

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

UPDATE ON THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY - ADOPT COAST TO COAST – APRIL 2021 TO FEBRUARY 2022

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

1 Marketing Activity

1.1 The marketing activity for 2021-2022 for Adopt Coast to Coast was all about brand recognition and getting the name out as far and wide as possible. Whilst events and some more traditional tools couldn't be employed due to the pandemic activity focused on the following actions:

- Public relations – stories about our launch, appeals, events, campaigns and more
- Internal communications – amongst three partners
- Radio campaign – activity during the launch and another campaign in October
- TV advert – to celebrate the launch of Adopt Coast to Coast
- Google advertising – making sure Adopt Coast to Coast appears highly when searched for
- Facebook and Instagram advertising – to raise awareness and promote events
- Display advertising on key websites to raise awareness of Adopt Coast to Coast
- Third party campaigns – joining in with activity such as for National Adoption Week or New Family Social's

1.2 LGBT+ Adoption and Fostering Week

- Organic social media activity
- Newsletters to adopters and those interested in adoption
- Spoke support from three partner local authorities including emails, internal publications, external publications, intranet
- Regular website updates

2 Together for Children's Adoption Performance

2.1 It is very positive to note that the transition to Adopt Coast to Coast has not had a detrimental impact on the children who have moved to adoptive families or recruitment of Adopt Coast to Coast prospective adopters assessed by Together for Children's adoption team.

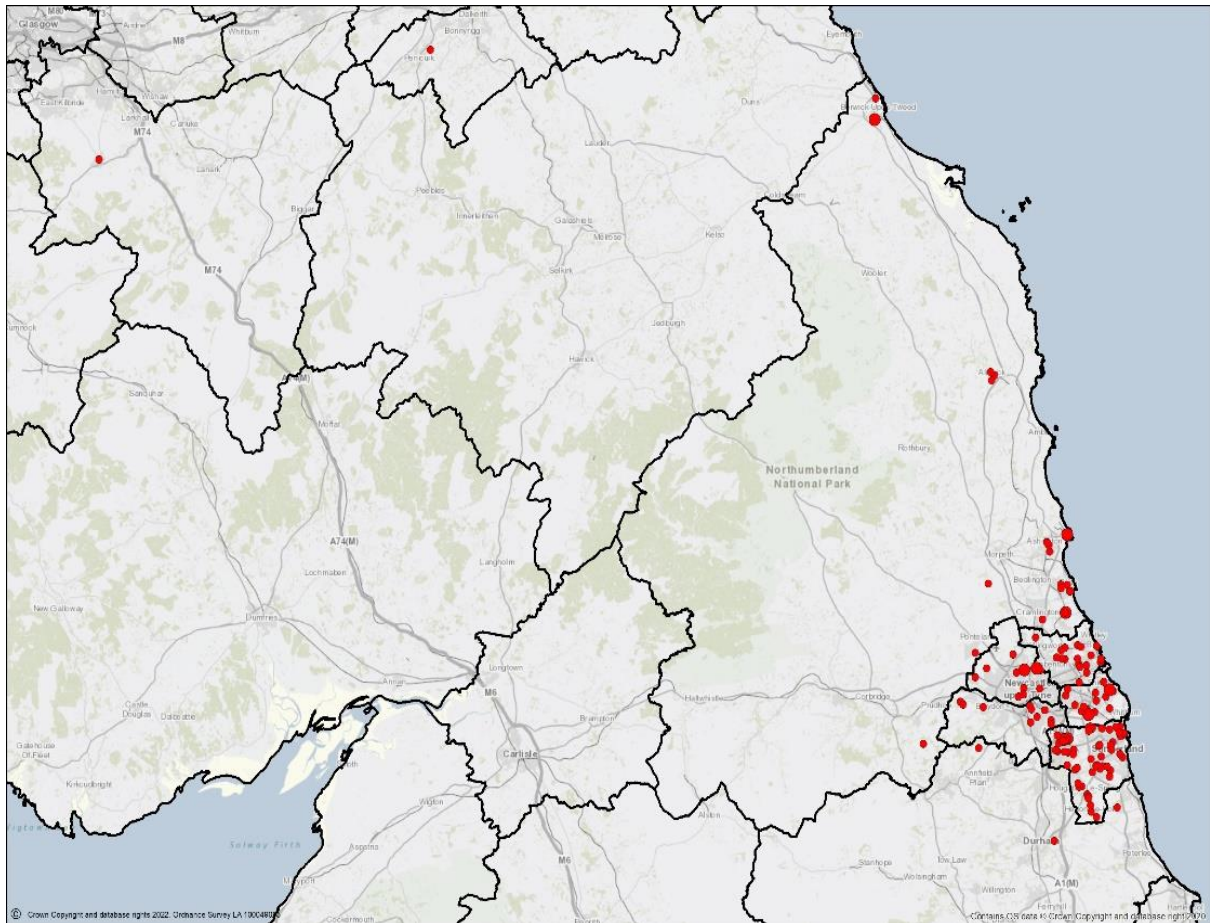
2.2 Children's Journey

	2020/21 @31 st March 2021	2021/22 @ 28 th February 2022	Analysis
Waiting with PO	14	13	<p>The slight upward trend of children waiting more than 6 months for a match with their adoptive family reflects the national position. Children with additional needs and groups of brothers and sisters are waiting longer. The national campaigns continue to seek to address these challenges.</p> <p>In respect of interagency usage, the 2021/22 number includes 5 children who were matched the previous year though the ADM was not completed until after the 1st of April.</p> <p>The reduction of 50% in interagency placements is a significant reduction in costs for TfC.</p>
Waited over 6 months	5	8	
Matched	39	27	
Interagency use	28	14	

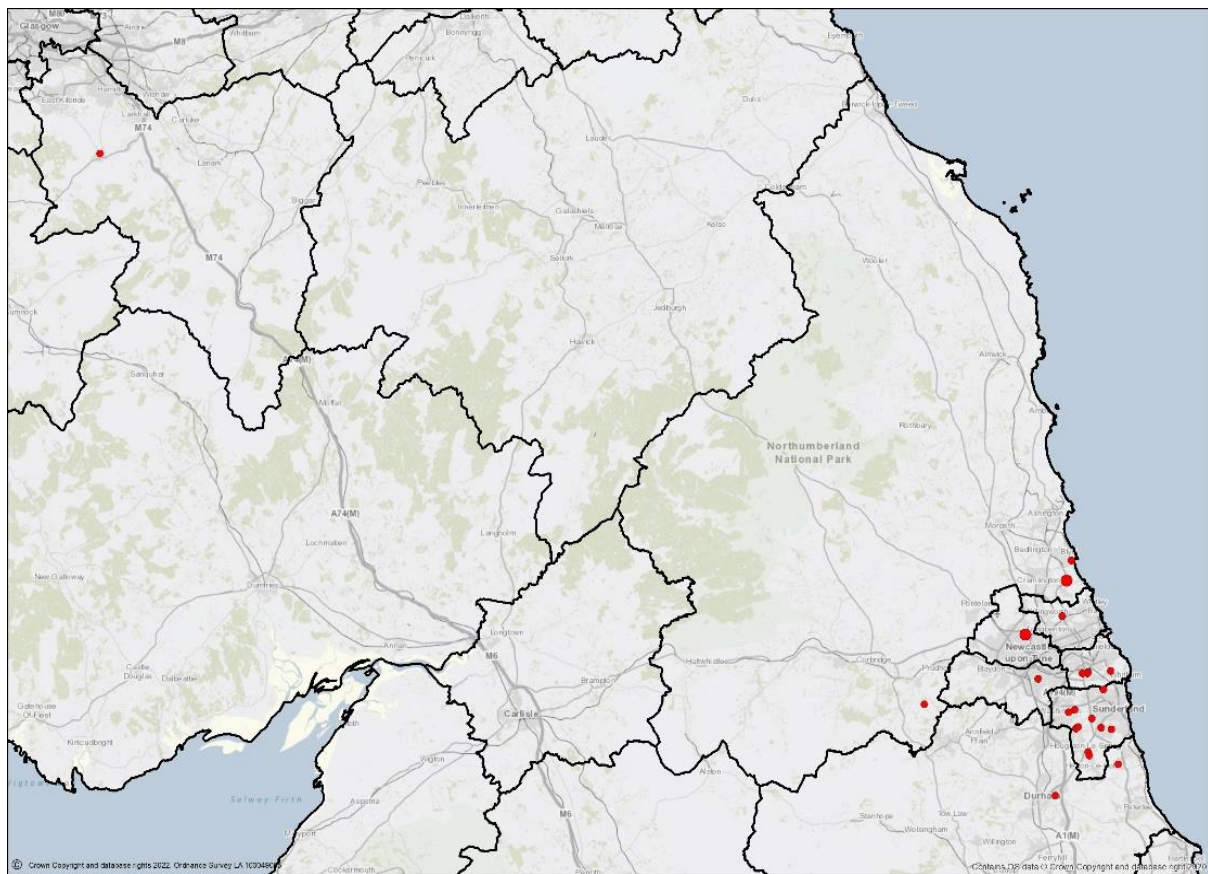
2.3 Prospective Adopter's Journey

Together for Children's adoption team are responding to enquiries promptly and as the map shows below covering a large geographical area. It is noteworthy that the adoption team are receiving as many enquiries from outside the council's border as they are from within.

Enquiries received



Commenced Stage 1



	2020/21	2021/22*	Analysis
Enquiries	34	145	<p>The increased number of enquiries being converted to applications (stage 1) and approvals has enabled TfC to match more children to the Adopt Coast to Coast prospective adopters they approved.</p> <p>There are already 19 prospective adoptive families in stage 1 and 2 with TfC who we would expect to be approved in 2021/22. We therefore anticipate the 2nd year of Adopt Coast to Coast will build on the excellent performance the TfC</p>
Stage 1	39	45	
Approvals	19	26	
Number of matches for TfC approved adopters	11	19	

			adoption team have achieved in 2021/22.
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*data up to 28th February 2022

2.4 Prospective adopter journey

Alex and Sophie originally contacted Adopt Coast to Coast in April 2021 after seeing a press release about the launch of the then new Regional Adoption Agency.

The couple are based in Scotland, falling under South Lanarkshire Council. Although the couple had made enquiries with both their local authority and Scottish Adoption (VAA), both were experiencing long delays due to the pandemic, so having read about Adopt Coast to Coast they were eager to explore their options.

Sophie said: *"We made our enquiry in Scotland around February 2021 and at the time the agency was only planning on hosting one preparation group over Zoom for 6 households later in the year, in September. That was it for the year, so it didn't fill us with hope. We weren't sure about the timescales, and we weren't sure about the way they operated as we wanted things to happen quickly. We'd already waited four years since we started trying for a family, so another year seemed a lot."*

Although the applicants would have come under Cumbria County Council's remit due to their geographical location (and automated settings in the system) the team at Cumbria felt it was too far to travel and so the other spokes were asked if they would pick it up. Together for Children (TFC) were the first to volunteer.

The couple were delighted at the speed of the response from TFC and the very next day attended an information event to find out more.

Sophie added: *"We send an email one day and we suddenly found ourselves sitting in a Teams meeting the next. It was exactly what we wanted to do as we just couldn't get to that point with anyone else. The following Monday a social worker was sitting in our house! We were so, so impressed. It was so quick and were pleased to find people who actually wanted us to come and be adopters."*

Alex added: *"The language they used and the way they explained things was very clear and really honest. We really appreciated that as we didn't want people to talk around the topics."*

The couple were advised to wait three months following completion of IVF treatment, and they were so set on the decision to progress with Adopt Coast to Coast that they had their calendar set for when they could get back in touch to officially start the application!

September 2021 – commenced stage 1 and completed 3-day preparation sessions

November 2021 – moved into stage 2

January 2022 – approved as suitable to adopt

March 2022 – matched with a 9 month old baby girl

“For us TFC have got it perfectly – they have completely nailed it. They do all of the processes, make sure all of the checks and balances are done which is completely right and proper, but they don’t waste time with bureaucracy either.”

3 Marketing activity priorities for 2022/23

- Marketing activity will include a focus on potential enquirers for groups of brothers and sisters, children with additional health needs and/or developmental uncertainty.
- Alongside the Adopt Coast to Coast activity, there is a pan regional initiative to increase opportunities for children to be adopted by families living in the North East and Cumbria through strategic partnership working across the 3 RAAs and 4 VAAs in our region.
- Continue to review and develop marketing activity and the recruitment practice across the spokes being cognizant of the lived experience of children and their adoptive families and the findings from the national mystery shopper activity.

4 Recommendation

- 4.1 The Committee are asked to consider the report.

Paula Gibbons, Head of Service, Adopt Coast to Coast