



Aspire Adoption Annual Report for Dorset Council

1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is the fifth annual report for Aspire Adoption Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). We are pleased to report that despite the continuing challenges of the pandemic, Aspire’s partnership with Dorset Childrens’ Services has continued to strengthen and grow. This was confirmed in the 2021 Ofsted inspectors who

“Were pleased with the working relationship between Dorset and Aspire and most importantly it led to good outcomes for children with almost every child with a plan of adoption being successfully placed with a family.”

1.2 Aspire improved the monthly performance reporting to give Dorset a clear view of every child in the adoption process. This was noted by Ofsted

“Senior managers, through regular oversight, assure themselves that children receive an effective service from the regional adoption agency”

2. Children’s Adoption Performance Data

SBPA Decisions

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Total
Dorset	2	4	3	2	11

Placement Orders

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Total
Dorset	4	4	0	3	11

Placements

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Total
Dorset	7	3	7	0	17

Adoption Orders

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Total
Dorset	5	4	5	0	14

Children with PO waiting for a match

	Jun-30	Sep-30	Dec-31	Mar-31
Dorset	8	8	4	8

**Children with
PO linked to
adopters**

	Jun-30	Sep-30	Dec-31	Mar-31
Dorset	2	5	4	8

**Children with
PO not yet
linked**

	Jun-30	Sep-30	Dec-31	Mar-31
Dorset	6	3	0	0

2.1 Fewer children had a Local Authority Should Be Placed for Adoption (SBPA) plan this year, which meant that there were fewer, placement orders and subsequent adoption orders made. This figure is slightly skewed by the Somerset ruling which meant that 4 children who most likely would have had an adoption order made by the 31st March had their adoptions postponed until after the 31st of March

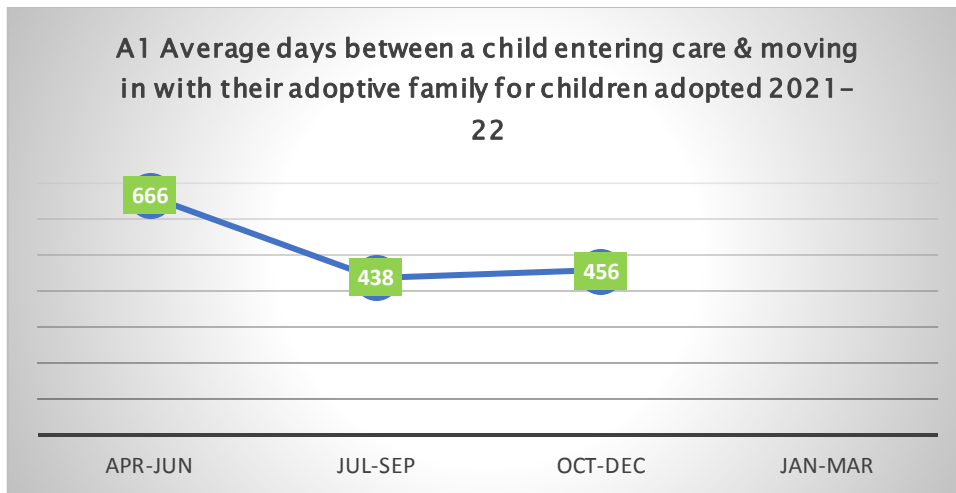
Every child with a plan for adoption is linked to an adopter.

Aspire has worked hard to increase the range and diversity of adopters enabling children labelled the 'hardest to place' find loving adoptive families.

2.2 Timeliness of adoption

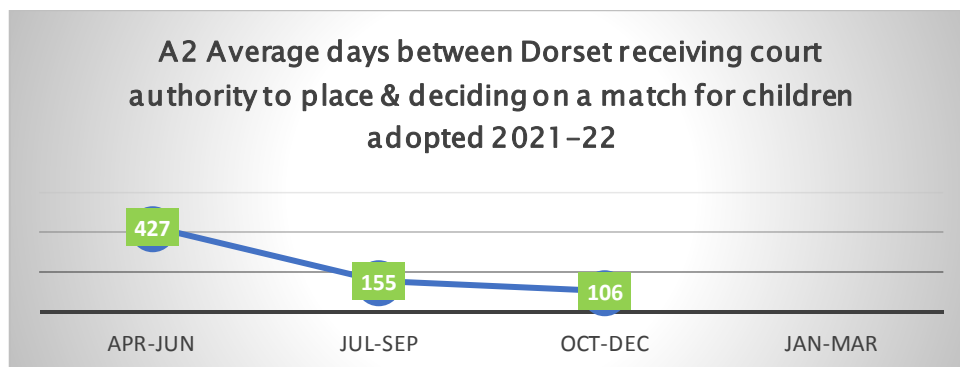
A1 The most up to date comparator figures available at the time of writing are the Coram BAAF quarter 3 figures to the 31st of December. The England average was 485 days and Dorset 456

At the end of quarter 4 the Dorset average remained at 456 days



A2 The most up to date comparator figures available at the time of writing are the Coram BAAF quarter 3 figures to the 31st of December. The England average was 196 days and Dorset 106 days

At the end of quarter 4 the Dorset average remained at 106 days



The quicker children are matched with adopters and placed the better. The performance figures illustrate Ofsted’s conclusion that

*“Adoption is considered carefully and promptly for all children who are unable to return home to their birth families and who need a permanent alternative.”
Ofsted 2021*

Jakes Story

Jake was found eating off the floor, severely neglected. Aged 7 with autism, nonverbal and mobility issues the courts doubted we would find adopters. But there was something very engaging about Jake who loves swinging and sensory play.

His social workers and foster carers were all determined to find him his own family foster carers, social workers.

It took ambition, determination, and the ability to put together a great long term support package with education and health. Aspire found a very special family who love Jake to pieces. Jake is going from strength to strength.

2.3 Early Permanence

EP	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Total
Dorset	2	2	1	5	10

Early Permanence is where children are placed with prospective adopters on a fostering basis. If the courts decide that adoption is the right plan, they become their adopters. This avoids the additional trauma children suffer from changes in their primary carers.

Early Permanence has generally been used for babies. Aspire has placed babies direct from hospital so there are Dorset children who have only known the one carer. We have also been far more creative in our use of Early Permanence with older children to reduce placement moves and breaking avoid delay.

Our adopters have proved that with the right support and information they can manage a high degree of risk, uncertainty, and contact. Two children ended up being returned to their birth families. They worked incredibly hard to make it a smooth transition for the child.

Over half of our adopters will consider Early Permanence

Mica 11 months story

Due to unforeseen circumstances her foster placement needed to end quickly. Dorset were exploring permanence with extended,

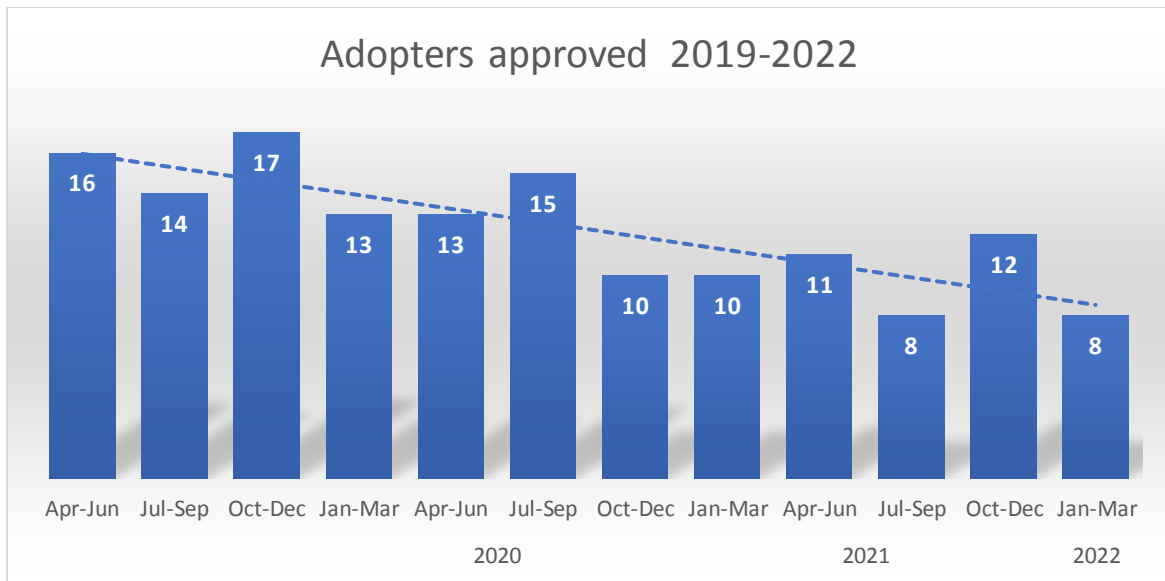
3. Adopter Recruitment

3.1 Aspire recruits a great range of diverse adopters. At any one time, we try to have around 30 families available to meet the needs of Dorset and BCP children.

Subtle changes to our social media messaging and changes to the induction programme have helped attract adopters for older children, sibling groups and children with additional needs that we require.

Aspire is fortunate that we can recruit a wide range of adopters

In the past year we have recruited adopters from 12 different nationalities. We have recruited couples and single adopters, and 1 in 7 approved adopters are LGBTQ+. We have fine-tuned our messaging and work with adopters to flex around the needs of local children. We do adopt some babies, but we are mainly looking for adopters who will consider older children, sibling groups and children with additional needs.



3.2 At any one time we have approximately 30 available approved adoptive households. If adopters are not matched with Dorset or BCP children, we support them to explore children nationally.

3.3 Interagency adoptions

Aspire supports national adopter sufficiency adopters

This year Aspire spent £236,500 on adoptive placements and sold £ 200, on placements. A further £103,000 of Aspire adopters are linked with children but will not be progressed until the Somerset guidance is issued.

3.4 The close relationship and tracking we undertake with Dorset means that by the time the placement order is made, we will know whether Aspire has suitable adopters or not, and immediately look elsewhere to avoid delay for children.

3.5 Our relentless focus on finding families for children means that almost all children with a plan for adoption are found families.

4. National Mystery shopper exercise

4.1 The Regional Adoption Agencies funded a programme looking at the effectiveness of response to initial adoption enquiries, website, and social media. Aspire received a rating of 82%.

4.2 The website did not require any improvements. Facebook and YouTube were considered good, but it was suggested that Twitter and Instagram needed improvement. We have identified that most of our prospective adopters use Facebook. As a small agency, it makes sense to concentrate on this medium. The larger report commented on the quality and the helpfulness of our Facebook posts.

5. **Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Services**

5.1 Aspire offers support to Dorset adopters and Special Guardians until their children reach adult hood. This is a service that families choose to access. We have worked hard

over the last year to eradicate the waiting list and offer an immediate response to families at the lower tiers through a daily duty system.

5.2 The cumulative increase in the number of adopters and special guardians eligible for this support continues to be challenge. This is a small team consisting of just under four FTE social workers and two and half family support workers. We have maximised capacity by reducing bureaucracy.

5.3 The service tries to pre-empt need and offer a greater range of early support services and has increased the range of specialist groups and training. This includes a range of forums and social groups, training in therapeutic parenting, Thera play, therapeutic life story work and great behaviour parenting for teenagers.

84 parents (Dorset and BCP) attended Aspire training and workshops over 2021-2022. with many more attending the support groups.

5.4 The service has strong links with and Early Help and universal services who offer bespoke services for our families.

5.6 Education

5.7 Adoption UKs 2021 barometer report found that education is adopters' highest concern. The team has developed strong relationships with Dorset virtual school who offer a mix of direct support and advisory sessions as required. The spring newsletter focused on education and included the Dorset Previously Looked After (PLAC) Information Book. Aspire's service manager is the Virtual School PLAC governor.

5.8 This allows workers to offer short pieces of task centred work for families with more complex needs. **120 Children (Dorset and BCP) are currently receiving direct social work support, with an allocated worker. It generally takes about 3 weeks to be allocated.**

5.9 The Department for Education Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASF)

5.10 The post support team help adopters and special guardians to access the ASF fund completing the required assessment and sourcing the therapists using our procurement framework. This has become increasingly important for our families. and cutting the waiting list has meant we have been able to support significantly more Dorset families access therapeutic services

2019 /20 57 Families £32,845.99

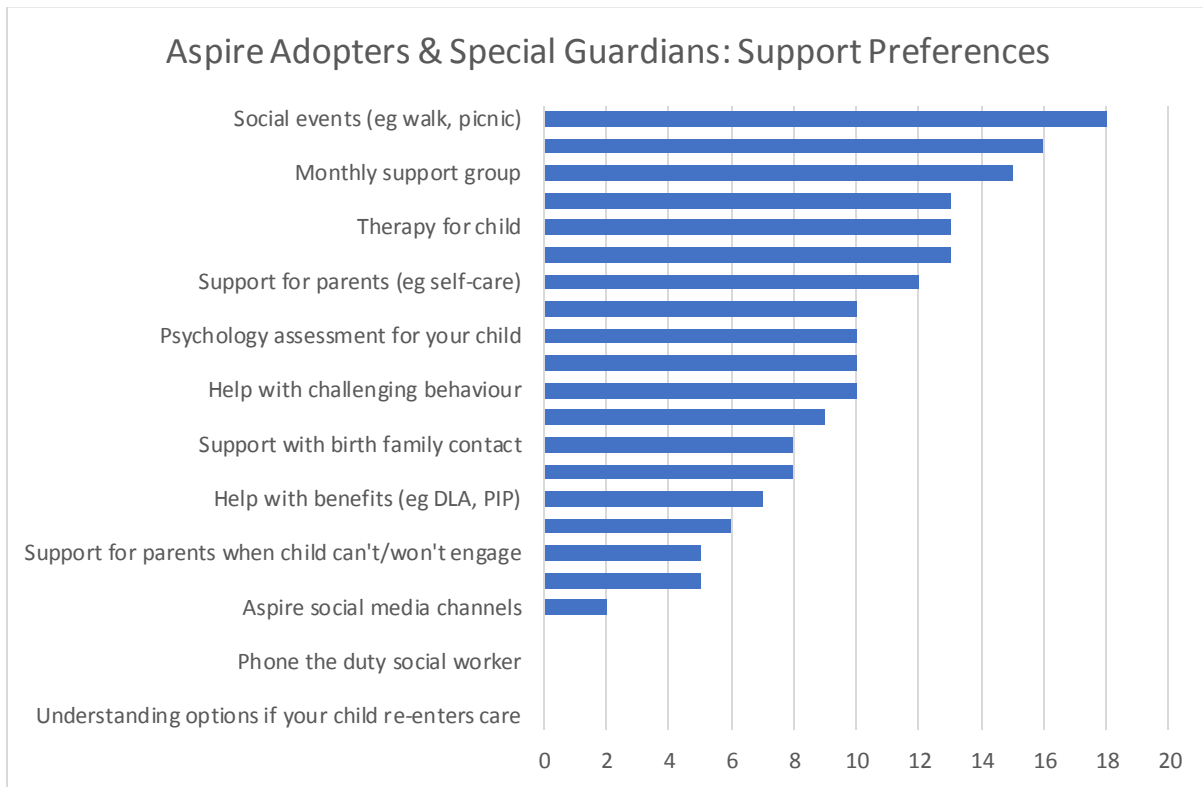
2020/21 130 Families
£186,183.91

20210/22 261 Families

5.11 Have the changes to the post support service had a positive impact for families?

5.12 Changes were made In consultation with the Adopter and Special Guardianship Forum. While they understood what the service wanted to achieve, there was some anxiety that moving away from a mainly allocated service would reduce the support available to families.

5.13 The forum conducted an independent survey in January 2022 which they kindly agreed we could include in this report.



5.14 The Forums key findings were:-

- **Social events** (e.g., walk, picnic) are the most preferred
- Therapeutic **support for the whole family** is more important than therapy for the child or support (e.g., self-care) for parents
- The **monthly support groups** are highly valued
- The next most preferred support is **Access to ASF, Therapy for the child, and Help with educational settings**

SG story: "We were at breaking point with R being violent to us and her brother. We received support from the team went on the foundations of attachment course and then received some Non-Violence Resistance training. It's not perfect, but home is much calmer now "

Adoption story: twin girls with attachment issues one frequently going missing with risky behaviour. The team worked with the Early help team providing DDP counselling and together prevented the girls coming into care

5.15 Demand for post support services

This service has seen a rapid increase in uptake over the year.

Prior to October, the service averaged 120 calls per month. Since then, it has steadily risen to 200 calls in December and nearly 300 calls each for both January and February.

5.16 The challenge for the Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Service

It is important that Aspire continues to review post support services closely with the Forum to ensure they continue to be accessible, timely, relevant and have impact. But it is clear that an increasing cohort and increasing demand is the greatest issue for the service.

5.17 The board will shortly consider a business case considering whether further efficiencies can be made through developing in house staff to deliver a greater proportion of the ASF therapeutic work which will help build the teams overall capacity.

6 Aspire Adoption Panel

6.1 Adoption panel has continued to meet virtually twice a month.

This year the panel made :-

40 Approvals

28 Matches

4 De-Registrations

6.2 The panel chair reports that the quality of Prospective Adopter Reports always good has improved

Ofsted considered panel minutes and met with the chair. They fed back that that panel was effective and efficient.

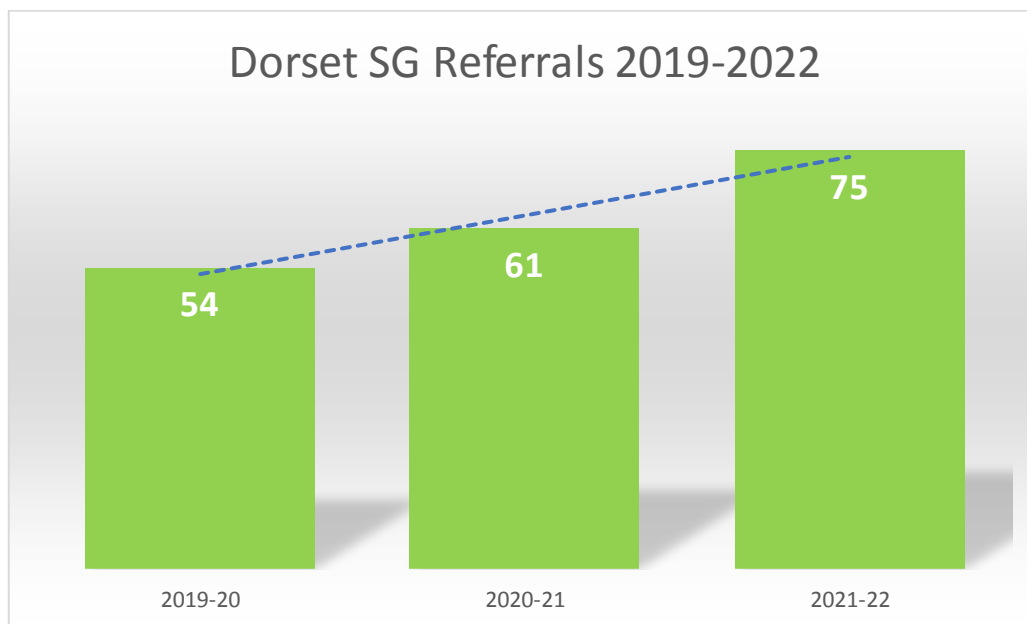
7. Birth parent services

7.1 Aspire commissions an independent Birth Family Matters |(BFM) Support Service from Families for Children. This has been recommissioned from April 2022 to 31st of March 2024 with an option to extend for a further 2 years.

7.2 The service is reviewed quarterly with changes being made to better illustrate the amount and quality of the work undertaken by the service.

7.3 The service has around 100 open referrals and actively works with about 40 birth family members in any one quarter. BFM work closely with Aspire sharing experiences helping inform the service and adopters, how to work sensitively with birth families, promote contact and offers advice regarding the experience of birth family members to the court.

8. Special Guardianship Assessment



SG Assessments completed

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Total
Dorset	7	9	9	9	34

8.1 It should be noted that slightly less than half of the Special guardianship referrals result in a full assessment being completed. This dropout rate is to be expected for a variety of reasons. For example the family may decide that they cannot offer permanence, more than one family member is being assessed, issues arise in the course of the assessment or the child's plan might change.

8.2 In the last 6 months Dorset has supported higher percentage of children to leave care through special guardianship than average.

Dorset last 6 months 20% in 2020-21 Dorset 12% England and Good rate was 14% (1/10/21 to 30/3/22) Children's Services Analysis Tool

8.3 The number of Special guardianship referrals from Dorset has risen and Dorset indicate that this is likely to remain the case as it is preferred that children live with their families wherever that is feasible.

8.4 Dorset and BCP agreed to expand the service by 1 social worker at the May 2021 board. To increase capacity from 100 to 120 pa for both authorities. Aspire has taken 159 assessments in total this year.

8.5 Special Guardianship Referrals for both Local Authorities

2019-20 110

2020-21 140

2021-22 159

8.6 Where demand exceeds capacity Independent social workers are commissioned. These are more expensive, and parts of the assessment still must be completed by Aspire and the child's worker.

8.7 Dorset have been considering this matter. Aspire has undertaken to complete an options paper for the board.

9. Finance

Aspire is funded 49% by Dorset and 51% by BCP. Considerable work took place to agree a 3-year budget for Aspire from 2022 to 2025. The financial model as agreed by the Strategic Partnership Board is included at Appendix 5

In terms of this financial year although the figures have not been fully signed off it we are expecting to report that Aspire has come within budget.

Appendices

Appendix 1

1. Local authority statutory responsibilities

1.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 sets out the duty all Local Authorities to establish and maintain an adoption service , to meet the needs in relation to adoption, of children who have or may be adopted, of adults who have been

adopted, parents and guardians of such children and persons who have or may adopt a child in their area

- 1.2 On the 1st July 2017 Dorset County Council delegated most of those functions, along with some statutory responsibilities in relation to special guardianship, to Aspire Adoption, a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). The division of responsibilities is detailed in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 Aspire (RAA) is funded by Dorset County Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council to deliver adoption and special guardianship services.
- 1.4 Each local authority retains overall responsibility for their adoption and special guardianship services, continuing to have parental responsibility for their own Children in Care, but delegating most adoption and some special guardianship functions to Aspire Adoption.
- 1.5 Aspire works closely with colleagues in the voluntary adoption sector, Families for Children and Parents and Children Together (PACT) are represented on the Aspire Partnership Board.
- 1.6 It is a requirement that elected members satisfy themselves that the Local Authority and the Regional Adoption Agency are working together to meet the needs of children requiring permanence through adoption as laid out by the Statutory Adoption Guidance 2013 and the Adoption Minimum Standards 2014.

The 2014 Adoption Minimum Standards can be accessed at

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336069/Adoption NMS July 2014 for publication.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336069/Adoption_NMS_July_2014_for_publication.pdf)

The 2013 Statutory Adoption Guidance can be accessed at

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/270100/adoption statutory guidance 2013.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/270100/adoption_statutory_guidance_2013.pdf)

Appendix 2

Division of roles and responsibilities between Aspire and the local authorities

- 2.1 Aspire has been delegated all of the local authority statutory responsibilities for adoption, other than the court work leading to Care and Placement Orders.
- 2.2 Aspire has responsibility for recruiting, assessing and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and intercountry adoptions.

- 2.3 The local authorities retain overall responsibility for their Children in Care, but have delegated case responsibility for the majority of children with adoption plans to Aspire following the granting of a Placement Order.
- 2.4 Aspire is responsible for family finding for all children with adoption plans. The RAA is also responsible for preparing children for a move to adoption, for preparing moving calendars or diaries, undertaking life story work and creating life story books.
- 2.5 Aspire undertakes special guardianship assessments for court on behalf of the local authority as part of care proceedings, or in private law applications.
- 2.6 Aspire provides support to all parties affected by adoption, including adopters, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth relatives, and also to special guardians, families created through special guardianship, and to the birth families whose children are subject to SGOs.
- 2.7 The table on the following page sums up the division of responsibilities between Aspire and the local authorities.

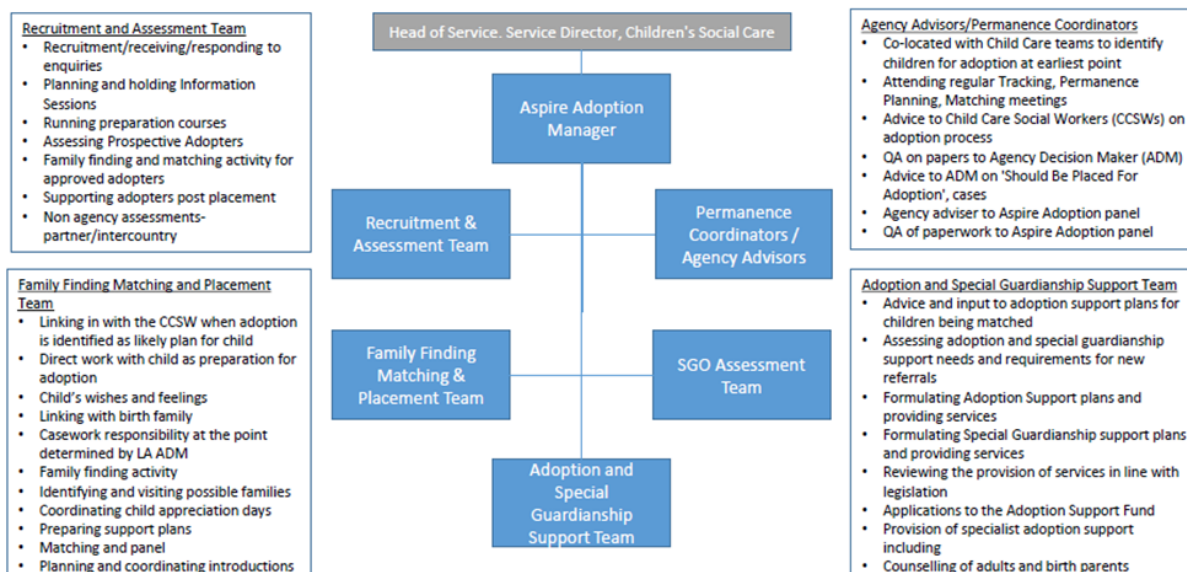
Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT		
Marketing and Recruitment Strategy	✓	
Adopter Recruitment and Enquiries	✓	
Assessment of Prospective Adopters – all Stage One and Stage Two functions	✓	
Completion of Prospective Adopter Report	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for approval of adopters	✓	
Post approval training	✓	
Matching	✓	
Post Placement training for Prospective Adopters	✓	
PERMANENCE PLANNING		
Early identification of a child possibly requiring adoption		✓
Tracking and monitoring the child possibly requiring adoption	✓	✓
Support and advice to child care social worker on the adoption process	✓	✓
Sibling or other specialist assessments if commissioned by LA	✓	
Direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	
Preparation of the Child Permanence Report		✓
Agency Decision Maker for “Should be placed for Adoption” decisions		✓
Case management prior to the point agreed by the LA ADM		✓
Case management from point agreed by the LA ADM	✓	
MATCHING AND PLACEMENT		
Family finding	✓	
Looked After Child reviews	✓	✓
Shortlist and visit potential families	✓	
Organising child appreciation day	✓	
Ongoing direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	
Adoption Panel administration and management	✓	
Agency adviser role	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for Matching prospective adopters and child	✓	
Placement Planning meeting administration and management of introductions	✓	
Support to family post placement and planning and delivery of adoption support	✓	
Ongoing life story work and preparation of Life story book	✓	
Independent Review Officer monitoring of quality of child’s care and care plan		✓

Support prospective adopters in preparation and submission of application for Adoption Order – including attending at court	✓	
Preparation of later life letter	✓	
ADOPTION AND SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SUPPORT		
Assessment for adoption or special guardianship support	✓	
Developing and delivering adoption and special guardianship support plans	✓	
Agree and administer financial support to adoptive families pre and post Adoption Order		✓
Adoption and special guardianship support delivery including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support groups • Social events • Post adoption/special guardianship training • Independent Birth Relative services • Support with ongoing birth relative contact • Specialist Life Story practitioners • Adoption counselling and training 	✓	
Financial support to adopters and special guardians including adoption and special guardianship allowances		✓
SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS		
Receipt of application or court request for special guardianship		✓
Assessment of applicants for Special Guardianship	✓	
NON-AGENCY ADOPTIONS		
Step parent/partner adoption assessments	✓	
Intercountry adoption assessments and post approval and post order support	✓	

Appendix 3

Aspire Organisational Structure and Staffing

Aspire Adoption - Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) – Organisation Structure



2. Staffing

- 2.1 There are 42.61 permanent full -time equivalent posts in Aspire (reduced from 45 in April 2020), with the permanent staffing establishment supplemented by those on casual or fixed term contracts to increase capacity where needed. Many of the staff work part time, with the total number of staff comprising of social workers, support workers, and business support staff totalling about 54.
- 2.2 The service is led and managed by the Aspire Adoption Service Manager, Jennifer Warr, Jennifer Warr is a qualified social worker, has a management qualification and is registered with Social Work England.
- 2.3 The Recruitment & Assessment Team comprises of a team manager, practice manager, 0.5 Family Support Practitioner and 5.69 social workers. This is a reduction of 1.31 FTE Social Workers since April 2020. All are registered with Social Work England
- 2.4 The Family Finding, Matching and Placement Team comprises of a team manager, 0.81 FTE practice manager and 4.3 social workers (a reduction of 1.2 social workers since April 2020) FTE social workers, all of whom are registered with Social Work England, and 3.64 FTE family support workers.
- 2.5 The Special Guardianship Assessment team has a team manager, practice manager and 4.27 social workers – this is a reduction of 1.23 FTE social workers since April 2020. One FTE social worker is on maternity leave and is only backfilled with 0.5 FTE social worker meaning that the actual number of staff in the team currently is 3.77 FTE social workers. All are registered with Social Work England.
- 2.6 The Adoption & Special Guardianship Support team has a team manager, 0.81 FTE practice manager and 4.31 FTE social workers, which is a reduction of 0.69 FTE social workers since April 2020, all of whom are registered with Social Work England. The team also has 2 FTE family support workers, and a 0.4 FTE clinical psychologist.
- 2.7 There are 2 FTE Permanence Coordinators, who also act as Agency Advisers to the Aspire Adoption Panel and Aspire Agency Decision Maker, and to the Agency Decision Makers in the local authorities in relation to decisions as to whether a child should be adopted.
- 2.8 The service is supported by 6 FTE business support staff including a senior business support officer, a panel administrator, and a marketing, media and monitoring officer.
- 2.9 All of the social workers employed by Aspire are registered with Social Work England, and many of the staff, including support workers, have additional qualifications including skills in a variety of therapeutic interventions such as theraplay, sensory integration, mindfulness and DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy).
- 2.10 Aspire also has access to dedicated clinical psychology support for staff and service users.

2.11 No agency staff are employed, and any vacancies attract a high standard of applications across all areas of the work undertaken by Aspire. Casual staff add capacity for one off pieces of work in the Recruitment and Assessment Team and the Special Guardianship Assessment Team. The 3 fixed term contract staff in place at the beginning of the year have now transferred into permanent positions as they became available when staff left. There is one part time social worker contracted to cover maternity leave and another full-time social worker contracted to cover a vacancy.

3. Staff training and development

3.1 Staff in Aspire have access to training and courses run by Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole Council as the host authority paying for these from the Aspire training budget of £8,000 a year. They have access to external courses, but only dependent on budgetary restrictions. In 2020/21 12 members staff attended Dyadic Developmental Parenting training.

3.2 Staff have monthly supervision and annual appraisals, and regular team case and practice reflection sessions are facilitated by the clinical psychologists

3.3 A staff forum for all staff in Aspire is held every 4 months to update on Aspire performance data, local and national issues relating to the service and to develop the team service plans.

Appendix 4

Governance

The following is taken from the Inter Authority Agreement

SCHEDULE 2 – TERMS OF REFERENCE

Governance Structure



Part 1 – Strategic Partnership Board

1 **Name:**

The name of the Board for Aspire Adoption shall be the **Strategic Partnership Board** which is established pursuant to an Inter Authority Agreement between Bournemouth Borough Council,

Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole ("the Councils") for the creation of a Regional Adoption Agency.

2 Role:

The Board will provide advice, oversight and endorsement of the strategic direction of Aspire Adoption.

3 The Board will:

- 3.1 Provide and review the strategic direction of Aspire Adoption;
- 3.2 Oversee, review and endorse budget setting and make recommendations to the Councils for Aspire Adoption;
 - 3.2.1 Oversee, review and endorse the Business Plan annually and make recommendations to the Councils for Aspire Adoption;
 - 3.2.2 Attempt to resolve disputes between the Councils under the terms of the Inter Authority Agreement.

4 Accountability and Responsibility:

- 4.1 Each Local Authority is responsible for ensuring that their nominated representative(s) (or named substitute) are available to attend all Board meetings, which will be scheduled in advance.
- 4.2 All members of the Board will be in a position to make decisions within their respective organisation, where appropriate.
- 4.3 All members of the Board will be responsible for reporting to their organisation, through their respective governance arrangements.

5 Meetings of the Board

- 5.1 The Board will meet every six months or at a greater or lesser frequency if it so decides.
- 5.2 The Board will elect a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson from amongst its members.
- 5.3 The Chairperson will agree the dates, times and venues for the meetings of the Board. The meeting timetable will be scheduled over the year, to reflect both planned monitoring and evaluation requirements.
- 5.4 The Chairperson shall normally preside at all meetings of the Board.
- 5.5 The Chairperson will be responsible for agreeing meeting agendas and draft minutes for circulation.
- 5.6 Agendas and papers for the meeting will be sent out at least five working days prior to the meeting in order to provide time for members of the Board to read them and identify actions for their own organisations.
- 5.7 Minutes of meeting will be circulated within 5 working days after the meeting with an action list.

6 Membership:

- 6.1 The Board will consist of:

- 6.1.1 Portfolio Holder and Executive Director for Childrens Services for Bournemouth Borough Council;
 - 6.1.2 Cabinet Member for Learning, Skills and Children's Safeguarding and Corporate Director for Children's, Adults and Community Services for Dorset County Council;
 - 6.1.3 Portfolio Holder and Strategic Director for Childrens Services for the Borough of Poole Council.
- 6.2 The Board will consult (so far as it considers proper and appropriate to do so):
- 6.2.1 Representatives from local Voluntary Adoption Agencies/Families for Children; and
 - 6.2.2 A representative from Stakeholders.
- 6.3 Members of the Board should:
- 6.3.1 Commit to attending the majority of meetings or nominate a suitable substitute who can attend in their place who will be expected to exercise the powers of the Member for whom they are substituting. Only Board members or their named representatives can attend Board meetings;
 - 6.3.2 Uphold and support the Board decisions and be prepared to follow though actions and decisions for the Board proposals and declaring any conflict of interest should it arise;
 - 6.3.3 Be prepared to represent the Board at stakeholder events and support the agreed consensus view of the Board when speaking on behalf of the Board to other parties.

7 Voting – Quorum

- 7.1 No quorum is necessary for the routine business and the receiving of reports. However where the Chairperson determines that a critical decision is required there must be a representative from all the Councils.
- 7.2 In the spirit of effective collaboration and partnership working, the Board will always seek to come to agreement through consensus and unanimity following debate and discussion where all the members will be encouraged to participate.
- 7.3 The Members of the Board will be expected to subscribe to the seven principles of public life in their work and decision making. The principles are selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
- 7.4 Members will be expected to declare any personal interests in the business of the Board and to withdraw from participation where such interests are prejudicial or pecuniary.

Part 2 – Operational Management Board

1 Name:

The name of the Board for Aspire Adoption shall be the **Operational Management Board** which is established pursuant to an Inter Authority Agreement between Bournemouth Borough Council,

Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole ("the Councils") for the creation of a Regional Adoption Agency.

2 Role:

The Board will provide support, advice and management to Aspire Adoption to ensure that statutory requirements and the Business Plan is delivered effectively.

3 The Board will:

- 3.1 oversee the implementation of the Aspire Adoption Budget and Business Plan;
- 3.2 oversee the commissioning arrangements and operational performance against agreed local priorities and targets and in line with national priorities and targets.

4 Accountability and Responsibility:

- 4.1 Each Local Authority is responsible for ensuring that their nominated representative(s) (or named substitute) are available to attend all Board meetings, which will be scheduled in advance.
- 4.2 This Board will report to the Strategic Partnership Board.

5 Meetings of the Board

- 5.1 The Board will meet quarterly or at a greater or lesser frequency if it so decides.
- 5.2 The Board will elect a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson from amongst its members.
- 5.3 The Chairperson will agree the dates, times and venues for the meetings of the Board. The meeting timetable will be scheduled over the year, to reflect both planned monitoring and evaluation requirements.
- 5.4 The Chairperson shall normally preside at all meetings of the Board.
- 5.5 The Chairperson will be responsible for agreeing meeting agendas and draft minutes for circulation.
- 5.6 Agendas and papers for the meeting will be sent out at least five working days prior to the meeting in order to provide time for members of the Board to read them and identify actions for their own organisations.
- 5.7 Minutes of meeting will be circulated within 5 working days after the meeting with an action list.

6 Membership:

- 6.1 The Board will consist of:
 - 6.1.1 Service Director for Children's Social Care for Bournemouth;
 - 6.1.2 Assistant Director – Care and Protection for Dorset;
 - 6.1.3 Head of Children & Young People's Social Care for Poole; 6.1.4 Childrens Services Commissioners from each of the three Parties;
 - 6.1.5 Adoption Aspire Manager.
- 6.2 Members of the Board should:

- 6.2.1 Commit to attending the majority of meetings or nominate a suitable substitute who can attend in their place who will be expected to exercise the powers of the Member for whom they are substituting. Only Board members or their named representatives can attend Board meetings;
- 6.2.2 Uphold and support the Board decisions and be prepared to follow though actions and decisions and declaring any conflict of interest should it arise;
- 6.2.3 Be prepared to represent the Board at stakeholder events and support the agreed consensus view of the Board when speaking on behalf of the Board to other parties.

7 Voting – Quorum

- 7.1 No quorum is necessary for the routine business and the receiving of reports. However where the Chairperson determines that a critical decision is required there must be a representative from all the Councils.
- 7.2 In the spirit of effective collaboration and partnership working, the Board will always seek to come to agreement through consensus and unanimity following debate and discussion where all the members will be encouraged to participate.
- 7.3 The Members of the Board will be expected to subscribe to the seven principles of public life in their work and decision making. The principles are selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
- 7.4 Members will be expected to declare any personal interests in the business of the Board and to withdraw from participation where such interests are prejudicial or pecuniary.

Appendix 5 -

Aspire Adoption Panel

- 5.1 Aspire Adoption operates an Adoption Panel, constituted in accordance with legislation, regulations and guidance. The panel has an independent chairperson, and 16 members on a Central List from which each panel is drawn. There is no legal maximum number of panel members at each panel but in practice, a maximum of 6 or 7 attend each panel, including the panel chair and a social worker. The designated doctor for looked after children in the local authorities funding Aspire is also the agency medical adviser and is a full member of the panel.
- 5.2 The panel is serviced by a panel administrator and has access to legal advice if needed. The professional advice to the panel is provided by the two Permanence

Coordinators, one of whom attends each Panel to ensure the smooth running and to advise on policies and procedures.

- 5.3 Current membership includes individuals with personal experience of adoption as adopters and adopted adults. It also includes experienced social workers with direct experience of adoption work, a psychotherapist with experience of working in a child and adolescent mental health setting, and panel members with experience of working in an educational setting.
- 5.4 Members of the Central List from which individual panel membership is drawn reflect the diversity of modern society as far as possible, and include those who are single, in heterosexual and same sex relationships. One panel member on the Central List has personal experience of disability. There is some diversity in terms of age, with panel members in their 30s and others who are retired. Although most panel members are of white British ethnic origin, one panel member is of black African ethnicity and another is of Indian descent.
- 5.5 The functions of the panel in relation to adoption matters are
- to recommend whether prospective adopters are suitable to adopt a child;
 - to recommend whether a proposed match between a child and prospective adopters is a suitable one.
 - In circumstances where a child is relinquished for adoption and no Placement Order is applied for, the panel will recommend whether the child should be placed for adoption
- 5.6 The panel can also give advice about the numbers and ages of children in relation to prospective adopters, also about post adoption contact, delegated parental responsibility and adoption support. The panel has a consultative role regarding the agency's policies and procedures, and a monitoring role regarding quality assurance and ensuring that the time scales set out in the Adoption & Children Act 2002 are met.
- 5.7 The Aspire Adoption Panel makes recommendations based on detailed written reports prepared by the child's social worker and adoption social worker, and the social worker and team manager's attendance at panel to clarify points if needed.
- 5.8 When considering the approval or deregistration of prospective adopters or a match between prospective adopters and a child, adoptive applicants have the option of attending panel in person, to provide scope to discuss and clarify any

issues relevant to the application. Applicants who decide not to attend in person are not disadvantaged in any way and no judgement is made from their decision not to do so although every effort will be made to assist their attendance.

5.9 The recommendations and advice of the panel are referred, along with the final agreed minutes of the meeting, to the Agency Decision Maker, for a decision to be made and conveyed to all parties within the time scales laid down in the Adoption & Children Act 2002.

5.10 The Panel chair is independent, is an experienced chair and an adopter of 2 children. He attends the Aspire Strategic Partnership Board and presents a report to the Aspire Operational Management Board and Strategic Partnership Board every 6 months in line with standard 17 of the Adoption Minimum Standards, on the quality of reports being presented to the panel. This includes whether the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met, and whether there is a thorough, rigorous, consistent and fair approach across the service in the assessment of whether a child should be placed for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the proposed placement. His most recent report is included as Appendix 5

5.11 In 2020/21 the Adoption Panels have all been held virtually due to the covid 19 pandemic. The panels have adjusted well to the new way of working and business has been uninterrupted.

Appendix 6

Aspire Adoption 3 year Financial Modal attached