

Aspire Adoption Recruitment and Sufficiency Policy 2021 – 2024

Aspire Adoption Regional Adoption agency was one of the first regional adoption agencies starting on 1st July 2017. Bournemouth Borough Council, the Borough of Poole, and Dorset County Council delegated most of the adoption functions, along with some statutory responsibilities in relation to special guardianship, to Aspire. As a result of local government reorganisation in April 2019, aspire is now funded by two councils, namely Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole Council (BCP) and Dorset Council.

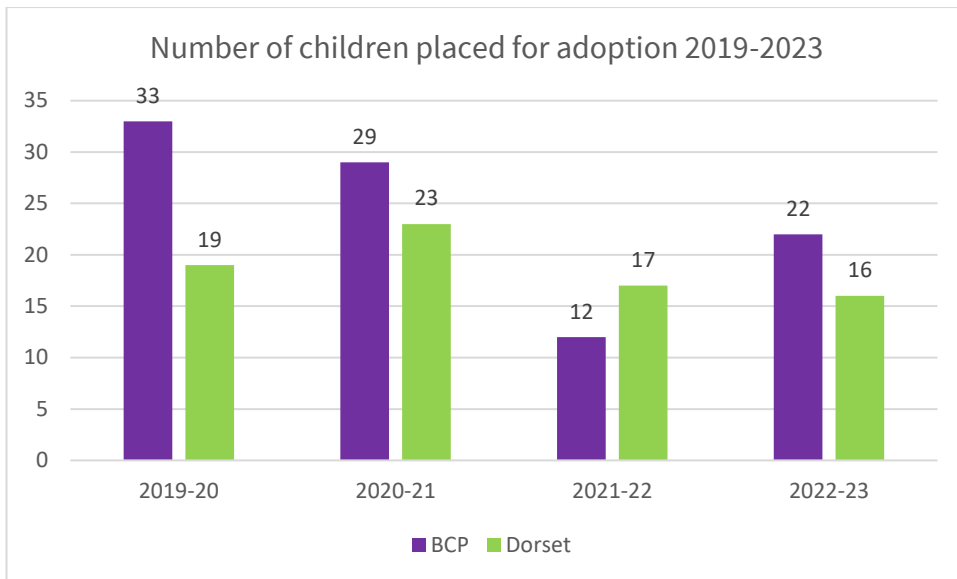
Each local authority retains overall responsibility for their adoption and special guardianship services, continuing to have parental responsibility for their own Children in Care, but delegates most adoption and some special guardianship functions to Aspire Adoption. Aspire Adoption works in partnership with Families for Children, a Voluntary Adoption Agency based in Devon.

Aspire has responsibility for the recruitment, assessment, and post placement support prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and intercountry adoptions.

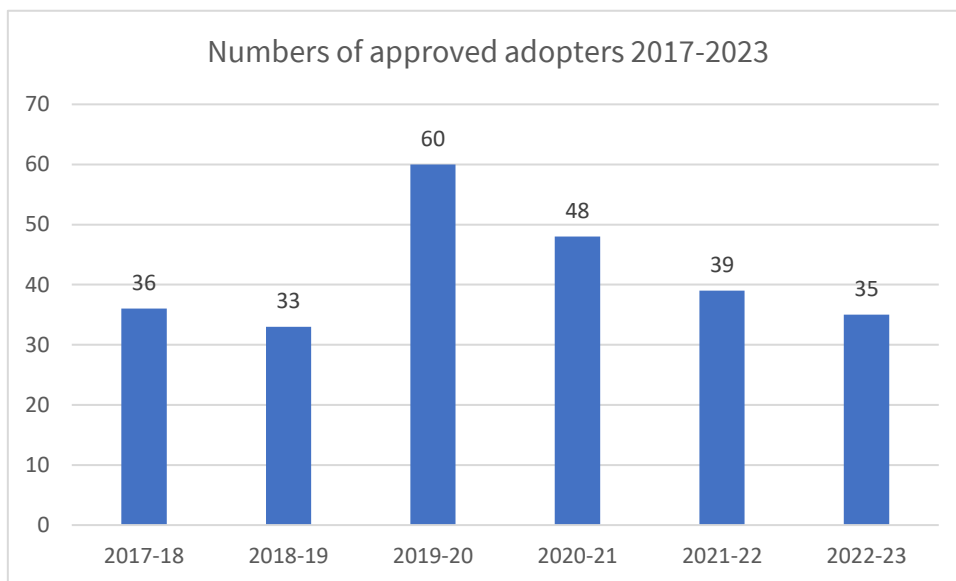
The local authorities retain overall responsibility for their Children in Care but have delegated case responsibility for most children with adoption plans to Aspire following the granting of a Placement Order.

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.

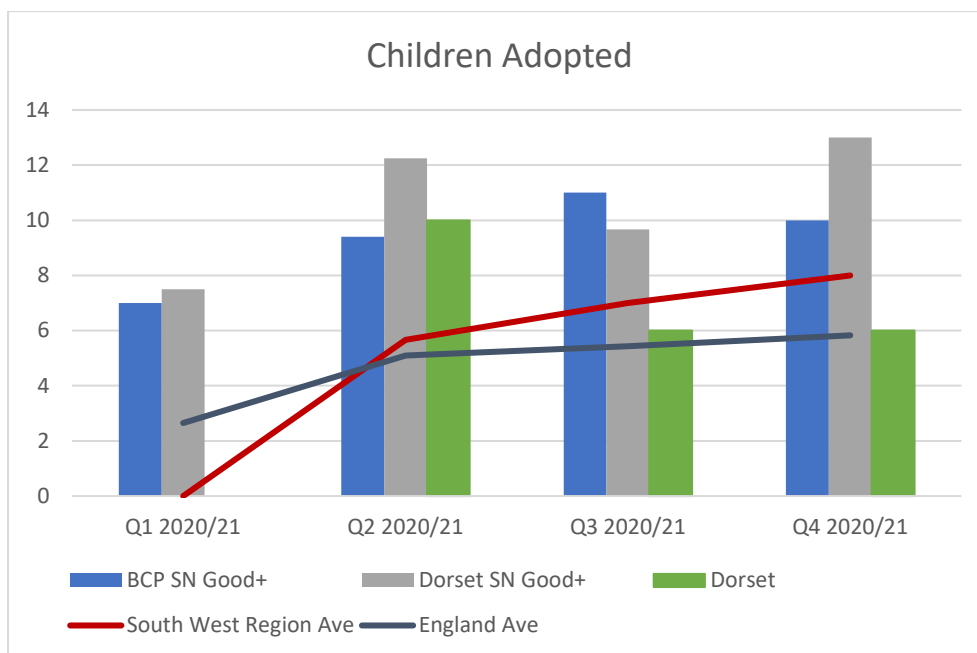
Since 1st of July 2017 to end of March 23 Aspire has successfully provided adoptive parents to 277 children from BCP and Dorset.



Aspire can recruit sufficient adopters to be able to provide adopters for children outside of the BCP Dorset area



As demonstrated by last year's adoption score card BCP and Dorset have a strong track record of the percentage of children leaving care through adoption



Permanency through Adoption

The most recent Government Adoption Strategy ‘Achieving excellence every where’ Department for Education July 2021 cites the need to recruit adopters from all communities so we have a range of parents able and well prepared to meet the needs of children waiting to be adopted .

As a permanence solution adoption is viewed as preferable for most children who cannot be parented by their birth families because adoption offers more stability, and measurable outcomes for children, for example in education are better. But this must be balanced by the needs and circumstances of each child.

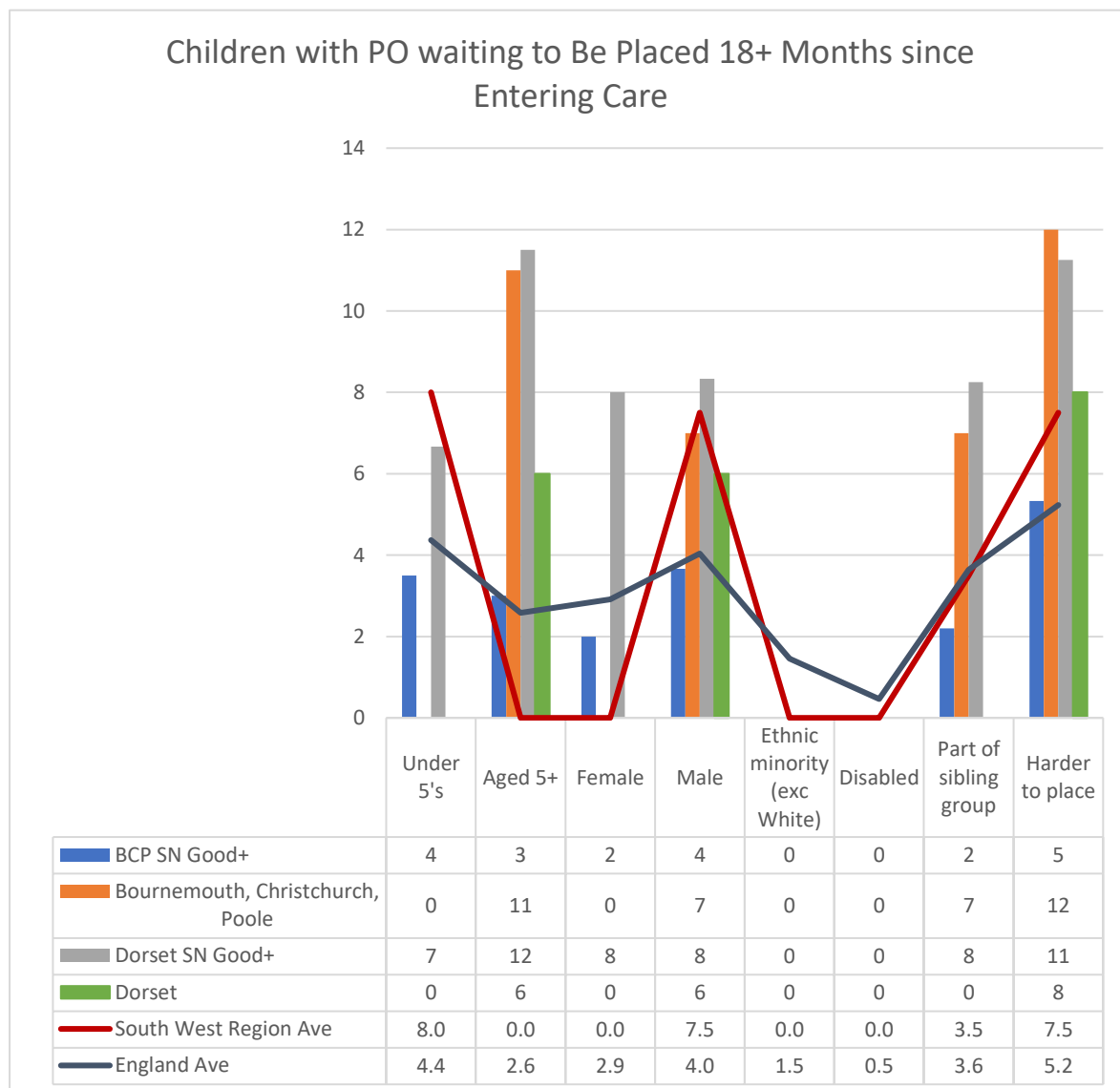
The 2020 average attainment 8 score for children who left care through adoption was 35.5 compared to 21.4 for children in care and 21 .3. But the average attainment 8 score for all children is 50.2 reflecting the continued need for adopted children to receive higher levels of support at school.

Adoption an option for all children

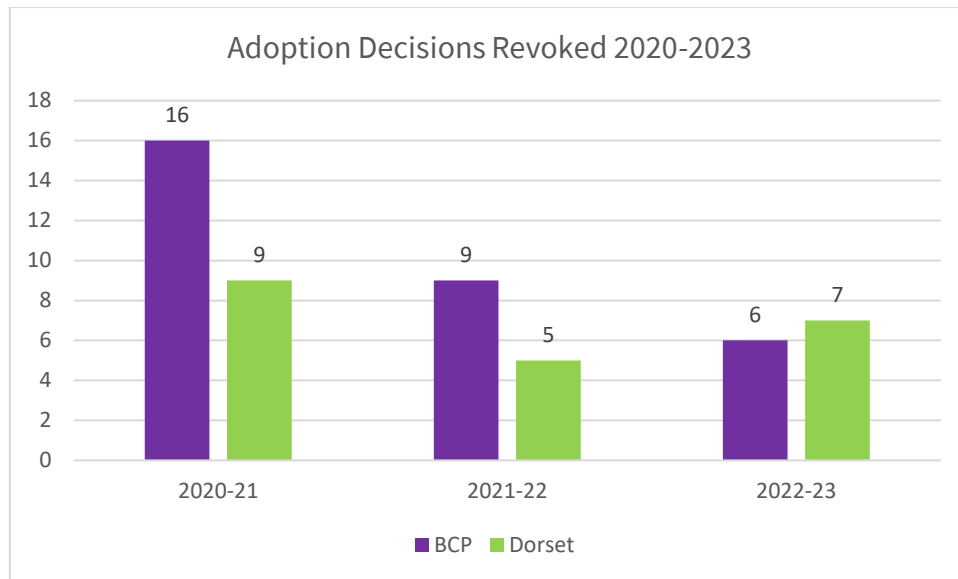
BCP and Dorset permanency strategies and practice are driving ever greater ambition in use of adoption for a wider group of children. No longer seeing adoption as predominantly babies and under 5 years of age but triple planning for a far wider range children with adoption as an option for older children, sibling groups, children with additional needs and children requiring direct contact with birth families.

Aspire has a strong track record in being able to match and place younger children quickly and though we have great success stories in placing older children, siblings, ethnic

minority children and children with more complex needs there is a small cohort of children mainly male older children and siblings for whom we have not been successful in finding suitable families either with the Aspire agency or elsewhere.



An indication of this can be gathered by the number of placement orders that were revoked over the last 3 years. This is only an indication, because children's circumstances and needs change over time and some of these revocations were a positive decision for the child, for example where strong bonds had been made with their foster carers and / or birth family circumstances had improved. But there are still instances where the placement order has been revoked because we have been unable to find a suitable family. The chart shows that this is mainly children over 5 and siblings. In this year it was also in the main boys we know in previous years it has been girls. Nationally the placement of BME children and children with a disability has been more challenging, to date this has not been an issue for Aspire who is able to provide BME adopters and found adopters for most disabled children.



The timing and numbers of revocations in the last year have been skewed by changes in court priorities over the pandemic. We need to better understand the reasons for revocations and are currently doing a deep dive in this area looking at revocations over the last 18 months to help improve the service.

A whole service approach to widening the pool of adopters

Our recruitment team has found that by focusing our messages to prospective adopters we are getting more interest from families interested in older children and sibling groups. The assessment team are building on this, reviewing our communication, and training with prospective adopters, and introducing disability, age, siblings, and other complexities from the start of the process. Keeping prospective adopters in touch with our children seeking families and finding creative ways to help adopters explore how flexible they might be, backed up with better knowledge of the support we can offer through childhood and into adult hood will help us place a wider group of children.

Building the confidence of key agencies in adoption for a wider range of children

Adoption as a plan can be ruled out at various points by several agencies. Social workers, independent review officers, panels need to be confident that adoption can be a viable plan for older children and siblings as do Guardians and the courts. The permanence strategies will need to be backed up with good communication, training, and leadership if we are to break the myths of which children are suitable for adoption and which adults make suitable adopters.

Collaboration with VAA's, regional and national RAA's

Breadth of adopters

The DfE Adoption strategy identified that Regional Adoption agencies need to be welcoming to a greater range of adopters specifically: -

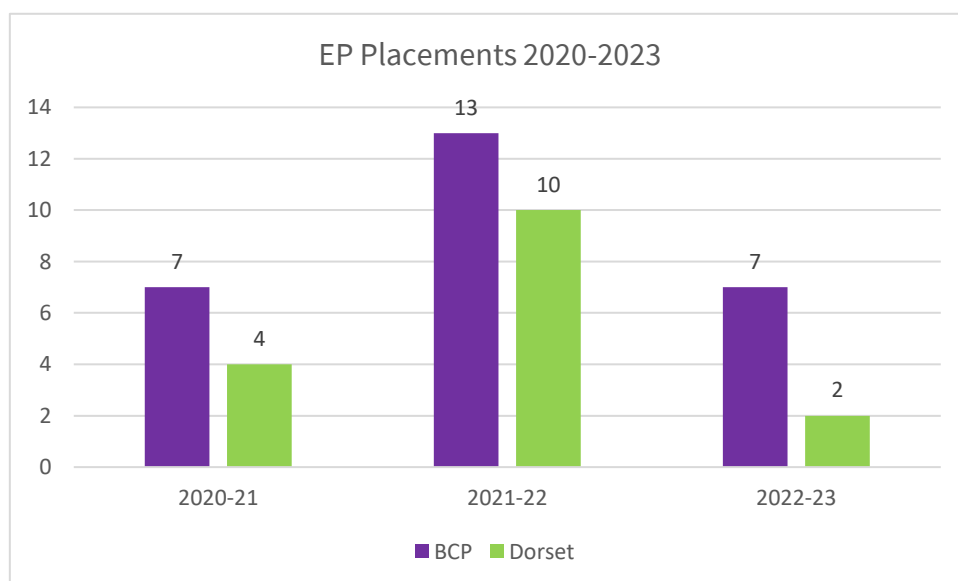
Race: BCP and Dorset children needing adopters are predominantly White British some East European and the remainder tend to be a complex mix of other races, for example, we are currently seeking adopters for a Kurdish/ Iranian child. As evidenced in the data Aspire can recruit a good range of adopters in terms of race. We have developed relationships with London authorities as we can offer adopters with sought after racial profiles. Our challenge is to make better links with the East European community.

Single and LGBTQ: Aspire has always valued and attracted single adopters 1 in 4 of our adopters classify themselves as LGBTQ. Both groups are represented within the forums and panel.

Income and accommodation: Aspire has recruited adopters in many types of accommodation and income brackets including benefits. It is important that these issues continue not to be a barrier for loving families.

Early Permanence

Early permanence: fostering children with adopters so that if the decision the child should be adopted the child can remain with the family. The risk being held by the adults rather than the child. BCP, Dorset and Aspire have been developing the use of early permanence with younger children.



More recently in line with the thinking in the DfE Adoption Strategy July 2021 Aspire has successfully used EP with older children and to prevent potential additional moves for children when their original adoptive placement has broken down. Practitioners are getting more comfortable in supporting adopters and decision makers to use early permanence where there is a lower degree of certainty that adoption will be the ultimate plan.

Just over a third of adopters are currently approved for early permanence, covering a greater range of children including older children and siblings.

The Sufficiency challenges

Is for Aspire to: -

1. Recruit a wider range of adoptive families specifically for older children and sibling groups.
2. Recruit and support a wider range of early permanence adopters
3. Prepare adopters to be meet these needs
4. Offer flexible support to adoptive families through childhood and into adulthood.
5. Continue to collaborate with VAA sector to help meet our sufficiency targets

And for BCP and Dorset continue to implement ambitious permanency policies

Aspire, BCP and Dorset partnership: -

1. Continue to track and plan permanency together for individual children
2. Monitor trends, learning from revocations adjusting recruitment targets accordingly
3. Review financial and general support packages and test whether new approaches may encourage a wider range of adopters and enable more children to achieve permanency through adoption.

Developing a more nuanced approach to performance

2020 to 2021 Aspire had a target of approving 50 adoptive households. This target was reached in 2019 and almost reached 48 adoptive households in 2020 to 2021 during the pandemic. Aspire is a successful agency in terms of the numbers of children adopted and adopters provided in house and externally. The key development for the agency is to be able to increase and support the numbers of adopters taking older children who are often more complex and sibling groups and place a larger number of children directly into EP placements.

Sufficiency targets for the recruitment of adopters over the next 3 years

	Children 4 plus	2 siblings	3 plus siblings	EP	Total No
2021 – 2022	10	5	1	15	50
2022 – 2023	15	6	2	20	53
2023 to 2024	15	7	2	20	55