire East (8)	1 and 3%	8 and 24%	1 and 3%	

CPR Agency specific data per Local Authority – as a % within each LA				
Agency	Outstanding	Good	In need of improvement to be good	Inadequate
Cheshire East out of 10	1 and 10%	8 and 80%	1 and 10%	

As discussed already there was a reduction in the number of both matches and approvals considered by Panel within this six monthly period.

Adoption Counts policy requires all CPRs and PARs presented to Panel to be graded at least Good at second audit. The percentage of CPRs graded Outstanding, Good with outstanding features or Good has remained the same at 88% from the last six month's figure. However, as indicated within the data above there remain variable standards across the five local authorities and further training for social workers is required. There continues to be a significant need for more careful proof reading before submission to Panel, to eliminate minor errors which make the CPR hard to read and as well as reports that do not provide an account that will help the child in the longer term to understand their life story to adoption. This issue is regularly discussed with the ADMs at the quarterly meetings with the Panel Chairs.

The outstanding CPRs give a robust analysis of the options available that have been considered by the agency for the future care needs of that child, whilst consideration is given to the Welfare Checklist at all times. Outstanding CPRs also carefully consider the impact of the document on the child and their understanding of their history and identity as they read the CPR in later life.

PARs graded Outstanding, Good with outstanding features or Good have dropped to 78% from the previous quarter of 88%, this was a further fall after a decrease from 95% within the preceding reporting period. Those PARs in need of improvement have important gaps in information, which then lead to more questions at Panel, as well as needing proof reading before submission.

No information has been made available as to why timescales for approvals and matches were not met nor was there any comment made regarding Agency specific data matches. However, those specific reasons are contained both within the individual reports presented at panel and within the 6 monthly reports to each LA which sit alongside this report.

Attendee Feedback

Both the social workers and adopters attending Panel are asked a number of questions about their experience of attending Panel, which are then graded from 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent)

Feedback from evaluations

There were responses from 9 adoption social workers or their team manager, 2 children's social workers or their team manager, 1 family finder and 8 adopters.

This represents a reduction in responses from CSWs, Family Finders and ASWs whilst responses from adopters have increased.

From adoption social workers:

"The Panel worked hard to ensure that the match was correct for these children, they also created a warm and friendly atmosphere that enabled thorough and reflective discussions."

"I felt that the panel members (including the chair), really helped put the prospective adopters at ease, they looked friendly and they were!"

Also

"I had 8 questions which I feel was a lot for a single SW at an approval panel and then a panel member asked a further random question after the adopters had joined then left for their recommendation. Then there was also the pressure I felt when answering some of the questions which made me feel like panel were trying to catch me out on something and was quite stressful and unpleasant. I usually enjoy attending panel but this was a very negative experience that left me feeling both anxious and frustrated."

This particular worker met with the Panel Adviser following Panel to provide clarification on issues within the paperwork which had led to Panel members having a high number of areas that had needed to be explored within questions. The comments made highlight the need for robust quality assurance processes prior to paperwork being submitted to Panel, as well as support for social workers from their managers during the Panel itself. The training at Panel Development Day has also provided training for Panel members around focussed questioning for social workers.

From a family finder:

"Some of the panel members could not remember the adopters first names, one member called the child another name."

This feedback serves as a reminder to all Chairs and Panel members to focus on remembering the vital details of cases and the importance of getting names correct.

From adopters:

“It was clear that the panel members had read our PAR as they made reference to aspects of it and had clear knowledge of who we are and our family.”

“We are very grateful to all panel members for such a warm, personal and positive experience. It felt that all panel members really knew us.”

Also

“It would be helpful to be given an expected timescale for being dialled in the panel meeting. Knowing the start time of the panel is one thing but it is then painful sitting watching your emails for nearly an hour waiting to be called in - if possible it would have been helpful to be advised that whilst panel begins at 9:30am you will not be called until 10am at the earliest?”

This comment brings into sharp focus the challenge for applicants of waiting whilst Panel discussion is taking place and the need for clear communication about anticipated timescales.

From children’s social workers and a team manager:

No comments were made.

A practice issue

Within the last Chair’s report the complexities of Panel considering cases where prospective adopters have a very high BMI (40+) was raised. The concern of Panel is that prospective adopters need to have the energy and activity levels to be able to meet the physical needs of children placed in their care, as well as having the longevity to care for children through to adulthood and beyond.

Since the last report a working group has met to seek to develop a policy for Adoption Counts to support social workers and Panel in both assessing and making decisions around the question of the health and weight of prospective adopters. This policy is being drafted and will be circulated in due course.

Conclusion

Within this last six-month period Adoption Counts has seen a greater number of Panels taking place, with an increased number of face to face Panels which have enhanced the experience of applicants, Panel members and social workers. Despite this increase in Panels there has

been a notable reduction of 28.57% in the number of cases being considered between this reporting period and the last. This change is consistent with the national picture of a reduction in individuals seeking assessment as adopters.

There has been improvement within some of the local authorities in the quality of CPRs, however there remains more work to be done to ensure consistency of approach across all of the local authorities represented within Adoption Counts.

Feedback from both social workers and adopters attending Panel is generally good, with the only negatives in this period coming from ASWs who had a less than positive experience, despite having their cases approved.

As with previous Chair's reports, this writer wishes to express her personal thanks for the exemplary work undertaken by the Panel administrative team. Without their diligence and attention to detail Panel simply could not function! The quality of organisation and Panel minutes ensures the smooth running of Panel and enhances the quality of the agency's overall processes. We have been grateful also for the work and enthusiasm of the interim Agency Advisor for this six monthly period. She has skilfully picked up the reins and has brought new ideas and insights to the role.

Recommendations - The agency should:

- Provide support and training to adoption social workers to improve the quality of PARs given the continued fall in grading within this reporting period.
- Continue the work to seek to increase the number of Paediatricians available to support Panel, specifically the Medical Advisors who do not participate
- Ongoing work to widen the diversity of Panel membership, from the perspective of issues such as race and culture, age, gender, socio-economic background and life experience
- Liaise with Trafford to identify a social work representative to join Panel membership
- Bring all appraisals for Panel members up to date.
- Finalise the agency policy around approach to health, weight and physical activity considerations for applicants
- Revise Panel agenda time scales to provide a better estimate of the likely time that applicants will be asked to join the meeting to seek to minimise applicant's wait and levels of anxiety.
- Continue to focus on recruitment of prospective adopters, and seeking to achieve diversity within this group to meet the diverse needs of children waiting

Naomi Kelso, Independent Pa