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Coram-i permanency planning and long- term fostering project

Evaluation report

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Key messages

The Coram-i project aimed to address delays in achieving permanency for children who will be fostered long term. The focus was to improve the understanding of looked after and child in need populations and to introduce improvements to key processes. The innovation was to adapt successful approaches and interventions to improvement in adoption to long term fostering. These ranged from tracking of cases and performance monitoring to improving matching and recruitment processes.

Coram-i established many of their approaches and interventions in 4 sites (children's social care services). These were bespoke to local needs and dovetailed with wider improvement plans. Some of these did not continue a year after the project had ended and some of these were adapted scaled down, simplified or merged with existing or new practices.

The evaluation collected qualitative observation (on meetings and events (n=13) and interview data (with social workers, management (n= 109), and local quantitative data on child outcomes and timeliness of processes and recruitment of foster carers, in 3 waves over a 2 year period that allowed for impact to be assessed 1 year after the Coram-i project has finished. The analysis found that:

- Coram-i's work had a positive impact on timeliness of permanency planning in relation to the frequency and timeliness of permanency planning meetings in all intervention sites where this was a focus of Coram-i's work. There was also evidence of the improvement of timeliness in other areas of permanency planning such as matching of children, but this was less clear.
- The culture of the services shifted to a more child focussed, more strategic and data informed way of working.
- There was an overall improvement in the quality of permanency planning processes driven through embedding a performance culture.
- Foster carer recruitment and support improved.

A key enabler was bespoke and coproduced working led by experienced consultants. This was particularly important as the participating sites were already on a steep and demanding improvement journey to address issues of timeliness and quality in achieving permanency for children in care.

Key barriers were lack of capacity and structural and staff changes taking place as part of the pressure to improve. Historic data quality and the understanding of standards in the arena of long-term fostering was a key problem in the participating sites. This was a problem for social workers' ability to hold the goal of permanence in mind, for systemic change to be made and for evaluation to be provided with useful data. More national guidance or research into this how this can be improved is required.

Executive summary

Introduction

This is the final report of the evaluation of the Coram-i permanency planning and long-term fostering project. The purpose of this report is to describe the contribution of the project to the improvement journey of 4 Children's Social Care services. This project was supported by the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (Innovation Programme hereafter).

The project

The Children Act 1989 statutory guidance states that 'permanence is the long term plan for the child's upbringing...to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging'. Permanence can be achieved through adoption, permanent fostering, residential care, special guardianship orders (usually of a relative) and return to birth parent.

The Coram-i project focussed on addressing delays in achieving permanency for children who will be fostered long term by improving processes, and practice. This included child-centred timely practices (such as tracking of cases) and a more robust performance and quality assurance culture (all within the national regulatory and standards frameworks).

The project input a performance management and quality assurance system, joint tracking systems between teams centred around 1 child or sibling group and supported the delivery of basic procedures such as timely permanency meetings. It also adapted a range of tools innovated in adoption services to the new contexts. The overall aim was for the services to be more strategic and systematic in understanding and responding to the needs of the looked after children.

Consultants (1 management consultant and 1 senior social work practice consultant) worked closely with the services to embed routine performance and practice improvement by challenging and supporting social workers and various levels of management. The consultants provided social work practice expertise to support problem solving, knowledge gaps and best practice.

The evaluation

The evaluation of the Coram-i permanency planning project followed a Theory of Change and mixed-methods approach. Two comparator sites were selected for both the purpose of quasi-experimental analysis and to bring into focus the unique and complex ways in which local authorities are grappling with improving permanency. Due to data limitations a quasi-

experimental impact analysis could not be undertaken to investigate attribution of changes to the project. Instead comparative data from 2 non-intervention sites and statistical neighbours were used to conduct a contribution analysis.

The complexity of the bespoke interventions demanded attention to context which was addressed through qualitative data analysis. The evaluation collected 3 waves of qualitative data and 3 waves of local quantitative data to evidence the contribution of the project on timeliness, and quality of services. Wave 3 data was collected 1 year after the project ended. All sites had been subject to many staff changes and 2 had significant restructures which are taken into consideration in the story of contribution.

Key findings

- Two key factors limited the ability of the evaluation to undertake an impact evaluation: (i) the inability of the project to implement some of the innovations across the 4 sites; and (ii) quantitative data available from the sites were not consistent in availability and quality.
- Coram-i introduced a number of interventions to the 4 sites supported with expertise of embedded consultants and a peer learning approach. The introduction of new methods and the targeting of areas for improvement was bespoke. A few of the interventions were established in areas and have endured since the end of the project, for example the use of Bright Spots to measure the wellbeing of looked after children in their area and the performance surgeries supporting social workers with delays in case progression or quality issues. Others, for example the diagnostic tools, and a Cost Calculator for Children's Services were not successfully introduced.
- The project improved systems for tracking cases of children entering care until permanency was achieved. This was shown to be an effective approach for driving permanency. Timeliness and the frequency of permanency planning meetings improved during the time Coram-i worked in the sites. Improvements established to the timeliness of CLA reviews and permanency plans were less evident.
- Towards the end of the project staff were seeing the benefits of the tracking process. For example, identifying possible delays in a timely way, problem solving across teams and task prioritisation. Despite this the tracking systems were felt to be labour intensive and a year following the end of the project, none of the projects were using them in their original form. Adjustments had been made to them to make them less detailed and less labour intensive.
- New processes were introduced in recruiting and supporting foster carers, these endured a year after the project ended. Quantitative data presents an emerging picture of some promising areas of improvement in recruitment and timeliness of the

different stages of the fostering process. For example, staff described and provided data to show that the number of approved foster carers increased in 3 sites.

- Although there is some early indication of improved placement stability in 2 sites, in terms of a reduction in the number of placement moves, it is not possible to attribute this to Coram-i whose interventions were varied in type, scope and dosage.
- For such an intervention focussing on systems and processes, it is too early to evidence the long-term outcomes such as increased wellbeing of children in care. However, there was qualitative evidence of children's life quality improving from staff interviews and case studies.
- The cost benefit analysis finds that savings were made to the sites participating because of improved stability and child outcomes, as measured by an increase in the number of in-house foster carers, a reduction in the number of placement moves and improvements in SDQ scores. However, attribution to the intervention is not possible because of different levels of dosage and activities. The intervention has the potential to reduce costs in children's social care services by increasing stability and wellbeing of children in care and by strengthening the provision of in-house foster carers.
- Sites reported lasting culture change in particular in improving the use of data and staff understanding the value of that data in their day-to-day work with children; being child centred in all the work; and taking joint accountability for children across services.
- When the changes had embedded staff reported feeling more in control of their work and a greater sense of work wellbeing. There is less evidence that this continued 1 year after the project ended when there had also been a number of staff and structural changes.

Lessons and implications

In all sites there were serious issues with the Integrated Children's Systems (ICS)¹ that staff felt hindered improvements in practice. For example, it was not possible to record certain data items or run reports, for example specific dates in the foster carer or child's journey which meant that these had to be recorded manually. Historic data quality and differing staff understandings of standards of timeliness and data recording in the arena of long-term fostering meant that much effort had to be deployed to this key aspect of the project. More national guidance or research into how the ICS can be improved is required. This is not only

¹ The Integrated Children's System (ICS) was developed to support effective practice with children and families, and improve decision making and planning for children in need.

a barrier for evaluation but overall, for efficient social work practice and systems improvement.

The tracker and performance surgeries enabled every child to be followed and every social worker to be supported with a view to optimising a child's journey to permanence. This was especially important in the absence of data to highlight delay and in a context of staff instability.

Given the sites all adapted their tools by simplifying them, the evaluation team feels a balance needs to be struck between the desire to track children's journeys robustly and what is possible for teams under pressure and on a day to day basis.

Every site was very different in size and characteristics of their children and foster carers. Every team structure was different. They were all on steep improvement journeys as the areas' children's services had been identified as being in need of improvement by Ofsted between 2013 and 2016. Therefore, there was no one-size-fits-all solution. Improvement journeys need adaptable and flexible independent support and challenge through scoping, agreeing plans with management, tracking progress, reflective practice and whole service engagement.

Permanency for children relates to permanency for staff. For example, staff said that the early improvement in the systems increased their sense of control at work and pride in the service making them want to stay in permanent roles. High turn-over of staff is a barrier to routine use of historical data on cases and support of foster carers. This is because out-going staff take with them valuable case knowledge and the relationship, new staff take time to fully understand the context of new cases and build relationships (often despite robust handover processes) and, as a result foster carers become sceptical about the ability of new staff to understand changes in circumstances and their family dynamics and exhausted by repeating information and building new relationship.

1. Overview of the project

Project context

The permanency improvement project was delivered in 4 local Children's Social Care services (sites)² in England that had been identified as being in need of improvement by Ofsted. Two of these sites have large populations of over 1,000 children looked after, and 2 have much smaller populations of under 300. The children's services in all 4 sites had been rated by Ofsted as inadequate between 2013 and 2016. Since then all authorities had been on an improvement journey implementing various service changes with the aim of improving outcomes for children looked after. Coram-i started the project with a scoping and diagnostic stage (May to September 2017). Project delivery finished in December 2018 and the project ended in March 2020.

Project aims and intended outcomes

The Permanency Improvement Project aimed to address delays in finding permanent stable homes for children whose plan is long term fostering. The intervention aimed to address a lack of systemic parallel planning³ in complex and pressured children's social care systems. Coram-i designed the intervention based on their experience that children's social service systems had become very process driven and siloed; data on individual children and whole populations was not well understood in services and there had been a lack of a child centred approach. For children this results in drift, instability and long-term psychological damage.

Delays in achieving permanency for children who will be fostered long term were to be addressed by improving the understanding of the looked after and child in need populations by scrutinising data and introducing improvements to key processes. Coram-i had previously achieved this in adoption services and aimed to adapt the approach to 4 children's social care services including fostering services. The project definition of innovation was to apply what had been successful in adoption to fostering services alongside good practice improvement interventions.

Overall, the project aimed to improve outcomes for children looked after with a focus on those with a plan of long-term fostering. This was dependant on the achievement of the medium-term outcomes of improvement in timeliness and quality of processes from referral

² These are anonymised in the report. For a detailed profile of the sites and context see Appendix 4: Site summaries.

³ Parallel planning refers to the process of having several plans for a child at the same time in care proceeding in case one plan is not possible.

to achieving permanency. There was no specific cohort of children as the improvement was delivered in different parts of the services with no corresponding intervention group.

Project activities

The Coram-i project worked in 4 sites (which are pseudonymised in this report) in a bespoke way to dovetail with their priorities for improvement in permanency planning. A summary of each site and theory of change is described in Appendix 4: Site summaries. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the main activities implemented per site. The activities are described below Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of project activities per intervention site

Activity	Broadmington	Leybridge	Monkford	Readstone
Performance management and quality assurance	Performance surgeries (recruitment and assessment, family finding, fostering support)	Performance surgeries (recruitment and assessment, family finding, fostering support); joint tracking meetings; PLO ⁴ tracking	Performance surgeries (family finding, fostering support, Connected Persons)	Performance surgeries (recruitment and assessment, family finding, fostering support); joint tracking meetings
Early family finding	Supporting early family finding	Supporting early family finding	Activity Days for Fostering, Profiling Events; Supporting early family finding	Activity Day for Fostering; Supporting early family finding
Permanency planning		Supporting permanency planning meetings	Supporting permanency planning meetings	Supporting permanency planning meetings
Incorporating children's views	Bright Spots	Bright Spots	Bright Spots	Bright Spots

The project input a performance management system, joint tracking systems (between teams centred around 1 child or sibling group) and ensured basic procedures, such as regular permanency meetings, were delivered. The key tool for this was a manually updated excel spread sheet containing key quantitative and qualitative data including external and internal performance indicators and national minimum standards. The aspiration was to have a joint tracking system, shared across the whole fostering service, for every child until permanence was achieved. In practice this was bespoke to each site, adapting to their agreed areas of need and combining with performance surgeries for targeted teams.

⁴ Public Law Outline (PLO) is the period before care proceedings and is also referred to as pre proceedings.

Two consultants (1 management consultant and 1 senior social work practice consultant) worked closely with the services to embed routine performance improvement by providing challenge and support for social workers, managers, and other stakeholders. The consultants brought social work practice expertise, and in particular systems expertise, to support problem solving, knowledge gaps and best practice.

Coram-i's approach, involving tracking of cases and performance management, has 2 types of meetings as its core. These include the Joint Tracking Meeting (implemented in 2 sites) and Performance Surgeries (implemented in all sites) covering fostering support, recruitment and assessment as well as family finding. Monthly Joint Tracking Meetings served the purpose of tracking the journey of each child in care until permanency is achieved.

Consultant social workers, social workers, business support and representatives from the family placement service attended to strengthen cross team working and solve arising issues on a case by case basis as well as identifying areas for improvement and celebrating good practice. Monthly performance surgeries in each of the areas aimed to analyse and review the performance of the fostering service. These performance surgeries were attended by social workers and their team managers. From these meetings Coram-i has aimed to pick up and troubleshoot other systemic issues that are causing delays in permanency. These may be cultural, administrative or practice-knowledge based. Data and discussions in the performance surgeries were then used in supervision and for individuals to improve their work planning and prioritisation. They were also used to celebrate good performance and share problems.

The adaption and application of the adoption improvement framework to long-term fostering including tracking of children's cases was the main innovation of this project. However, the project further aimed to deliver (and in some cases develop anew) several technical interventions to support system wide data sense making to drive improvement. Not all of these were implemented in all of the sites. This was in part intentional as the project worked to deliver bespoke and relevant interventions and in part because of unforeseen barriers. Further detail about these is provided in Section 3. These additional interventions included:

- The introduction of Bright Spots⁵, a diagnostic tool which assesses the wellbeing and experience of services of children in care. The Bright Spots survey was run twice in all 4 sites.
- The adaption of Bright Spots survey for care leavers. This was piloted in Readstone only.

⁵ The Bright Spots Programme is a partnership between Coram Voice and the University of Oxford. It supports local authorities to systematically listen to their children in care and care leavers, about the things that are important to them.

- The Cost Calculator for Children's Services⁶; Due to Intellectual Property Issues the cost calculator was not introduced to the pilot sites during the project site work, but piloted in Readstone, Monkford and Leybridge with significant delay.
- The development of a fostering service diagnostic and scorecard. This was a new tool which was not implemented in the sites.
- A care leavers' service diagnostic; This was piloted in Readstone only.
- Adapted family finding techniques from Coram-i's adoption work. Activity Day's, for example, were implemented in Readstone and Monkford.

Coram-i also facilitated cross-site learning events for the participating authorities to share learning and gain peer support; and introduced peer learning networks and Fostering Ambassadors to support foster parents and improve recruitment. The project was an adaptation of a Round One Innovation Programme project that focussed on adoption.⁷ In 2 sites, Coram-i was commissioned to support the services beyond the Innovation Programme-funded period on issues identified during the life of the project.

⁶ This cost calculator was not introduced to the pilot sites due to Intellectual Property Issues.

2. Overview of the evaluation

Evaluation questions

The evaluation aimed to answer the following evaluation questions:

1. Has the innovation⁸ contributed to improvement in the quality of permanency planning?
2. Has the innovation contributed to an improvement in the timeliness of permanency planning?
3. Did the innovation contribute to improving the recruitment and maintenance of a pool of foster carers (FC) who can meet the needs of its children looked after population?
4. Has the innovation influenced the culture of Children's Social Care teams: valuing data, shared accountability and child centred?
5. Did the innovation contribute to the improved stability of placements?
6. Did the innovation contribute to key outcomes for children looked after?
7. Did the innovation contribute to increased wellbeing of staff?
8. Did the innovation contribute to a decline in spending for the services/ does the innovation have the potential to contribute to less spending for the service?
9. What lessons are there for wider roll out of the approach and specific innovations?

Evaluation methods

The evaluation consisted of 6 main elements: 3 waves of staff interviews in intervention sites; retrospective case studies with children looked after; 2 waves of staff interviews in comparator sites; local authority data analysis; a cost-benefit analysis and a contribution analysis. The evaluation started in December 2017 and finished in March 2020.

- Design and review of Theory of Change for the project as well as specific ones for the participating pilot sites.
- Qualitative Wave 1 interviews with 48 staff (including social workers, team managers and senior management) in pilot sites in Spring 2018; 29 Wave 2 interviews in Winter 2018; and 32 Wave 3 interviews in Summer 2019.

⁸ The innovation refers to the project overall as described in Chapter 1. Overview of the project

- Observations of 10 site-specific activities such as performance surgeries and joint tracking meetings in the pilot sites.
- Observation of 3 cross-authority learning events in London.
- Qualitative Wave 1 interviews with 8 Local Authority staff of comparator sites in Winter 2018 and 6 follow-up interviews in Summer 2019.
- Quantitative analysis of SSDA903 children looked after (CLA) data for 2017, 2018 and 2019 to measure changes in wellbeing⁹, placement changes and other long-term outcomes.
- Quantitative analysis of local tracker data including the children's journey (joint tracker) and the foster carer's journey and occupancy (recruitment and assessment, and foster support tracker).
- Assessing the costs and benefits of this project by comparing current costs and potential cost savings.
- 6 retrospective case studies with children looked after in the 4 pilot sites. Foster carer and social worker were interviewed as well if this could be arranged.
- Contribution Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data for participating sites as well as comparator sites.

A full description of evaluation methods is outlined in Appendix 3 including a table showing a summary of the data collated to evidence key outcomes for each evaluation question.

Changes to evaluation methods

There were unexpected opportunities to observe several meetings which are at the heart of the methodology of Coram-i. The evaluation team observed performance surgeries and/or joint tracking meetings in each intervention site. The evaluators further observed learning events with representatives of all intervention sites.

The quasi-experimental analysis of quantitative data was not possible due to data limitations. Instead quantitative and qualitative longitudinal data from all intervention sites, 2 comparator sites and 4 statistical neighbours were used to undertake a contribution analysis.

⁹ The SSDA903 data measures well-being with data collected using the Strength and Difficulties (SDQ) questionnaire. This data is collected for children who have been in care for over 12 months and who were aged between 4 years old and 16 years old (inclusive) on the date of their last assessment.

Limitations of the evaluation

The interventions of Coram-i were necessarily emergent in response to needs and context. The evaluation methodology therefore had to adapt but was limited in scope because of the directive to keep to an impact evaluation. The evaluation additionally included observations of key events such as tracking meetings and learning events, the analysis of tracking data from joint tracking meetings and performance surgeries and the review of minutes from project board meetings in 3 sites as it became clear that these were crucial to understanding the processes implemented. On reflection this project lent itself to a developmental and process evaluation. Had this been the case from inception the researchers would have focussed more on the delivery team, and the strategic leads rather than the teams they were embedded in and the longer-term beneficiaries (children who are looked after).

The quantitative analysis was limited by the data shared with the evaluators. This in turn limited the evidence available to support the research questions in particular around timeliness of permanency planning and recruitment of foster carers. First, the evaluators were not able to receive all relevant tracker data. Gaps in the data were supplemented with analysis carried out by Coram-i based on the data they held.¹⁰ Because of data sharing agreements it was not possible to receive tracker data directly from Coram-i. Second, there were gaps in the SSDA903 data shared by the pilots. These were partly due to difficulties in linking SSDA903 data with educational data. The evaluation team further requested team-level staff data but only received this from 2 sites. Gaps in this data were complemented by summary statistics published as part of the local authority interactive tool (LAIT). Analysis undertaken on tracker data revealed that in some areas the quality of data recording before Coram-i started working in the sites was poor. This was also found in the scoping stage of this project by Coram-i. The evaluators have therefore limited analysis of the tracker data to cases where the recording was complete.

The full theory of change linked the delivery of interventions to improve the quality and timeliness of permanency planning to improved care experience for children, and improved life outcomes. During the lifespan of the evaluation it was not possible or appropriate to track wellbeing, placement stability and other outcomes for those children for whom permanency was achieved while Coram-i worked in the sites. This was because of the data collation cycle not matching the periods of being a case for the project. Moreover, it was more important to establish the achievement of the intended service improvement. To investigate child

¹⁰ The evaluators reviewed all analysis performed by Coram-i as presented in their site reports. Where the evaluation team had received the same tracker as Coram-i based their analysis on, statistics were compared to ensure that these are aligned. As this was the case for all statistics for which it was possible to check this, the evaluators are confident that the analysis conducted is reliable. However, this meant that it was not possible to perform some of the inference statistics as originally planned.

outcomes the evaluators have used population level quantitative data that was received from the sites and triangulated any findings with qualitative data from interviews with staff.

3. Key findings

The key findings are presented below by addressing each of the evaluation questions.

Has the innovation contributed to an improvement in the quality of permanency planning?

This section outlines key improvements to the quality of permanency planning. Two key elements of improving quality are linked to 2 other research questions that are addressed in detail in the following chapters: did the innovation contribute to improvement the recruitment and maintenance of a pool of foster carers (FC) who can meet the needs of its CLA population? And, has the innovation contributed to an improvement in the timeliness of permanency planning? Other than the focus on foster carer sufficiency and timeliness of permanency planning the project aimed to improve the quality of permanency planning through a range of interventions that were either established service improvement tools new to the sites, interventions adapted from adoption services or entirely new innovations:

- Technical interventions Bright Spots (including extending to care leavers), a Cost Calculator for Children's Services; a fostering service diagnostic and scorecard, and a care leavers service diagnostic.
- Facilitation of cross-site learning events for the participating authorities to share learning and gain peer support.
- Expertise: The identification and addressing of systemic issues and raising awareness of best practice.
- Performance surgeries.

Bright spots

One of the interventions Coram-i implemented in all 4 sites was the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey as part of the Bright Spots Programme, a cooperation between Coram Voice and the University of Oxford. The survey measured wellbeing indicators at the population level from a volunteer sample. This evidence of a child's experience of being in care is intended to inform practice. During the evaluation period the survey was implemented twice, the first time in 2017 and the second time in 2019. Three sites shared the first report with the evaluators, and 2 sites also shared the report of the second round.

In the first round of Bright Spots staff interviewed reported that they were able to see that there were many positive aspects outcomes for children related to the provision of services

and there were clear areas for improvement.¹¹ Overall, Bright Spots was viewed by the staff at the sites to be a powerful tool to capture the voice of children and influence service improvement. For example, 1 site reported that feedback collated on what children wanted from foster carers (such as explanation of why they were in care and more contact with their birth families) was used by social workers in discussions with foster carers and fostering panels and shared with local agencies. One local authority incorporated the survey into their handbook for social workers as a method for understanding the views of the looked after child population.

Coram-i in partnership with Coram Voice and the University of Bristol proposed to adapt Bright Spots to care leavers. One of the participating sites was one of the pilot localities for this survey and the first results have been published¹².

Cost calculator for children's services (CCfCS)

The CCfCS is a software tool¹³ that was developed as part of a research project to explore the relationship between needs, costs and outcomes of services provided to looked after children. Coram-i began work with all sites during 2018 to introduce the CCfS to support services to understand the economic value of improving services and outcomes for children. Unfortunately, due to Intellectual Property issues, the tool was not introduced to the sites. Another barrier was historic poor data quality in the sites due to a lack of consistent data recording and different understandings of national data standards of how to record data on local authority systems. However, interviews with the project partners established that in consultation with the sites they have been able to refine the tool making it more user friendly and suitable for the types of financial and performance data that services can realistically provide.

¹¹ In all sites, the majority of looked after children felt happy (around two-thirds in all 3 sites). Most of them also felt settled and safe in their home (Feeling settled: proportions range from 61% to 100% depending on the age group; Feeling safe: proportions range from 69% to 100% depending on the age group). For 2 sites, the proportion of children feeling safe was higher than in general population as measured in a national comparison from the Children's Worlds survey. In all sites a very large proportion of young people in care reported that their carer was interested in their education (more than 90% in all 3 sites). This proportion was higher than reported in the national comparator data used from the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey. Room for improvement was found in relation to knowing the social worker and reducing the number of changes in the social worker. At least one-quarter of children who completed the Bright Spots survey reported to have experienced 3 or more changes in social worker in the last 12 months and in one site only around three-quarters stated to know their social worker.

¹² <https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/OLBC-Snapshot-online-2018.pdf>

¹³ The tool is provided as an Access database and all the reports are produced in Excel. The research was carried out at the Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University between 2000 and 2017, and the work then moved to the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford.

Care leavers service diagnostic and Fostering diagnostic and scorecard

The fostering diagnostic and scorecard and the care leavers diagnostic are similar tools. The fostering diagnostic is a service improvement and monitoring tool adapted from established tools in adoption services. The tool uses indicators collated in routine service performance monitoring around the areas: Child Centred Service; Foster Carer Sufficiency, Permanence Planning; and Achieving Permanency. The care leavers diagnostic is based on a similar assessment of timeliness of statutory duties and care leavers outcomes for an overall strategic view of this area of the service. The care leavers diagnostic tool was developed by Coram-i during the life of the project and was proposed to the sites at Broadmington and Leybridge. It was not piloted, however, as the project sponsors within the sites considered that it was either not an appropriate time due to other strategic priorities or capacity issues, or a duplication of similar work already underway. The fostering diagnostic and scorecard were also developed during the life of the project but was neither piloted nor introduced for the same reasons. However, the diagnostic has been used with 2 other LAs since this time and work on one of these is current. Therefore, the tool was developed and introduced to the sector through this project.

Learning events

Coram-i hosted 3 learning events over the course of the project. All of them took place at the Coram Campus in London and consisted of expert talks and presentations from the participating project sites. The purpose of the events was to share what has been learned in the different sites, including good practice examples, discuss challenges and find solutions together. The first seminar took place in November 2017, the second one in March 2018 and the last one in October 2018. All events were well attended (approximately 24 attendees) with several representatives from each site as well as Coram-i staff.

All 3 learning events followed a similar structure with introductions from Coram-i, presentations from all sites and several presentations from experts selected for their relevance to key issues across the sites. These included: foster carers, a young care leaver, academics, a family psychotherapist, and policy experts. The project sites reported their experiences in their involvement in the project, challenges and successes and the project lead at Coram-i spoke about what had been delivered and learnt, and key impacts of those aspects. For example, Leybridge fostering team manager gave a presentation outlining how embedding performance management and tracking of recruitment of foster carers had been noted by Ofsted as areas of improvement that had increased foster carer recruitment.

In the second and third afternoons of events, there were break-out sessions on a number of topics related to the project. There was also time for networking.

Evaluation forms were provided in the seminar packs. These asked about satisfaction with the seminar, which parts of the seminar were enjoyed most and least, improvement ideas as

well as topic suggestions for the next event. Feedback was very positive, and the general feeling was that the expert presentations should be shorter and the local authority and expert by experience presentations were the most valuable. Participants suggested more group discussions and networking time. Similarly, staff interviews reported finding the learning seminars a rare space to reflect on practice and learn from other services.

Observations of the events found that working and engagement across the sites was very positive and there was a positive and non-competitive atmosphere. Participants were genuinely interested to hear from the other sites. Much open sharing and helpful discussion took place. During the break-out groups, participants were also honest about how the work was going and were able to speak confidentially about challenges that they did not share during the formal discussions.

The presentations given by the sites at the second and third event reported improvement journeys of all sites, even though all sites started at different points, focussed on different parts of the system, and had different priorities.

Expertise: The identification and addressing of systemic issues and raising awareness of best practice.

The tracking and performance meetings brought about systemic problem solving and awareness of good practice. Except for 1 joint tracking meeting where representatives across teams attended to track the cases of all children for whom permanency had not been achieved, the meetings had the dual purpose of tracking cases of individual social workers (hence their performance) and the progress of the case in that part of the system (for example support for foster carers or those who had been newly recruited and being assessed). The meetings were chaired by the Coram-i consultant initially and supported with a business support administrator. The meetings were held monthly, and the social worker will attend with the supervisor to discuss progress, problem solve and reflect on good practice and challenges.

Coram-i provided ad hoc information and expertise on a range of issues from psychological support to legal details. There was evidence of troubleshooting and, where necessary, escalating problems that could not be resolved to more senior staff or experts, 'unsticking' them from the individual social worker responsible for the case. For example, in 1 local authority a blockage to recruitment of foster carers was identified as there was confusion over which local authority had responsibility for clearing the health check of a foster carer who was to provide a permanent placement. This was resolved.

In Broadmington, Coram-i explained that they had to give guidance on the different types of meetings in the permanency process that they had discovered many social workers and managers were unclear of. This was also confirmed in senior staff interviews in the sites. For example, the difference between permanency planning and family finding meetings had been

unclear. In all the sites Coram-i challenged the irregularity and quality of permanency planning meetings. In Leybridge, Coram-i worked on early permanency and supported parallel planning when a child's case was in the Public Law Outline period whereas before this had not happened¹⁴.

Where blockages were not resolved immediately, social workers and managers interviewed said that they were able to seek previously unavailable support from the tracking and performance meetings to problem solve rather than feeling frustration and isolation. For example, in Leybridge, one social worker had been unable to secure a permanent match for a child who was very likely to come into care. The team responsible for matching had refused to match the child until the care order had been made. This meant that the child would only be placed in an emergency placement. The social worker felt she could have done valuable work pre-placement to ensure a permanent match was available and the child and birth family were prepared. This case was finally resolved with the support of Coram-i. The fact that the cross-team limitation was surfaced and dealt with represented a culture shift from problem solving within a team (that was previously the norm in the service) to problem solving across a service. Permanency was achieved for this child and work progressed successfully on improving the family finding process.

In Leybridge, the project supported improvement in the scrutiny of matching of children in the age range of 12 to 16 years. These are now presented to a fostering panel which was not the case before. In addition, it was agreed that the agency decision maker would scrutinise all long-term fostering plans (previously just the under 12s). These changes represent the raising of the profile of the looked after child population in line with adoptions.

Performance surgeries

Monthly performance surgeries were introduced to selected fostering teams in 3 of the sites. Consultants (1 management consultant and 1 senior social work practice consultant) worked closely with the services to embed routine performance and practice improvement by normalising a culture of supportive challenge for social workers and various levels of management. Coram-i set up and chaired performance surgeries bringing social work practice expertise to support problem solving, knowledge gaps and best practice. These were attended by social workers and their team managers.

Early in the intervention there was a strong feeling of being demotivated by the new processes. Around half of the social workers involved in the performance and tracking

¹⁴ This means that when a child is identified as being in need and before a care order is made, plans are made in parallel for all possible outcomes including staying with the birth family so that if the child is taken into care the arrangements can be made swiftly rather than waiting for each option being explored in isolation. This causes drift and results in a permanent home for the child being delayed.

meetings said that they and/or their colleagues felt under pressure and scrutiny. This was also corroborated in interviews with the management. For these staff, the process of the meetings caused anxiety. The initial feeling was that a focus on timelines distracted from the whole picture. In 2 sites managers reported that they felt that a minority of staff had avoided the meetings with annual leave or sickness.

The performance surgeries did challenge poorly performing staff, for example, one in one team it supported transparent disciplinary procedures, and in another it was reported that there had been voluntarily staff resignations in this period. Remaining staff said that it had been empowering to challenge poor performance objectively with the tracking of key tasks, making it non-personal. By the second wave of interviewing in 2018 it could be seen that where performance and quality assurance had been established, there was a sense of efficacy in the workplace, as well as improved morale. In Leybridge, 3 social workers said they were aware of the direct link between the work and the recognition of the improvement in their third Ofsted inspection where they were able to show the tracker as evidence and its effect.

By the end of the project this view was more widely held amongst staff interviewed and there was a much clearer articulation of a view that individual staff with performance issues had been rightly challenged. One important and wide impact was that the performance surgeries, as well as the joint tracking of cases, had become a welcome tool for individuals who regarded it as a mechanism to gain control over their workload. As represented in the following quotations from staff interviews:

“...as we have a lot of newly qualified social workers, and so we have a process now that they can work with. People get overwhelmed with the court process, so we now have alignment with the court system” *Fostering Team Staff Member Interviews*

“We weren’t so good at the step by step process of recruitment, documenting the process, tracking it, completing application forms. All staff grumbled about it but did nothing to change it. I have had 6 managers in 4 years, all with different ideas. They’d either micro-manage me or not manage me at all, wouldn’t have a clue. So it’s been helpful to have an outside body support.” *Recruitment Team Broadmington Interviews*

“It keeps mental command...Having the monthly surgery keeps you focussed on the tracker. You miss the deadlines less. Helps you to manage the workload and get to know the children” *Fostering Team Leybridge Interviews*

Overall, as the performance surgeries were embedded, they were found to be supportive for individual social workers in prioritising work and in framing supervision meetings. A year after Coram-i ended the project, the performance surgeries had become established in all but 1 site. These had all been adapted to local needs and resources and as a result become

shorter or less frequent. Without further research it is not possible to establish how this will impact on their efficacy.

Barriers and enablers

From 3 waves of staff interviews in all sites barriers and enablers were identified:

In wave 1 interviews it was evident that lack of time for staff to prepare for, participate in, and reflect on the new processes was a large barrier. In wave 2 interviews, as the processes had embedded, such as the performance surgeries, time became less of a stated barrier. However, through all 3 waves of qualitative interviews time capacity continued to be highlighted as an issue especially where there was high staff turnover.

Although Coram-i aligned the interventions with the improvement priorities of the sites from the outset, the context of services under pressure to improve created a difficult culture in which to drive change.

Working in targeted teams on bespoke tasks is an evidenced approach to organisational change appropriate in complex systems (e.g. Wheatley, 2011; Kolko, 2015). However, the evaluators considered that where there were large scale and fast moving changes in terms of new leadership and restructure (which was particularly the case in 1 site) less enduring change was possible.

The staff interviews suggested that Coram-i was able to influence processes through their consultants' reputation for expertise in children's social care systems improvement. Their social work practice experience enabled them to show empathy with the challenges faced by staff at all levels of the organisations.

Conclusion

It is difficult to assess whether the sites would have sought other forms of improvement models or support without this project. Without any extra support it would be a reasonable hypothesis that improvement in quality would have been slower or unsuccessful (See Appendix 1 Contribution Analysis). However, there is evidence that the support and direction from Coram-i improved the quality of permanency planning through their innovations, expertise and peer learning approach. Key areas of improvement were: systemic problem solving and awareness of good practice; improvements in parallel planning; the scrutiny of matching children and families; and challenging poor performance objectively. Success was underpinned by the expertise of the consultants and the bespoke way in which they worked in each service. Many of the interventions were established and have endured. Those that were not established (the CCfCS and the 2 diagnostic tools) were developed through the learning and are available to the sector through Coram-i and partners.

For teams wishing to create similar changes to processes without external consultancy it would be important to consider the following points: taking a bespoke approach to areas of service improvement; involving all levels of staff; addressing staff instability (turnover and lack of permanent staff) so that learning remains in the organisation; support change dynamics through expecting resistance early on and encouraging dialogue.

Has the innovation contributed to an improvement in the timeliness of permanency planning?

Joint tracking meetings across teams were a key methodology designed to drive the timeliness of permanency planning which were introduced in 2 sites. The purpose of joint tracking meetings was to track a child's journey to achieving permanence as well as to track the related performance of achieving performance which is linked to staff performance (e.g., complying with the national minimum standards). Other sites used trackers to track cases related to performance of teams, for example fostering teams or specific areas of work that needed focus such as recruitment of foster carers. These were also child focused and aimed at improving timeliness and quality but were less powerful as a whole system piece of work.

Joint tracking meetings were chaired by a Coram-i consultant with social workers, their team managers and business support attending. The Excel based joint tracker was to be updated in advance of the meeting. Progress was reported for each child separately by the allocated social worker and updates were recorded. The tracker was a combination of data from the Integrated Children's System (ICS) as well as additional data manually inserted which was not recorded in the ICS.

This site-specific tracker data introduced by Coram-i and data collected locally for the statistical return SSDA903 allowed the evaluation to triangulate with staff reports of improved timeliness in permanency planning in the system. The evaluation team has supplemented gaps in the data with data analysis carried out by Coram-i which was presented as part of their final reports for each site. When referring to analysis undertaken by Coram-i this is referenced with the corresponding report (e.g., Coram, 2019a).

The impact on the timeliness of permanency planning is measured in a number of ways below, by looking at: (i) the number of permanency planning meetings (PPMs) that take place; (ii) number of working days it took from a child becoming looked after to the first permanency planning meeting.; (iii) timeliness of CLA reviews; (iv) agreeing the permanency plan; and (v) timeliness of matching.

Timeliness of permanency planning meetings.

Permanency planning meetings (PPMs) play an important part in driving the successful achievement of permanency. In all 4 sites, the strengthening of PPMs was an intended area

of work of Coram-i. The analysis of quantitative data from the sites reported below describes the frequency and timeliness of these meetings.

For Leybridge, tracker data for children up to the age of 16 who became looked after from March 2015 onwards (and for whom permanency planning meetings were recorded) showed an increase in the frequency of meetings over the period of the Coram-i intervention. In 2016/17 45 PPMs took place, in 2017/2018, 49 and 2018/19, 74. In addition when inspecting the number of PPMs in 3 monthly intervals a step increase in the second quarter of 2018 is noticeable from 15 to 48 PPMs (see Figure 1). This coincides with the time when Coram-i started joint tracking meetings which were a key driver of permanency planning meetings. The notable decrease in meetings recorded at the fourth quarter of 2018 can be explained by the overall pattern of seasonal decrease at this time when there were fewer planning meetings. The data for this most recent fourth quarter were also not complete. This indicates that the estimated number in this quarter is much higher.

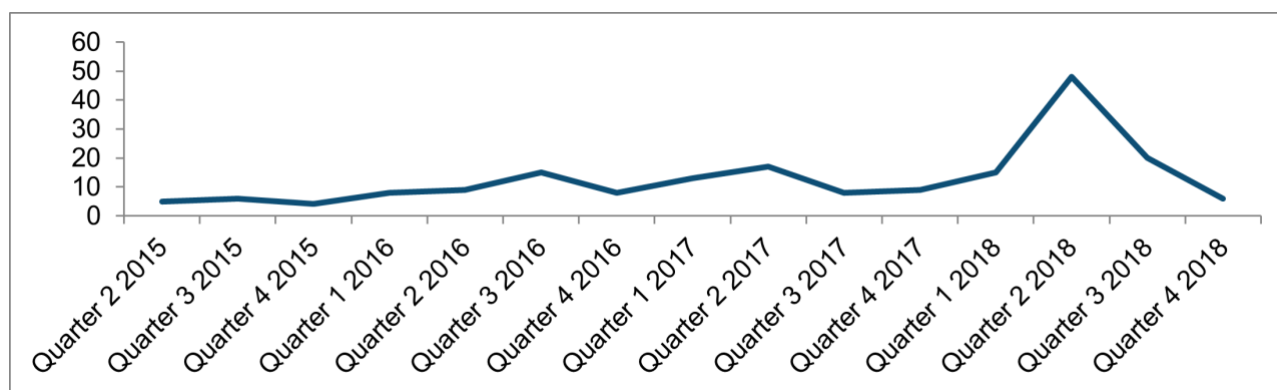
In Readstone, tracker data also evidenced the increase of permanency planning meetings taking place: there were 19 permanency planning meetings in 2016/17, 44 in 2017/18 and 37 in the first 9 months of 2018/19. This increase and embedding of improvement were acknowledged by Readstone staff almost a year after Coram-i had finished the project.

“People know that they should be booking them in and having them 6 weekly and more regularly if it’s needed because ... Yes, I think that’s definitely embedded and much better.” *Senior manager*

In Monkford, analysis performed by Coram-i as part of their site report also showed that in this site the number of permanency planning meetings increased from 188 in 2016/17 to 213 in 2017/18 and 223 in 2018/19 (Coram-i, 2019b). In all 3 waves of interviewing in this site staff attributed the increase in permanency planning meetings to Coram-i working closely with the permanency team. At wave 3 this team had disbanded as part of a wide restructure and senior staff expressed the concern that the improvement made in relation to the PPMs may diminish. There were also risks to this improvement expressed by senior staff due to capacity and new directions of a new senior management team. However, at the point of interviewing the changes seemed to be embedded.

“Two years ago, we wouldn't have been in that situation because it wasn't embedded, it was work in progress. But I think everybody knows and understands now that permanency planning needs to happen at the earliest opportunity.” *Service Manager*

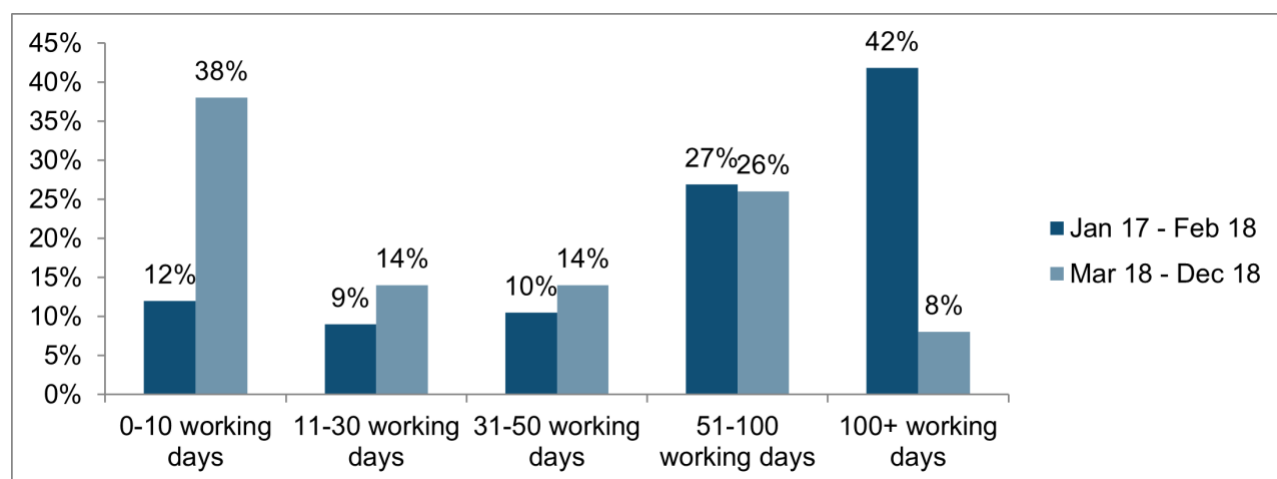
Figure 1: Number of permanency planning meetings per quarter in Leybridge



Source: Leybridge tracking data.

The increase in the number of PPMs in Leybridge are strengthened by comparing the timeliness of permanency planning meetings before and after Coram-i introduced the joint tracking meetings. The number of working days it took from a child becoming looked after to the first permanency planning meeting taking place reduced from before Coram-i introduced the joint tracking (January 2017 – February 2018) to while Coram-i was tracking (March 2018 to December 2018). This reduction from 92 working days on average (SD=65) to 37 (SD=39) was statistically significant ($p<.001$). Figure 2 shows the proportion of permanency planning meetings taking place in a certain timeframe before and after Coram-i implemented case level tracking. While before joint tracking only 12% of PPMs permanency planning were held within 10 working days of a child coming into care this increased to over one-third (33%) during March 2018 to December 2018.

Figure 2: Timeliness of permanency planning meetings in Leybridge

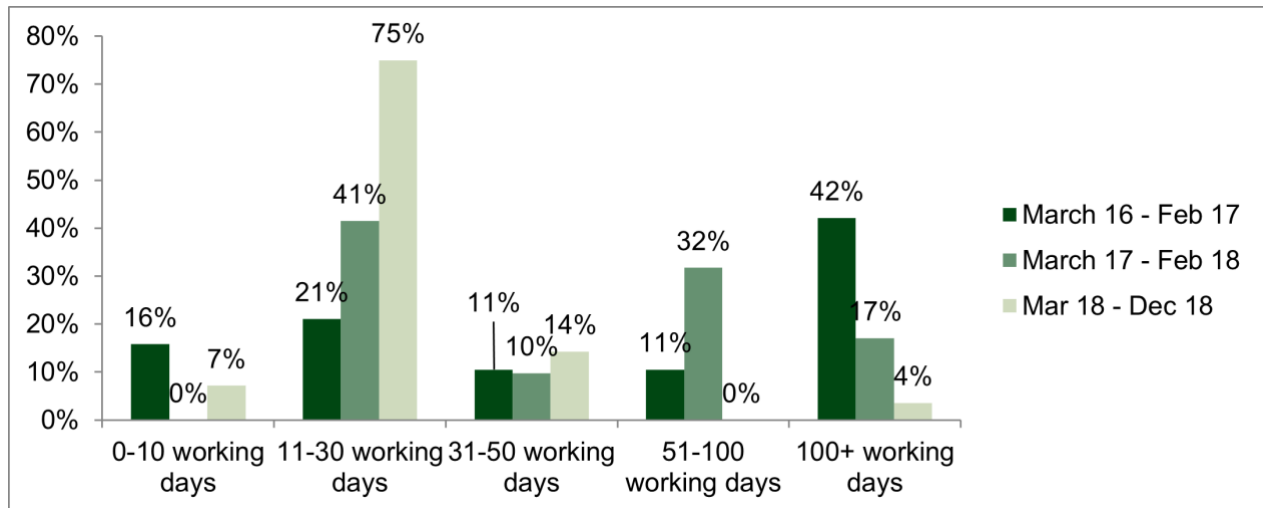


Source: Leybridge tracking data (N=117).

An improvement in the timeliness of permanency planning meetings was also found in Readstone. The average number of working days from the child becoming looked after to the first permanency planning meeting held decreased from 90 working days on average (SD=100) between March 2016 to February 2017, to 63 (SD=44) between March 2017 to February 2018, to 28 (SD=28) between March 2018 to December 2018. This difference was

found to be statistically significant ($p < .01$)¹⁵. Between March 2018 and December 2018, the majority of cases had a permanency planning meeting between 11 and 30 days after they came into care (Figure 3). No comparable information was available for Monkford and Broadmington.

Figure 3: Timeliness of permanency planning meetings in Readstone



Source: Readstone tracking data (N=88).

Timeliness of CLA reviews

Coram-i did not work directly on the timeliness of CLA reviews, however it was hoped that the intervention of tracking would impact on all areas of permanence. Therefore, assessing timeliness of CLA reviews which was included in the tracking data is an indicator of systems improvement. Statutory guidance sets out that the second review needs to take place no later than 3 months after the first one, while the maximum interval between a child becoming looked after and the first review taking place is 20 days (Department for Education, 2015).

In Leybridge, when comparing the proportion of second CLA reviews taking place within the four-month period before Coram-i introduced tracking and after that, the analysis showed that for the majority of recent cases no information about the date of the second CLA review was available. For the ones where information was available there was no statistically significant difference in the average number of months it took from becoming looked after to the second review taking place ($p > .05$, see Table 15 in Appendix 5: Further findings). However, where information was available it showed that the second statutory review took place in the required timeframe in the majority of cases (84% for March 2018 – December 2018) (see Figure 8 in Appendix 5: Further findings).

¹⁵ Cases with permanency planning meetings dates dated before the start date of CLA were excluded from this analysis.

Similarly, for most of the recent cases in Readstone, no information about the second CLA review was recorded, or if the child had not been in care for 4 months. When only looking at the cases with recorded information about the second review date and the date of coming into care there was no significant improvement in the proportion of second reviews taking place within the four-month time period ($p>.05$). Again, most of the cases with data took place in the specified time frame, 92% for between March 2018 and December 2018, the same as the year before and 83% for the year 2016/17 so that there was little room for improvement (see Table 16 in Appendix 5: Further findings).

Timeliness of agreeing the permanency plan

A permanency plan needs to be agreed by the second CLA review. Unfortunately, data in Leybridge were not available to examine whether there was an increase in the timeliness of the permanency plan (see Figure 9 in Appendix 5: Further findings). In Readstone, data were also not consistently available on the permanency plan agreed by the second review (see Figure 10 in Appendix 5: Further findings). However, when comparing the cases with available data for the time period April 2017 to March 2018 and April to December 2018 there was an increase from 49% to 70% having the plan agreed in time.¹⁶ In Monkford, according to data analysis performed by Coram-i the proportion of permanency plans that were agreed by the second CLA review decreased from 95% in 2017/18 to 72% in 2018/2019 (Coram, 2019b)¹⁷.

Timeliness of matching

The quantitative data on timeliness of matching were analysed in relation to: time between child being looked after and IRO endorsing permanent fostering plan; time between IRO endorsing plan to match being presented to panel; and time between panel being presented with match and ADM agreeing match. The data were patchy, in that returns were not received from all the areas, and in some areas the data were unable to be validated. Therefore, it was not possible to fully analyse against the project against these 3 measures. Although the findings below should be treated with caution, they can be taken as indicative of direction of travel.

In Readstone, it was not possible to validate the number of permanent fostering matches with the tracker data available to us. According to data analysis carried out by Coram-i, 20 children were matched with permanent foster carers including cases that should have been matched before (Coram-i, 2019c). No historic data were available to compare the number

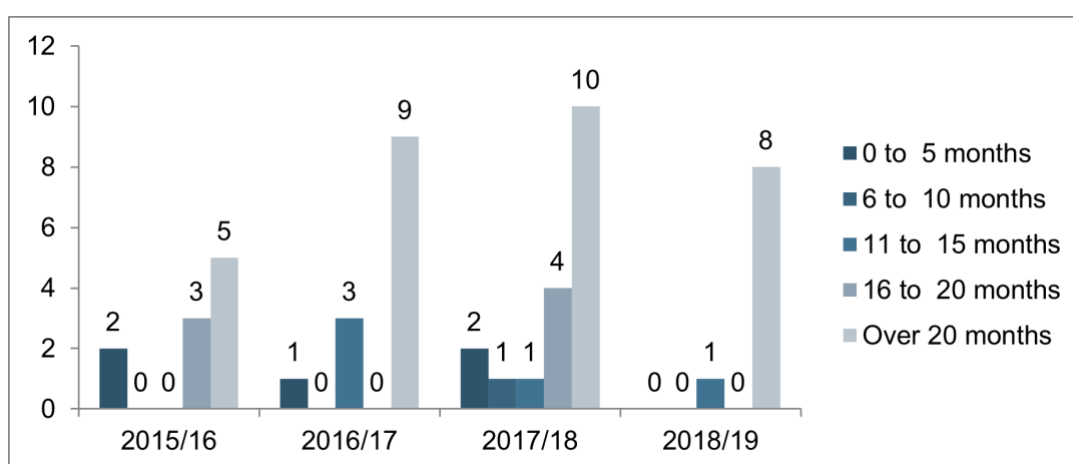
¹⁶ This is based on 63 cases when no information was available for 45 cases (42%). Therefore, one cannot conclude this represents an improvement.

¹⁷ There was no test of statistical significance provided in the reports, therefore, it is not possible to say if this change was statistically significant.

and the timeliness of matches before Coram-i started tracking in the site. Monkford, according to the site report provided by Coram-i, has seen an increase in the number of children matched with long-term foster carers or connected persons from 29 in 2016, to 82 in 2017 and 93 in 2018. This increase can be explained by the rise in connected persons which was a focus of Coram-i's work in Monkford.¹⁸

Figure 4 shows that there was no improvement in Leybridge in the overall timeliness of ADM agreeing permanent fostering matches. This can be explained by the 'backlog' of children with no match (so the time that they had waited historically skewed the measure of timeliness during the project) when Coram-i started the tracking and more consistent and accurate data recording since the tracking was introduced.

Figure 4: Timeliness of ADM agreeing permanent fostering match from Becoming Looked After (BLA) in Leybridge



Source: Leybridge tracking data.

Early Permanency Planning

Coram-i also aimed to strengthen early permanency planning working and were able to do this in Leybridge with a joint tracking meeting focused on the progress of Public Law Outline cases. The Public Law Outline period is 10 to 12 weeks and intended to be the time period in which local authorities carry out duties to ensure they make the best decision for the child when thinking about taking a case to court to ask for a Care Order to take a child into care or for a Supervision Order to be made. These are children supported in the community with a clear plan of support and if the parents do not engage or make the necessary changes, the

¹⁸ In Monkford, one focus of Coram-i's work was to strengthen permanency planning and achieving permanency for children with a plan for long term fostering including connected carers. Coram-i worked together with the connected person's team to achieve this. Further information about activities within Monkford can be found in Appendix 4: Site summaries.

local authority may issue care proceedings. If they do, they may step them down to supporting with a plan in the community.

Previous to Coram-i's focussed support in Leybridge this was an area where there was a lot of drift in the system. Senior staff interviewed explained that this was a difficult area for social workers to progress and often the PLO period was being extended as families were supported to improve the situation for the child. Once the tracking work had been established it was felt that the process offered a supportive and objective tool that put the child's need at the centre:

"The PLO was not used in the way it was intended. It is hard for a social worker to give up on a family and there is a tendency to keep trying. The tracker challenges this. Good social workers try to make it work. You have to believe in your decision if you are going to take a child away from their family." *Head of Service Leybridge*

"Taking a child away is counterintuitive. The tracker shows the value of early permanency planning. Timing is important. The challenge to tracking is the time it takes. Staff buy into the value." *Team Manager Leybridge*

This tracker data was not made available to the evaluators as explained in Chapter 1. Coram-i's own analysis showed that there was, overall, a decline in the number of children starting pre-proceedings from 108 children in 2015/16 to 73 in 2018/19 (Coram-i, 2019d). For children with populated date for the first Legal Planning Meeting (LPM) and the last LGM Coram-i further evidenced an improvement in the timelines. The proportion of children who met the 12-week timescale from first to final LPM increased from 14% in 2014/15 to 33% in 2018/19 (Coram-i, 2019d).

Barriers and enablers

Particularly in the early phase of the project there was a strong sense from all the sites that the tracking method increased the administrative burden on teams. Social workers felt that the tracker was time consuming to complete and created duplication of data entry. The tracker consists of many different tabs that need information for each case; some of that information comes from the main data system, and other tabs need to be inputted manually. It did not lend itself to joint working across the organisations because only 1 person was able to use the excel tracker at a time.

There was also a cultural resistance to focussing on improving and working with the data. Social workers, as reported during staff interviews, felt that the new data demands were 'for the managers' and they could not at first see the value to their own work. There were also concerns raised around depersonalisation of the work by focussing on processes and targets rather than what was right for each child in its context. Similarly, social workers said that the

focus on data 'deskilled' the social worker, whose intuitive judgement of particular cases may not always fit the tracker timeframe.

By the end of the first year the technical challenges of using the tracker remained but staff were recognising the positive impacts of tracking and local solutions were emerging, such as more business support and improved training on data entry being made available. There were many examples from staff interviews of social workers using the data independently to find out information, to track cases, to raise questions as well as to frame supervision meetings. Similarly, the questioning of the data focus deskilling or being target focussed rather than child focussed was almost completely diminished as social workers began to see the benefits for children and families.

Although there was some evidence of embedded change (for example, one fostering team had taken over the entire process of tracking and performance surgeries), generally the feasibility of continuing such a detailed and highly resource intensive meeting beyond the Coram-i support timeframe was questioned.

In the final wave of interviewing, a year after Coram-i ended the project there was no evidence that the various trackers were still in use in the same way. In 3 sites new priorities or systems for monitoring permanence had emerged and in 1 where it was still in use it was explained that this was currently being reviewed because of the ongoing issues of aligning data driven permanency improvement with the site's main data recording system. It had been a concern from the beginning of the project that the tracking tool and process was too labour intensive and duplicated work in some areas. However, it is clear that this detailed tracking improved staff understanding of the child's journey and had an impact on timescales, and was necessary at the time to gain an understanding of where drift was happening and enable a focus on the child. It is unclear the extent to which the services stopped using the tool because of the barriers, or because wider improvement occurred and the detailed focus on cases was no longer necessary.

Case Study of Keith¹⁹: Joint service tracking leads to a permanent placement of a child who has spent years in need.

Keith has spent much of his childhood as a young carer for his birth mother who has multiple health issues. During regular tracking meetings held by Coram-i, the Senior Social Worker picked up that Keith kept being referred to the Children-in-Need team. However, because there had not been a 'crisis', no action had previously been taken. However, the neglect was persistent with Keith struggling at home and unable to achieve his potential at school. As a result, at the age of 15, Keith was supported to move to a foster care placement. He was matched with foster carers who could help him study for and sit his GCSE exams. Living in his new home, and being able to prioritise himself, Keith was able to thrive in his education. He was happy and wanted to stay with his foster carers, June and Christopher.

"He has adapted well. At first we had to stop him studying so much!" *Foster Carer*

Keith has since gone on to achieve his A' Levels and is now about to start university. Keith has also been supported to maintain relationships with his birth parents. Having been matched with foster carers who could support his ambitions and provide a stable home from which to achieve these, Keith is now 'staying put'²⁰ with June and Christopher.

"Since I have been [here], my whole outlook on the world has changed....
[June]... is very proactive in getting me what I need, I am very grateful." *Keith*

Whilst June, Christopher and Keith see their placement and relationship as permanent, the 'staying put' contract does not reflect this.

"The contract makes me feel like I'm a tenant." *Keith*

Conclusion

The evidence above suggests that the support of Coram-i in the intervention sites contributed to the improvement in timeliness in some parts of the permanency system and in some areas this was sustained beyond the life of the intervention. Improvements were recorded for the timeliness and frequency of permanency planning meetings in some Monkford, Leybridge

¹⁹ All names in this and the following vignettes have been pseudonymised. The vignettes also represent merged stories from children and foster carers interviewed as part of the retrospective case studies to ensure anonymity.

²⁰ Staying Put refers to the arrangement where-by care leavers aged 18 and older remain living with their former foster carer/s (HM Government, 2013).

and Readstone. There were fewer improvements established to the timeliness of CLA reviews, permanency plans and matching. This can be partly explained by data recording inconsistencies particularly for historic data which made comparisons difficult.

From the alternative stories of improvement provided by comparator sites which is presented in Appendix 1, the evaluation team aware that there were also other approaches to improving timeliness in permanency being progressed. These were not as intensive and granular as the Coram-i tracking approach. It was furthermore not possible to determine whether comparator sites did improve timeliness as their data was not available.

Did the innovation contribute to improving the recruitment and maintenance of a pool of foster carers (FC) who can meet the needs of its children looked after population?

In order to achieve permanency for children to a high quality, sufficiency of foster carers is essential. This includes recruitment as well as retention of foster carers. Both areas were a focus of Coram-i's project in all 4 sites to varying degrees. The following chapter begins with a description of the progress of the interventions as they were delivered in each site. This is followed by an analysis of outcomes for foster care.

Coram-i supported sites in introducing a range of innovations to improve the recruitment and maintenance of a pool of foster carers. This included 2 key innovations brought from Coram-i's experience in adoption - Activity Days and improved child profiling.

'Activity Days' are designed to match children and potential foster carers through informal, supervised fun activities. The children and carers are prepared for the day and the aim is to match children by providing more balanced profiles (involving life appreciation work), and for children and potential carers to meet face-to-face to see how they get on. The activity days are supported with new approaches to profiling children based on their lived experiences rather than more negatively framed paperwork presenting children as a series of complex needs. These were held in 3 sites. In Leybridge they were not held. There were 2 reasons given for this: a capacity of social workers and business support to plan and facilitate the events and some scepticism about the suitability of the process for fostered children with concerns about whether children would find the events unsettling. Monkford has continued with the practice and another local authority (not involved in the project) has also begun to run them (representing early spread of the innovation).

The profiling of children whose long-term plan was fostering in line with the quality of profiling for children whose plan is adoption. This was attempted through profiling events (where prospective carers come to see profiles of all the children waiting and can speak to a social worker to get more information) and profile writing workshops (giving support to write more holistic profiles). In 2 sites, Monkford and Broadmington, profiling events were successfully introduced, continuing 1 year after the Coram-i project ended. In Leybridge, where there was

a profile writing workshop, they said that the improvement work continued and that Coram-i had raised the profile of this work.

“So we think we’ve learnt quite a lot from the activity day but more than that just how to profile children, how to try and get the voice of the children out there and how we can be a bit more creative than just getting children’s information out.” *Assessment Manager Broadmington*

Other innovations included supporting the redesign of fostering recruitment and assessment process with a range of processes outlined in the table below.

Table 2: Support from Coram-i and outcomes for fostering per intervention site

IP area	Support from Coram-i	Outcome/ Impact
Leybridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity days • Redesign of fostering recruitment and assessment process. • Recruitment of family finder within the fostering team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer care approach impact on timeliness. • Strengthened marketing materials and information events. • Visit to prospective carers on a timelier basis. • Early finding court permission was sought. • Increase in the number of fostering households
Monkford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement in family finding, particularly recruitment of foster carers who can meet individual children’s complex needs. • Connected persons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased the recruitment of people who are able to offer long term places. • Improved sufficiency planning and foster carer recruitment reporting a net gain of over 40 carers.
Broadmington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambassador scheme to one of the sites (using existing foster carers to help recruit new ones) • Mentoring scheme for foster carers, with foster carers providing structured support to other less experienced foster carers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increase in the number of approved foster carers from 17 in 2017 to 27 in 2018 and 26 in the first 8 months of 2019 • Improved timeliness of foster carer recruitment • Increased provision of in-house foster placements from 32% to 42% a year after Coram-i’s

		<p>intervention had 6 mentors recruited, trained and supporting new foster carers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst potential ambassadors were successfully recruited and trained, Broadmington has since found it difficult to consistently engage a group of ambassadors.
Readstone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance surgeries to track foster carer's journey • Redesign of fostering recruitment and assessment process related documentation • Activity Day and redesign of profiles of children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement of internal standards of foster carer recruitment and approval • Alignment of new processes with ICS • Simplified documentation

In Leybridge, Coram-i supported the redesign of the fostering recruitment and assessment process and related documentation. The team manager of the fostering service felt that this customer care approach had increased the number and quality of newly recruited foster carers²¹. Considerable work was undertaken to strengthen the marketing materials and information events at the beginning of the project. The location of the family finder in the adoption team was also identified as a barrier to timeliness of matching for fostering. Coram-i supported a redesign which resulted in the recruitment of a family finder within the fostering team. Coram-i also influenced the service to visit prospective carers on more a timely basis, and that early family finding court permission is sought.

In Monkford, improvement in Family Finding and in particular the recruitment of specialised foster carers who can meet individual children's complex needs was also an area of focus. Monkford worked with their communications team to raise the profile of long-term foster care (e.g. on the website and in social media dedicated pages) and they have increased the recruitment of people who are able to offer long term places. As a result, after a year of the intervention Monkford had improved sufficiency planning and foster carer recruitment reporting a net gain of over 40 carers (this included some existing short term or respite carers converting to long term foster carers and it also included approved connected persons for long term care).

²¹ Local data was not made available to the evaluators.

In Broadmington, in order to recruit foster carers and to support them Coram-i introduced an Ambassador scheme (using existing foster carers to help recruit new ones) and a mentoring scheme (foster carers providing structured support to other less experienced foster carers). Broadmington worked with Coram-i to build a mentoring scheme for foster carers, which a year after Coram-i's intervention had 6 mentors recruited, trained and supporting new foster carers. The ambassadors' scheme was designed to involve foster carers in the recruitment of new foster carers. However, whilst potential ambassadors were successfully recruited and trained, Broadmington have since found it difficult to consistently engage a group of ambassadors.

"From initially having a lot of interest, people coming along to see preparation and training sessions, when it is actually carers being [...asked...] to go out and do a recruitment event we find that people are sort of saying, a bit busy this week or got a lot going on. So whilst, I think, a lot of really good work was put into that [...] for whatever reason that hasn't really taken off." *Fostering Team Leader Broadmington*

This area of work was out of scope in the other sites and was identified by some interviewees as an area for them to develop in order to improve retention, as this social worker reflected.

"I think we haven't really been that creative yet about what support we can offer to families." *Supervising Social Worker Monkford*

In Readstone, Coram-i worked with the fostering teams to strengthen the recruitment and assessment of foster carers as well as the retention. Coram-i implemented performance surgeries to track the foster carers journey. Work was undertaken to redesign recruitment process and related documentation to make it more customer focused. The marketing and recruitment strategy was being led by a Coram associate and the work involved the delivery of an Activity Day.

Overall analysis of outcomes for foster care by intervention site

In the following, evidence of the impact of Coram-i's support on recruitment and maintenance of foster carers is presented per site. Data sources are: tracker data on recruitment and assessment and/or foster carer support (Broadmington and Monkford); staff interview data (all sites); Coram-i site reports; as well as summary data on national fostering statistics.²² For the recruitment and assessment of foster carers indicators used are: number of enquiries from potential foster carers; number of foster places; timeliness of completion of enquiries; timeliness of Initial Home Visit (IHV); timeliness of panel approval. For the retention and usage of foster carers indicators used are: fill rate; proportion of in-house foster placements.

²² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2018-to-31-march-2019>

Leybridge

In Leybridge, even though the recruitment process was redesigned and improvements on quality and numbers of those recruited were reported in staff interviews, according to the national fostering statistics the number of enquiries decreased between 2017 and 2019. This could be a reflection of more targeted marketing, meaning that less enquiries were needed. Overall there was an increase between 2017 and 2018 in the number of foster places in Leybridge according to the fostering statistics (see Figure 14 in Appendix 5: Further findings). No data were available for 2019. Linked to the number of foster places is the usage of these places as indicated by the fill rate (percentage of filled places of approved places), the vacancy rate (percentage of vacant places of approved places) and the not available rate (percentage of not available approved places). The fill rate in Leybridge was 65% in 2018 as reported by Coram-i whereas the 'not available rate' and the 'vacancy rate' were 15 and 20%, respectively (Coram-i, 2019d). The fill rate was higher than the national average of 62% as of 2018.

There was an overall intention for all sites to be less dependent on external agencies for providing foster carers in line with sufficiency strategy²³ to provide a sufficient number of placements. In Leybridge however, there was a noticeable decrease in the proportion of placements provided by in-house foster carers (not including connected cares), this is down from 44% in 2017 to 41% in 2018 and 34% in 2019 according to the SSDA903 data shared with the evaluators. This represents an opposing trend, though this difference was not statistically significant ($p>.05$).

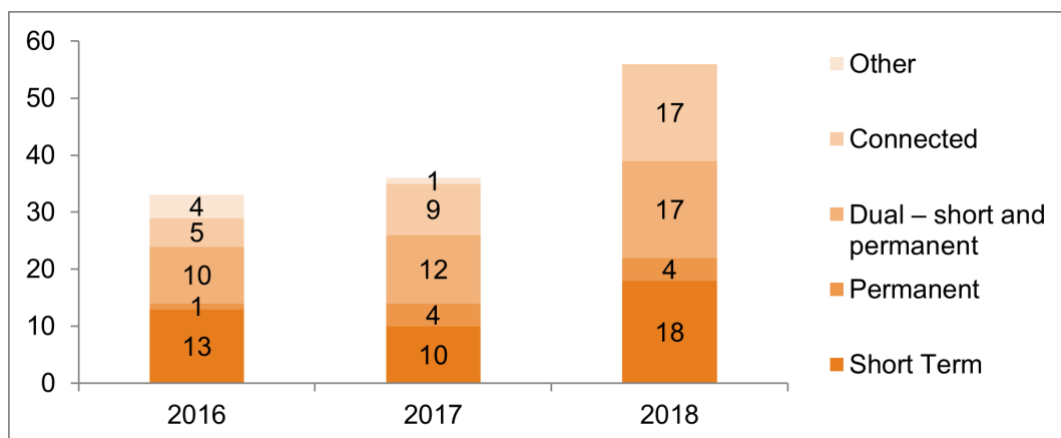
Monkford

In Monkford, foster carer recruitment was not in scope within this project and no increase in the number of initial inquiries was shown in the annual fostering statistics and the analysis carried out by Coram-i (Coram-i, 2019b). There was further no overall improvement in the timeliness of recruitment processes in Monkford (Coram-i, 2019b). In 2017 the target of taking no more than 10 working days to undertake an IHV after having received the enquiry was met for 46% of visits while in 2018 only for 42%. The target of having a panel recommendation within 8 months was met for all cases in 2017 while only for 78% in 2018. However, the number of approved foster carer households increased according to foster support tracker data shared with the evaluators. This showed an increase from 33 approved foster carers in 2016 to 36 in 2017 and 56 in 2018 (see

²³ Sufficiency strategy refers to the plan set out by local authorities to fulfil their duty of providing sufficient and safe placements for all children in care as set out in the Children Act 1989 (DCSF, 2010).

Figure 5).⁷ Noticeable is also the higher proportion of connected persons which was one of the priority areas of the work of Coram-i in Monkford.

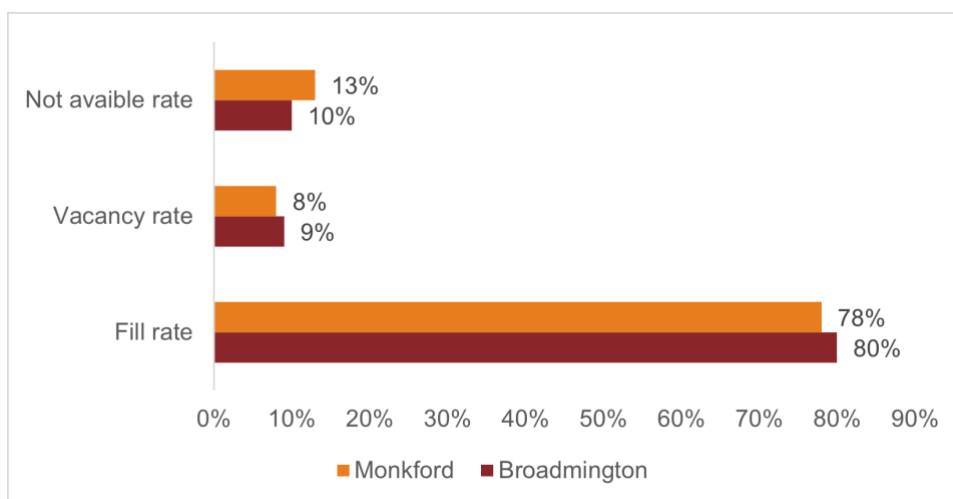
Figure 5: Number of approved foster carer households per year in Monkford



Source: Monkford fostering tracker data.

In relation to the occupancy of foster places in Monkford, there were some inconsistencies in recording the number of children approved for, children placed, vacant places and not available places. When only using cases where numbers could be validated it showed that the fill rate at the time for both Monkford and Broadmington was relatively high, at around 80% (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Occupancy of foster carer places in Monkford and Broadmington



Source: Monkford and Broadmington foster carer support tracker data;
Monkford: N=230; Broadmington: N=278.

Broadmington

In Broadmington, according to analysis performed by Coram-i on data that were available to them there was an increase in the number of enquiries from 2017 to 2018, however historic

data could not be validated (Coram-i, 2019a). This finding from tracker data can be triangulated with summary data available on local authority level which shows that the number of enquiries received increased from 380 in 2017 to 820 in 2019 (see Figure 11 in Appendix 5: Further findings).

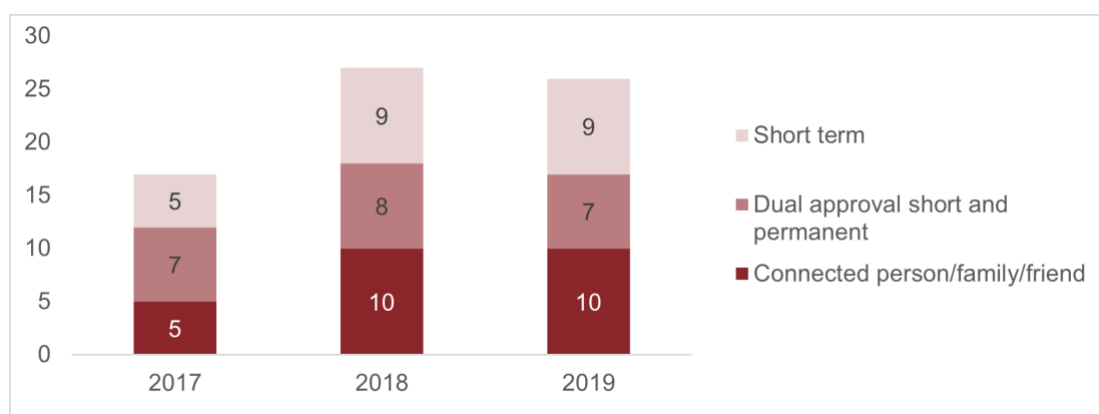
Recruitment tracker data from Broadmington allowed to look at the timeliness of the different application stages of potential foster carers in relation to the time from household inquiry and IHV as well as from application to panel recommendation. This showed that:

- There was no significant change in the average number of days between household enquiry and IHV between 2017 and 2018. Most of the visits (over 60%) took place within the first 10 days after receiving the enquiry as recorded via the tracker (Coram-i, 2019a). Tracker data shared with the evaluators for the period between March and December 2019 showed that the proportion of initial application going to IHV within 10 days increased to 79% from the reported proportion of just over 60% in 2018 and just over 70% in 2017 (see Figure 12 in Appendix 5: Further findings).
- Furthermore, the timeliness of the fostering panel improved in 2019 with the majority of cases taking 4 months or less from making an application to panel recommendation, compared to 25% in 2018 (see Figure 13 in Appendix 5: Further findings).

Analysis of the number of approved foster carers from the tracker data as of January 2019 showed that there was an increase in the number of approved foster carers from 17 in 2017 to 27 in 2018 and 26 in the first 8 months of 2019 (see Figure 7).²⁴

²⁴ Note that secondary carers and family members were excluded from these statistics. There is the possibility that the number of approved carers was higher historically but that these have deregistered in the meantime.

Figure 7: Number of approved foster carer households per year in Broadmington



Source: Broadmington fostering tracker data.

These findings can be triangulated with national data available on foster carer places available and approved foster carer households. This illustrates that the number of foster places is overall increasing for Broadmington (including all fostering agencies).

In Broadmington, the council was able to place more children with inhouse foster carers when comparing the proportion of 2017, 2018 and 2019 (see Table 3). The proportion of inhouse foster carer placements increased from 32% in 2017 to 42% in 2019. The increase of the pool of inhouse foster carers was a priority for Broadmington as set out in their sufficiency strategy to meet the need of children and to be less reliant on external fostering agencies. It was a key focus of Coram-i's support and changes made included streamlining Stage 1 and 2 processes, simplifying application form and the tracking tool itself.

Table 3: Provision of foster placements in Broadmington

Year	Own provision		Private		Voluntary/third sector provision	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
2017	226	32%	438	61%	51	7%
2018	279	38%	408	56%	40	6%
2019	295	42%	381	54%	25	4%

Source: Broadmington children looked after data.

Readstone

In Readstone, Coram-i's analysis shows that between January 2016 and December 2018 369 initial enquiries were made (Coram-i, 2019b). Even though the unit of analysis is slightly different for the foster carer statistics available at a local authority level, it does indicate an overall increase of the number of foster carers from before Coram-i started to work in

Readstone to when they had just left, i.e., end of March 2019 (see Figure 11 in Appendix 5: Further findings).

In Readstone, there was no overall improvement in timeliness according to Coram-i data analysis, however, for most cases enquiries (91% in 2018/2019) were completed within the first 10 days (Coram-i, 2019c). This could have been due to several reasons such as better data recording, an increase in enquiries as well as staff taking time to adapt to new processes. There were no data for 2019 available to the evaluators to be able to assess improvement in timelines after the end of the programme.

According to national statistics, the number of foster care places increase in Readstone between 2017 and 2019 (see Figure 14 in Appendix 5: Further findings). The fill rate as of 2019 presented as part of the local authority is similarly low in Readstone at 60% than in Leybridge (Coram-i, 2019c). In Readstone, there was an increase in the proportion of foster placements with inhouse foster carers between 2017 and 2018 from 39% to 43%, however this proportion decreased in 2019 to 37%.

The overall picture is rather complex and difficult to interpret. Overall, there were some promising areas of improved timeliness of the different stages of the fostering process. It was not possible to determine overall if more foster carers were recruited in any of the sites.

Barriers and enablers

One of the key themes of the qualitative analysis in all 3 waves of interviewing was the barrier of limited resources to all service improvement work. The preparations and staffing of Activity Days and profiling events were regarded as quite resource heavy. Although early in the project a minority of site staff interviewed expressed concerns about the appropriateness of activity days for children in foster care, it was more generally the case that practices were regarded as beneficial and resources were the barrier. One site reported 'localising' the process of profiling events making them less resource intensive.

From the same interviews, the key enabler for improving recruitment and support to foster carers was changing the culture to 'child centred' and the language from long-term to permanent fostering. Holding in mind the whole child and their life story, rather than seeing the fostering service as a service for foster carers shifted a focus onto the primary task of the work: improving permanency. This is described more fully in Chapter 'Has the innovation influenced the culture of children's social care teams: valuing data, shared accountability and child centred?'

Conclusion

Overall, one can conclude that there is some evidence of success in improving recruitment and support of foster carers and some improvements in areas of timeliness of processes.

This is based on the analysis of number of enquiries, timeliness of recruitment of foster carers, number of improved foster carer households, number of foster places, filled rate and provision of placements by in-house foster carer. There was mixed evidence from Leybridge, Monkford and Readstone while Broadmington showed positive indication of change. There are also signs of alternative positive outcomes based on staff interviews with both comparison sites had Coram-i not supported the sites with their particular approach which is reported in Appendix 1: The Contribution analysis. However, one can see that in the context of these particular sites that were struggling with improvement, Coram-i's bespoke and granular methodology produced success in a small amount of time. As with the question of timeliness, without the trackers in place and fully understanding what replaced them in the sites it is difficult to assess the sustainability of the improvement work. This is also the case in the comparator sites.

Case Study²⁵ Karen and Emily: A foster carer who can meet a child's needs

Emily was removed from her birth family at the age of 10, following years of neglect and being a young carer for her mother and younger sibling. Following a visit to meet Karen, a foster carer of 7 years, Emily moved in 4 days later on a 'short-term' placement. Although Karen had previously decided that she would focus on short-term fostering for babies and children up to the age of 10, this changed with Emily. When it became clear after a year that Emily would remain in foster care, Emily said that she wanted to stay with Karen.

"It was kind of [Emily] that made the decision for me to do the long term because she was happy. She was settled and she was happy and she gets on great with my family [...]. So [...] I just thought, why move her on? Why should she have to start again?" *Karen, Foster Carer*

That was nearly 5 years ago, and life has been very settled since. Emily has had almost 100% attendance at school, attends out of school sports and activity clubs and says:

"It is a calm place to stay and I can actually have a conversation with [Karen] and I can trust [Karen] with my problems and stuff like that." *Emily*

Karen also reports that Emily struggled with day-to-day living tasks when she first arrived and needed a lot of support with, for instance, personal hygiene and dressing. With nurturing, Emily learnt to do these things and now takes pride in looking after herself. Additionally, Karen has established clear boundaries and a calm approach to dealing with inevitable difficult behaviours that sometimes arise. For instance,

"[Emily] might have a little tantrum but she can control it now whereas before she couldn't. [...] there were a couple of things that got broken. I said 'that is fine, pick it up and put it in the bin but I am not replacing it.' I try and give her the choices although I have the last say [...]. I say, 'well do you think that is sensible that you should be out at nine o'clock at night?' And then she will say 'no'. [...] I just feel that I am really lucky with her [...] [Emily] [...] knows that she wasn't in a good environment. And I think that makes a difference." *Karen, Foster Carer*

Emily has felt at home since arriving: "I felt like I had a proper family"

and is ambitious about her future:

"I want to be a Social Worker [...] because it is a good experience that I have been through, so I want to go to 6th Form and study [...] at University." *Emily*

Has the innovation influenced the culture of children's social care teams: valuing data, shared accountability and child centred?

Coram-i worked on culture change through modelling best practice, use of language and challenge. Analysis of minutes, and qualitative staff interviews establish that to different degrees in each site there was a positive shift in culture in terms of improving the valuing of data, shared accountability, and child centred thinking.

Valuing data

Coram-i's work had a strong focus on improving the use of available data in social work in the belief that each number represented a child's journey through children's social care. In the early phase of the work there was resistance to this from social workers, as they felt data entry and retrieval was a task for business support and the information produced was largely 'for management' to make service level decisions. The introduction of tracking and performance surgeries enabled each worker to see their cases progressing or being held up and the history of each case.

Another important mind set shift supported by Coram-i was to see the recording of accurate data on the whole journey as an important service for the child. The details of how, when, and why someone came into care was emphasised as central to a child in care's positive view of themselves. This challenged the culture of the sites where many described the experience of data recording as in service of bureaucracy, taking time away from working with families. For example, 1 senior member of staff described the collection of routine data as 'feeding the beast'.

Joint accountability

All sites appreciated that the permanency work, particularly joint tracking meetings, had an impact on the linking up of issues and teams so that work was focussed on the child's outcomes and not completing tasks allocated to services or individuals. This depended on what areas of children's services Coram-i were working on in each site and included from the social work and safeguarding through to fostering services, and from senior management through to newly qualified social workers. Towards the end of the intervention, there was evidence of joint accountability across teams for establishing permanency. For example, in 1 site staff described the culture as having a new sense of urgency and responsiveness. By the end of the intervention and 1 year following, there were also some examples given of how improvements to permanency planning systems had created capacity and clarity to support more strategic thinking. For example, 1 service manager reported for the first time being

²⁵ Anonymised Case Study based on Retrospective Case Study method outlined in Appendix 3 Methodology

seriously engaged in partnership meetings with other local services focussing on longer term outcomes for looked after children such as in education.

Child centred

Coram-i attempted to model a culture that held 'the child as client'. This was particularly important in fostering teams who traditionally regard foster carers as their client. Staff interviewed in 3 of the 4 participating sites said that the new tracking systems had 'brought to life' the child's journey. Across all sites the focus on the child at the centre of all work influenced a shift towards thinking about early permanency (before a child becomes officially looked after and when a child comes into care). There was a feeling across all sites that there had been more exploration of all possible permanency paths (parallel planning). Two sites reported that a shift in language had taken place from long-term fostering to permanent fostering.

In Leybridge, Coram-i established the presentation to children of a certificate to mark their permanent plan (as in adoption) which they continue to use after the end of the programme. Social workers said that the positive impact of knowing the placement is permanent for a child could not be underestimated.

There were also a small but sustained theme from the 3 waves of staff interviews of uncertainty about Coram-i's application of adoption processes to foster care and the focus on faster achievement of permanency. Joint tracking, PLO tracking, performance surgeries, and Activity days were examples of this. The related processes of tracking and performance were critiqued as driving change in placement to somewhere permanent at the cost of destabilising arrangements that were considered best for the current circumstance. The Activity days were critiqued as being potentially disturbing to children. There was only 1 example given by a social worker of any negative impact on a child and this was a view that was contested by others.

Did the innovation contribute to the improved stability of placements?

Placement stability was one of the long-term outcomes of the project. As set out in Tilbury and Osmond's review of permanency planning in foster care "permanency planning is a systematic, goal-directed and timely approach to case planning for children subject to child protection intervention aimed at promoting stability and continuity" (2006). Adoption research showed that the timeliness of making permanent arrangements is essential for promoting stability and security (van den Dries, Juffer, van Ijzendoorn, & Bakermans Kranenburg, 2009). Apart from timeliness, UK research on fostering evidenced that the quality of the match between child and foster carer is key for achieving permanency for children (Schofield, Beek, & Ward 2012). Schofield and Beek (2005) further demonstrated that the quality of the carers is another factor that has an impact on the stability of the placement. American research also found that effective matching as well as preparation of and support for foster

carers increased placement stability (Redding, Fried, & Britner, 2000). There are many other factors which contribute to placement stability or instability. Social worker turnover for example was found to be related to placement instability (Ryan, Garnier, Zyphur, & Zhai, 2006). More generally a distinction needs to be made between planned and unplanned placement moves, hence, not all placement changes can be interpreted as a negative.

As it was not possible to track children long-term the evaluation team was unable to provide robust evidence on the impact of the project on placement stability. However, using information on the date when children became looked after offered the potential to investigate placement stability in relation to entry to care for the following measures: the number of placements in the previous 12 months; and the number of area placements.

To assess the impact of stability of placements the data and indicators as set out in Table 4 were used.

Table 4: Data used to assess placement stability

Site	Indicators	Data source	Intervention site
Intervention site	Number of placements in last 12 months (across all CLA)	SSDA903 local data for 2017, 2018, 2019	All four
	Number of placements in the last 12 months (for CLA coming into care in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019)	SSDA903 local data for 2019	All four
	Number of placements in the last 12 months (for CLA in fostering arrangements)	SSDA903 local data for 2017, 2018, 2019	Broadmington, Leybridge, Readstone
	Out of area placements	SSDA903 local data for 2017, 2018, 2019	Leybridge, Monkford
	Three or more placements	National CLA statistics	All
Statistical neighbours and Comparator sites	Out of area placements	National CLA statistics	All
	Three or more placements	National CLA statistics	All

Placement moves

Coram-i's aim was to promote permanency for children for whom a plan had not yet been agreed in 2018. An analysis of impact on stability of placements was conducted by comparing the number of placements depending on when children came into care. for Broadmington and Leybridge there was a statistically significant difference in the number of placements in the previous 12 months depending on the year the child came into care (i.e., period of care start) as of 2019 ($p<.001$; $p<.05$). Table 5: Average number of placements by period of care start in Broadmington and Leybridge Table 5 displays that the average number of placements decreased between period of care starts 2017 and 2019.²⁶ For Monkford the number of placements showed a decrease from 1.8 to 1.6 when using the year the child came into care, however, this decrease was not statistically significant. In Readstone, the differences in the number of placements in the previous year (depending on the year when the child came into care) was not statistically significant.²⁷

Table 5: Average number of placements by period of care start in Broadmington and Leybridge

Period of care start	Broadmington				Leybridge		
	N	Mean	SD		N	Mean	SD
2016	110	1.9	0.89		54	1.4	0.72
2017	172	2.0	1.23		40	2.0	1.04
2018	333	1.8	1.09		120	1.9	1.30
2019	108	1.2	0.37		16	1.3	0.58

Source: Broadmington and Leybridge CLA local data as of 2019.

²⁶ Note that the children coming into care in 2019 have not been in care 12 months.

²⁷ We further tested the effect of year on the difference in the number of placements in the last 12 months for long-term and short-term fostering but did not find a statistically significant effect. This analysis was conducted for the 3 sites where data on placement type was available.

Case Study²⁸ Craig: A historic case of when permanent fostering has been the plan, but delay has been the reality. This highlights the importance of stability in a child's life.

Craig and his younger brother were removed from their birth parents in 2009 and placed in foster care. Aged 3 and 2 respectively, the 2 brothers settled quickly with Geoff and Patricia, an older, experienced couple. Four years of stability in their placement passed, with permanency agreed as part of their care plans, though social workers assigned to them changed over this time. During this period, the couple experienced some ill-health and the local authority decided that the boys' needs would be best met being placed with a younger couple. The boys were moved to new carers in 2013, with the intention that this would be a 'forever home'. However, within a matter of months, this placement was disrupted and over the next 5 years, the boys moved from one foster carer to the next, experiencing 7 placement moves in total.

By 2018, Coram-i were working with the local authority to support permanency planning, including a focus on improved matching between foster carers and children. Following his latest foster care experience, which included some significant neglect and abusive behaviour, it was agreed that Craig and his brother would be placed separately. At a 'Family finding' day, Craig met Denise and Noel, a couple who had had careers working with vulnerable young people and were committed to long-term fostering. Within a matter of weeks, Craig moved in with the couple and 18 months later, at panel, the placement was made permanent.

When asked what the difference was between his previous and current foster carers, Craig said

"They treat me like an actual human being rather than a piece of dirt."

Craig continues to see Geoff and Patricia who have been like 'grandparents'. Having expected permanency with every move, Craig cautions that permanency plans need to be approached carefully.

Conclusion

The evaluation found an early indication of a potential effect on stability in 2 sites in terms of a reduction in the number of placement moves. However, there is no evidence that the Coram-i intervention had an impact on placement stability on a population level. Considering

²⁸ Anonymised Case Study based on Retrospective Case Study method outlined in Appendix 3 Methodology

the dosage of the Coram-i intervention, and the time frame of the intervention it is unlikely that the project would have had a significant impact on placement stability overall which would have shown in the evaluation.

Did the innovation contribute to key outcomes for children looked after?

One of the long-term outcomes of the project was to improve the outcomes of the population of looked after children (including wellbeing, education, criminal justice involvement and substance misuse) by providing timely and high-quality permanency planning. This theory of change was based on evidence that placement stability and early stability has a positive impact on the wellbeing of children as well as other developmental outcomes (Harden, 2004; Rubin, O'Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007; Bazalgette, Rahilly, & Trevelyan, 2015).

Overall, the statistics reported need to be interpreted with caution as improvement in long-term outcomes could not be expected so early following the intervention (see Appendix 1: The Contribution analysis).

Wellbeing was measured by (i) the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and (ii) the Bright Spots reports prepared by Coram. In Broadmington, the average level of wellbeing measured by the SDQ showed a statistically significant improvement between 2017 and 2019 for all CLA as displayed in Table 6 ($p < .01$). This improvement was linked to the difference between 2017 and 2019 ($p < .01$) as well as between 2018 and 2019 ($p < .01$). There was no significant improvement in Leybridge, Monkford and Readstone ($p > .05$).

Table 6: Average SDQ total difficulty scores²⁹ in Broadmington

Year	N	Mean	SD
2017	580	13.5	7.64
2018	634	13.6	7.50
2019	799	12.4	7.50

Source: Broadmington CLA local data.

One of the interventions Coram-i implemented in all 4 sites was the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey as part of the Bright Spots Programme, a cooperation between Coram Voice and the University of Bristol. The survey measures several wellbeing indicators developed as part of the programme with the aim to provide evidence about the child's experience of being in care and to inform practice. As part of this project the survey was implemented twice, the first time in 2017 and the second time in 2019. Three sites shared the first report with the evaluators

²⁹ The SDQ total difficulty score refers to the level of difficulties with a higher score representing higher levels of difficulties. Individual scores can be classified into 'close to average' (0-13), 'slightly raised' (14-16), 'high' (17-19) and 'very high' (20-40).

and 2 sites also shared the report of the second round.³⁰ Of the 2 sites that shared both rounds of the report with the evaluators the comparison of the reports for 1 site showed an improvement in wellbeing of children in care who took part in the survey.³¹ (See Appendix 5: Further findings)

Also, as a long-term outcome related to stability, Coram-i's support also aimed at improvement in education outcomes for looked after children. School attendance was used as an indicator for educational outcomes. SSDA903 data from Readstone showed that there is no statistically significant improvement when comparing the proportion of persistent absences as well as the number of fixed-term exclusions between 2017, 2018 and 2019 ($p>.05$). Other long-term intended outcomes related to stability were the reduced criminal involvement and substance misuse for looked after children. There was no statistically significant change in substance misuse problem in last 12 months for Broadmington, Readstone and Leybridge between 2017 and 2019 ($p>.05$). For Broadmington and Leybridge there was further no statistically significant change for convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand in last 12 months between 2017 and 2019 ($p>.05$). Only in Monkford there was a very small but significant increase in the number of looked after children convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand in last 12 months ($p<.05$).

Staff in the sites believed that the improvement in permanency planning should logically have an impact on the long-term outcomes of children in care and gave some examples of this in interviews (some of these were followed up and presented in the case studies). There was also a link made by staff in the sites between the quality of services provided and child outcomes with one example given that when a child's permanence was agreed and marked with a certificate this was deemed to have had a positive impact on the children's self-esteem and sense of belonging.

³⁰ Reports were shared by Coram if project leads within the sites gave consent.

³¹ Note that it was not possible to track if the same children completed the survey at both times.

Case Study³² Janine: The impact of a permanent home on education and mental health.

Janine is 15 years old and has lived with Phillipa for the last year, having had many years of instability up to that point. Janine was removed from her birth parents aged 2 and then lived with one relative on a special guardianship order for 5 years. However, when some abuse became apparent, Janine was moved in with another relative, but this placement also broke down. Janine was then placed in foster care and over the course of the next 2 years had 13 different placements. Because of this, Janine struggled to build friendships and school was also challenging.

“If you don’t have a settled home then your school isn’t going to be settled as well.” *Janine*

Philippa was a local parent, who knew of Janine through her daughter. When she found out that Janine needed a place to stay, Philippa offered this without considering becoming a foster carer. Janine arrived with her social worker and has stayed ever since. The plan agreed for Janine is that she will stay ‘long-term’ with Philippa and her children. In this year, Janine has started building friendships and attending school which she had not done for a long time.

“[Janine is] now able to manage relationships more, [has] less social anxiety, not going missing, coming into her own.” *Sonia, Social Worker*

Janine is working towards maths and English qualifications and her school is hopeful that she will be able to catch up in time for her exams in the next year. Janine has also been able to enjoy hobbies such as horse riding and dancing.

“I am much more confident.” *Janine*

Whereas previously, Janine had no thoughts of future education and career, she now wants to go to University and has some growing ambitions for her future adult life. Janine puts her improved wellbeing to knowing she will be staying with Philippa.

“Long term is definitely better for me. [...] I would rather be just in one home and settle down rather than be moving around a lot.” *Janine*

Sonia, Janine’s social worker highlights some of the difficulties that can lead to the disrupted lives of children like Janine.

“An understanding of permanency is good but often there’s not a good enough foster carer. Foster carers also need good social workers, supervision, we need diversity in the workforce, able to work with multi agencies. [...]. [...] When it



Conclusion

Within the life span of the evaluation it was not possible to observe the changes in child outcomes linked to the cohort of young people that were being tracked and matched while Coram-i was working in the sites. Evaluating the whole theory of change from intervention to long term outcomes is tentative in terms of attribution. This is because the impact of Coram-i's work on the stability of placements cannot be shown. However, there are some early indications of changes in wellbeing based on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) in 1 site (Broadmington) as well as based on 2 rounds of Bright Spots from 2 sites (Readstone and Monkford).

Did the innovation contribute to increased wellbeing of staff?

Improved staff well-being was never an intended outcome measure of Coram-i's interventions. However, in the first wave of qualitative staff interviews the evaluators noticed that there were mixed feelings about the effect of Coram-i's interventions on staff well-being. Some staff felt under pressure from the changes and others felt empowered by being active in an improvement journey. This was especially regarding the focus on individual performance. As it was also Coram-i's view that a strong performance culture underpinned all the improvement work the evaluation team decided to explore the possibility that improved wellbeing was an unintended outcome.

The staff qualitative interviews suggest that the difference in how staff felt about the new approaches were a reflection of 2 broad categories of staff: those with dissatisfaction with workload and/or poor performance; and those who were newer in post and perhaps more open to the new process, and having embraced it, found it to be beneficial in keeping task and case focussed. Whether staff agreed with it or not, the evaluation team observed in the meetings that the performance and tracking improvement processes did transparently highlight work performance issues by enabling a discussion about why data was not recorded, why deadlines for key timelines were not met and why agreed next steps were not actioned.

By the end of the project it (in wave 3 staff interviews) it was a widely held view that the performance surgeries and trackers had become a useful way for individuals to gain control over their workload, to depersonalise problems and gain support.

³² Anonymised Case Study based on Retrospective Case Study method outlined in Appendix 3 Methodology

In the final wave of interviewing, a year after the project finished there were no further examples of improvement in staff wellbeing. One could understand this as a logical response to moving from a difficult working environment to an improved one (in the project duration) followed by a year after the end of the project there were many further changes to services, and staff changes and political and economic uncertainties for all the 4 sites. Quantitatively the evaluation team explored this using as indicators staff vacancy rate, staff turnover rate as well as agency rate to assess staff stability. There were some positive findings for a number of sites for the indicators, but these are difficult to attribute to the project.

Information about vacancy rates, turnover rates and agency rates in relation to social workers in children's services is also available for statistical neighbours and comparator sites. Vacancy rates in Monkford and Broadmington are approaching the same level as their statistical neighbour averages in 2018 and 2019. In Leybridge and Readstone the vacancy rate was higher than the one of the corresponding statistical neighbour averages in 2019. A similar observation can be made about the social worker turnover. Only Broadmington demonstrates a lower agency social worker rate than its statistical neighbour in 2019. A full analysis can be found in Appendix 5: Further findings.

Case Study³³ Debbie: The impact of staff stability on foster carers

Debbie has been a foster carer for 20 years, mostly caring for babies pre-adoption, with her husband Dean, who sadly died a few years ago. Debbie's experience has been that if there is stability amongst the social work teams, it supports stability within families.

"If in here [the local authority] is unstable, it filters all the way out." *Debbie*

One foster child, Neil, was placed with Debbie and Dean 'permanently' but this did not work out. At the time, the local authority had a high turnover of agency social workers. These professionals seemed unable to provide the information or support that Debbie and Dean needed to help make this placement permanent. Dean tried to 'fight' for Neil and support him in engaging with the sports activities he enjoyed and was motivated to do. He advocated for Neil at his school, who did not seem to understand Neil's behaviour or needs. When the school did not listen and withdrew sports activities from Neil as punishment, Dean and Debbie felt that a school move would be preferable. However, the social workers decided that Neil needed to stay at his school for stability. They also encouraged Neil to keep contact with his birth mother, even when these meetings were very unsettling. Eventually, the placement broke down and Neil moved on to residential care. Debbie reflects that if there had been consistent support from the social workers, and a better understanding of the family and Neil from before the matching process, this might have been avoided.

In contrast, another foster child, Simon, returned to Debbie and Dean as a toddler after his adoption was disrupted. At that time, approximately 15 years ago, they had a longer-term social worker who was very supportive over the 2 years it took for Simon to fully settle in. Although there have been ups and downs, Simon has been able to thrive and now that he is about to turn 18, he will be 'staying put' with Debbie. However, in more recent years, as the local authority social work team has become increasingly unstable, this has still had an impact even on this relatively stable match. When Dean died, a strong family and friends' network supported Debbie in navigating these very difficult times. However, there were few, if any, professionals around who knew the family, their history, and relationships. When Debbie acknowledged in an annual review that life was currently hard, this initiated a full-scale review into whether the children should continue to be placed with her.

"I said it was hard. I was too truthful. I felt betrayed. I have never let go of any children in my care. I love what I do" *Debbie*

As a result of this kind of experience, Debbie says that she and fellow foster carers support each other but are very careful of what they say to professionals. They have

learnt that showing vulnerability can be misunderstood and they feel that it is difficult to rely and lean on workers who might not stay very long.

“You are being really personal with a person who disappears in 6 weeks.” *Debbie*

Did the innovation contribute to a decline in spending for the services/ does the innovation have the potential to contribute to less spending for the service?

The original plan of the project foresaw the implementation of the cost-calculator in all 4 pilot sites. Therefore, the design of the cost-benefit evaluation aimed to draw on the cost-calculation as a resource for the assessment. In the absence of the cost calculator, the evaluators have reviewed outcomes for children in care in the pilot sites and input estimated impacts into a cost framework designed with a view to assessing the consequent level of cost reductions. In doing so, the estimate of impacts was generally determined by comparing later outcomes with baseline outcomes and checking for statistical significance of changes. For the purpose of this analysis 1 pilot site was excluded from consideration as it had wider, substantial leadership and financial issues – the scale of such effects meant that these would heavily outweigh any changes due to Coram-i, making statistical assessment of impact not possible.

The Theory of Change assumed that if achieved, improvements in the medium to long-term fostering arrangements for children have potential for cost reductions by:

- (a) increasing the proportion of in-house foster care - this reduces the proportion of more expensive private care;
- (b) increasing the stability of long-term foster care - this reduces the need for administration and placements by social workers; and
- (c) increasing the wellbeing of children who require fewer placement changes, which is likely to result in fewer missing episodes and reduced need for mental health expenditure.

One needs to re-iterate that these are medium to long-term savings, and given the timescales of the evaluation it is important to note that they represent extrapolations from the intermediate outcomes (such as wellbeing) that the evaluators have observed, rather than directly observed effects on current expenditure. It is also important to note that the assessed impacts on the basis of the 3 sites in aggregate gives greater priority to the effects observed in the largest local authority.

³³ Anonymised Case Study based on Retrospective Case Study method outlined in Appendix 3 Methodology

The chosen 3 agendas for achieving cost reductions are considered in turn below, followed by checking overarching factors for increasing, and for reducing the expected scale of those effects, before contrasting benefits with the consultancy costs associated with Coram-i. No other operating costs of the project were considered.

In-house foster care

Table 7 below examines in-house foster care among the 3 pilot sites included in the analysis. Among this sample of almost 1,000 children in foster care each year, the overall proportion of children placed with in-house foster carers rose by almost 6% between 2017 and 2019. This represents a statistically significant increase ($p<.01$).

Table 7: Statistical analysis of change in proportion of in-house foster care

Year	Number of children in foster care	Number in in-house foster care	Proportion in in-house foster care
2017	994	338	34.0%
2019	978	389	39.8%
Difference			5.8%

Source: CLA local data for Broadmington, Leybridge and Readstone.

In order to assess the value of such an improvement, one needs to assess the difference in cost between in-house and external foster care, and the proportion of this which can be recouped by bringing provision in-house. The calculation of this saving estimate can be found in Appendix 3: Methodology. With an aggregate group (for the 3 pilot sites considered) of around 980 in foster care, a 5.8% shift towards in-house provision represents an additional 57 in-house placements. At a saving of £8,675 per child per year, this represents an overall cost reduction of the order of £492,700.

Stability of long-term foster care

Table 8 below presents trends in number of placements per year for children in long-term foster care³⁴, using aggregate figures for the 3 pilot sites. Among the sample of around 500 children, the average number of placements fell by 0.13 from 1.54 to 1.41, which represents a proportional decrease of 8.7%³⁵. This represents a statistically significant effect ($p<.05$).³⁶

³⁴ Long-term foster care as used in this analysis refers to category 'foster placement – long term fostering' placement codes as required by the SSDA903 data (DfE, 2015b)

³⁵ Note that this represents a weighted average figure for placements per year for the relevant children in the 3 local authorities.

³⁶ An analysis per site is provided in section 'Has the innovation influenced the culture of children's social care teams: valuing data, shared accountability and child centred?'

Table 8: Statistical analysis of trends in placements per year for children in long-term foster care

Year	Average number of placements per year	Number of children in long-term foster care	Standard deviation
2017	1.54	503	0.69
2019	1.41	456	0.62
Difference	0.13		

Source: CLA local data for Broadmington, Leybridge and Readstone.

In assessing the value of this improvement, the evaluation team examined both direct and indirect effects of greater stability in long-term foster care. It is important to note that there are key caveats around many of these numbers which are highlighted in the discussion at the end of this chapter.

Direct effects of greater stability

The direct effects relate to reduced need for social worker and public sector worker time; partly this occurs because there are fewer new placements to arrange and administer, and partly because there tend to be fewer missing episodes with greater placement stability (Ofsted, 2013). Case study material provided suggests that each new placement takes on average an amount in the order of 15 hours of social worker time to arrange and administer. Since social worker time costs an amount of the order of £50 per hour (taking into account National Insurance, Pensions, holiday allowance, sickness leave and overheads) (Curtis & Burns, 2018, p.80), this implies a cost per new placement of 15 hours * £50 = £750. By saving 0.13 placements per child, this implies a cost reduction for the cohort of 456 * 0.13 * £750, which equates to around £45,800.

There was no direct data from pilot sites on the link between placement stability and missing episodes. Because of the lack of such data, this was not included in the overall assessment of benefits but do provide an indication of its potential effects in Appendix 3: Methodology.

Indirect effects of greater stability

Indirect effects occur because greater placement stability is linked with improved wellbeing, which in turn links to reduced need for mental health services (Rubin et al., 2007). The approach is to identify expected impact on wellbeing, and consequent impact on mental health treatment, and to multiply this by the unit cost of mental health treatment that was expected to be avoided.³⁷

³⁷ Calculation of the unit cost of cost-avoidance for mental health treatment can be found in Appendix 3: Methodology.

The first step in this process is to identify whether there has been an improvement in SDQ. Table 9 below presents trends in SDQ for children in foster care in the 3 local authorities considered. Among the sample of 976 children, average SDQ fell by 0.61 points from 13.46 to 12.85, which represents a proportional decrease of 4.6% (i.e., an improvement in their well-being). This represents a statistically significant decrease which means a reduction in the overall difficulties as measured by the SDQ ($p < .05$).

Table 9: Statistical analysis of trends in SDQ for children in foster care

Year	Number of children in foster care	Average SDQ	Standard deviation (based on case study site data)
2017	982	13.46	6.68
2019	976	12.85	6.68
Difference		- 0.61	

Source: CLA local data for Broadmington, Leybridge and Readstone.

The next step was to consider what difference this 4.6% improvement makes to the cohort of 976 children in terms of reducing the need for mental health services. This was scaled down by the proportion (22%) of the children in the 3 local authorities who have major wellbeing problems, with an SDQ of 18 or above. This implies that 1.0% of the cohort (calculated as $22\% \times 4.6\%$) are estimated to avoid major wellbeing problems.

This 1% improvement in reducing major instances of mental health problems:

- Reduces a greatly adverse impact on wellbeing, since on this basis some 10 children (calculated as $976 \times 1\%$) avoid major mental health problems.
- Achieves an indicative £58,800 saving for public services (calculated by using a £6,000 public sector cost per issue, as set out in Appendix 3: Methodology, and multiplying this by 10).

Overarching factors affecting scale of benefits

Two important points for consideration in relation to the scale of benefits are that:

- It seems implausible that all of the effects observed are due to the Coram-i programme (the “attribution” problem), so reducing the scale of benefits; and
- It is possible that positive effects that occur last for longer than 1 year (providing they are embedded in local authority’s ways of working), so increasing the scale of benefits.

In order to review these 2 points, the evaluation team has reviewed data on a range of indicators for which there is a closer connection between the consultants’ activity and

attributable effects. The metrics examined were timeliness of PPMs; number of PPMS; timeliness of CLA reviews; timeliness of agreeing the permanency plan; timeliness of matching; and number of matches for long-term fostering.

The assessment is that the support of Coram-i in the intervention sites contributed to the improvement in timeliness in some parts of the permanency system and in some areas continued beyond the life of the intervention (particularly the timeliness and frequency of permanency planning meetings).

From the alternative story of improvement provided by comparator sites and statistical neighbours one can conclude that there are other approaches to improving timeliness in permanency being progressed in other children's social services that were also reported as successful. However, the comparator site approaches did not seem as intensive and granular as the Coram-i approach and the comparator sites were not rigorously evaluated in the same way as Coram-i.

Overall, the evaluation provides evidence that positive effects are evident as reported in previous sections (e.g., improvement in the timeliness of permanency planning); and based on staff interview data from wave 3 that these were at least partly sustained after the end of the project work in the sites. This provides grounds for scaling estimated benefits upwards.

On the other hand, because of the attribution issue mentioned earlier, there are grounds for scaling estimated benefits downwards, to reflect other factors that may have led to observed improvements. Further research is required to come to a view as to which of the 2 effects predominate. The evaluation team has, therefore, taken the view that a useful, but indicative assessment can be gained by assuming that the 2 effects (i.e., achieved outcomes and the attribution issues on the other hand) are of roughly equal scale and cancel each other out – in other words, the assessment based on 1 year's worth of improved outcomes was left as identified by the statistical analyses.

Consultancy costs

To produce an indicative estimate of the consultancy costs for delivering the project the evaluators have used data on the days spent by Coram-i consultants in each of the pilot sites and multiplied this against an estimate of daily rate for those consultants (see Appendix 3: Methodology for a calculation of this). Using the estimate of the daily rates as well as the number of days worked, an indicative estimate of costs of the order of £311, 100 was derived across the 3 sites included in the analysis of costs. This does not include any set-up costs for this project or any other operating costs including local authority staff costs for additional time spent (for example tracking meetings or project board meetings) – though they are crucial from an operational perspective, for a programme running a significant amount of time (e.g. 5 years or so) they would not be expected to greatly affect the results. The cost benefit analysis

also focuses on providing an estimate of the value for money generated by a 'business-as-usual' delivery of the programme and therefore excludes such costs.

Summary of cost savings

Table 10 below presents a summary of financial effects of Coram-i for the 3 sites considered, based on the above calculations.

Table 10: Summary of financial effects

Provider type	One-off costs	Decrease in current costs	Decrease in future costs
Coram-i consultancy	£311,100		
In-house foster care (1 year)		£492,700	
Placement stability (1 year)		£45,800	
Missing episodes – Police, Schools, Local Authority (indicative)		not included	
Mental health – NHS, Schools (indicative)			£58,800
Overall	£311,100	£538,500	£58,800

These figures imply that the reduction in public sector costs is some £597,300 (calculated as £538,500 + £58,800). The consequent ratio between those future cost savings and the up-front costs is of the order of 1.9 to 1 (calculated as $597.3 \div 311.1$). This ratio is limited to the 3 outcomes included in the calculation (i.e., provision of foster placements, placement stability and mental health) and the one-off cost for the consultancy. As described above, the ratio is based on the assumption that only parts of the changes can be attributed to Coram-i's intervention but that on the other hand some changes will be sustained for longer than the 1 year period the calculation is based on. One further point that should be noted is that much of this estimated effect is due to positive results in the largest local authority in the sample – more research would be useful to review whether such effects can be observed more widely.

Overall, however, the assessment is that the intervention has the potential to reduce costs in local authorities by increasing stability and wellbeing of children in care and by strengthening the provision of inhouse foster carers.

4. Lessons and Implications

Data systems are not granular enough: The Integrated Children's Systems (ICS)³⁸ hindered improvements in practice. It was not always possible to record certain data items or run reports (for example specific dates in the foster carer or children looked after journey) in the ICS, so that these had to be recorded manually in the tracker. This meant that it was more time-consuming to record additional information in the tracker which could not be populated from the ICS.

The quality of data collection requires improvement: Historic data quality and current social worker (including some management level) understanding of standards for recording detail of data long-term fostering cases meant that much effort had to be deployed to this key aspect of the project. Coram-i had to invest lot of time and resources to gain an understanding of the reliability of historic data and to update and clean data. For example, in 1 site the foster carer register data was not reliable enough to provide basic information about the current capacity. More national guidance, training or research into how the ICS can be improved is required. This is not only a barrier for evaluation but overall, for efficient social work practice and systems improvement.

Granular child centred tracking of quality and timeliness enables staff to stay connected to the purpose of the work: The tracker and performance surgeries enabled every child to be followed and every social worker to be supported with a view to optimising a child's journey to permanence. This was especially important in the absence of data to highlight delay and in a context of staff instability. This granular way of working with a case combined with supportive supervision was resource heavy in the beginning but had the effect of connecting individual performance to system improvement.

Realistic tools and processes: Given the sites all adapted their tools by simplifying them there needs to be work on design of tools and processes in children's social care that balances the ideal of tracking children's journeys robustly and what is possible for teams under pressure and on a day to day basis.

There is a need for a shared recognition of power and relationships in change processes: Although Coram-i did approach the work as a partnership and they offered challenge and support the evaluators felt that the way negotiation into the system had been made (as a new approach but neither mandated by being commissioned work or a statutory requirement) resulted in a lot of energy being used in negotiating the politics of systems sensitively. The partnerships could have benefitted from building a culture of working with power and group dynamics including an expectation of common resistance to change. This may have

³⁸ The **Integrated Children's System** (ICS) was developed to support effective practice with children and families, and improve decision making and planning for **children** in need.

supported the improvement work in the early stages and supported the work in a rapidly moving system (e.g. restructuring and staff turnover). Power and relationships also affected the authority of the evaluators in terms of access to the sites and the data. The evaluators suggest that the Department for Education take a role in the contracting of sites for projects so that the relationships and accountability between project staff, evaluators and participating sites are more clearly defined.

Improvement support needs to be sensitive to context: Every site was very different in size and the population characteristics of their children and foster carers. Similarly, every site comprised of very different team structures. In addition, they were all on steep improvement journeys as the areas' children's services had been identified as being in need of improvement by Ofsted between 2013 and 2016. All this variation meant that there was no one-size-fits-all solution. An important lesson from Coram-i's approach is that improvement journeys need adaptable and flexible independent support and challenge through scoping, agreeing plans with management, tracking progress, reflective practice and whole service engagement.

Permanency for children relates to permanency for staff: For example, staff told us that the early improvement in the systems increased their sense of control at work and pride in the service making them want to stay in permanent roles. High turn-over of staff is a barrier to routine use of historical data on cases and support of foster carers. This is because out-going staff take with them valuable case knowledge and the relationship, new staff take time to fully understand the context of new cases and build relationships (often despite robust handover processes) and, as a result foster carers become sceptical about the ability of new staff to understand changes in circumstances and their family dynamics and exhausted by repeating information and building new relationships.

5. Summary of key findings on 7 practice features and 7 outcomes

As reported in the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Round 1 Final Evaluation Report (2017), evidence from the first round of the Innovation Programme led the DfE to identify 7 features of practice and 7 outcomes to explore further in subsequent rounds.³⁹ This section outlines which practice features and outcomes the evaluation team feels that the Coram-i intervention made a contribution to:

Systemic theoretical models. The project has adapted the adoption improvement framework and applied it to permanency planning for long-term fostering. Coram-i's improvement framework is systemic. It deploys a multi-professional team of analysts, social care experts and consultants, with a data-led, case-level approach to managing performance, and identifying and resolving issues. The model is flexible and co-productive which is appropriate for delivering organisational change work in complex systems typical of the current children's social care landscape.

Multi-disciplinary skills sets. Coram-i have modelled the importance of multi-disciplinary skills sets in their systemic approach to the work, set up structures that enable multi-disciplinary working such as joint tracking meetings across services, ensuring all relevant skilled staff and foster parents are attending permanency planning meetings, and in the identification and addressing skills gaps in problem solving blockages in children's journey to permanence.

High intensity and consistency of practitioner. This was not a focus of Coram-i's work but the evaluation did find that 1 year into the project teams felt a sense of pride and control over their work which the evaluators hypothesised might lead to greater staff stability and wellbeing. Although it was not possible to evidence this with quantitative data, qualitative evidence from 3 waves of staff interviews suggests that that consistency of practitioner is related to work wellbeing. In this project having a sense of control over workload was an important outcome for the workforce.

Skilled direct work. This practice feature is a key part of the approach from Coram-i. They provided support to staff, recommended training where appropriate and upskilled staff by for example disseminating best practices. However, this created more office-based work.

Group case discussion. Key to the methodology is to increase working across teams and having shared meetings to improve child centred problem solving (e.g., joint tracking

³⁹ Sebba, J., Luke, N., McNeish, D., and Rees, A. (2017) *Children's Social Care Innovation Programme: Final evaluation report*, Department for Education, available [here](#).

meetings). There was progress in joint accountability and a breaking down of siloed working practices for some teams.

Create greater stability for children. A key aim of the project was to increase stability of children in foster placements by improving the timeliness and the quality of permanency planning and finding long-term foster placements. The evaluation found early indication of improved stability in 2 sites. Attribution is tentative as the interventions were varied in type, scope and dosage. There is qualitative evidence from interviews with social workers, and cases studies of foster carers and children that stability had been improved.

Increase wellbeing for children and families. Increased wellbeing for children was an intended long-term outcome for this project. Attribution is not possible, but the evaluation did find from population level data of Bright Spots and SSDA903 data that child outcomes improved in 2 sites. Again, qualitative data suggests that improving parts of the permanency systems led to improved outcomes for children.

Increase workforce wellbeing. Where the improvement work was established, staff reported that having a greater sense of control over their work improved their self-esteem and reduced stress. Some staff reported an improved sense of pride in their team and value in service to looked after children. The evaluators were not able to substantiate this in terms of children's social work workforce data.

Generate better value for money. Further research is required, particularly as attribution is difficult in this case. However, based on the evidence of outcomes across the sites the analysis established a ratio of future cost savings and up-front costs of 1.9 to 1. Specifically, the analysis found:

- (i) actual reductions in contractual costs associated with provision of foster placements;
- (ii) scope for saving on staff costs associated with placement instability; and
- (iii) scope for saving on need for current and future public sector action to deal with longer term consequences of instability such as mental health issues

Appendix 1: The Contribution analysis

The contribution analysis explores the alternative performance story ‘what may have happened in the sites without the intervention’. The data that is drawn on for this are from 2 comparator sites (i.e, Norchester and Bridmouth) and statistical neighbours.

Across the country, Children’s Social Services are engaged in efforts to improve their systems, performance and ultimately outcomes for children looked after. This is undertaken in various ways as demonstrated by the projects funded under the Children’s Social Services Innovation Programme. Many of the project sites said they were on the path to improvement prior to the Innovation Programme and Coram-i enabled them to identify areas of priority and gave them the expertise to progress with confidence and utilise the influence of Coram-i.

It is difficult therefore to assess whether the sites would have sought other forms of improvement models or support without this particular project. If they had not been able to, then it would be a reasonable hypothesis that they would have been slower and maybe unable to improve quality. Interview data pointed out that Coram-i had put a spotlight on permanency planning and without them it would not have been possible to improve the system with the same pace and embed a culture of rigor and child-focused working.

“The added-value to what was originally set out is almost unmeasurable because it’s in the culture of the organisation.” *Senior manager interview*

However, if they had accessed other forms of support the alternative story could equally be that quality improved through a different approach.

Alternative Improvement Story: Improvement in the quality of permanency planning

The comparator site Norchester has targeted particular areas for improvement (e.g. foster carer training and support) and Bridmouth has implemented a whole system change. Bridmouth has invested in a trauma informed service using the dyadic developmental psychology model. This model focuses on helping professionals and parents to support children to recover from trauma and disrupted attachments through the parenting, education and care they receive as well as through therapy. The broader intention behind this is to “create a systems environment of placement stability” which enables staff and foster carers to repair the trauma of the young people they bring into their care. They have prioritised this over tracking and performance with the rationale that a whole systems approach will improve each element of the process. The view of staff the evaluation team interviewed in Bridmouth was that this approach is improving the quality of permanency planning even though the impact on timeliness, stability and improved sufficiency cannot be seen yet.

Alternative Improvement Story: Improvement in the timeliness of permanency planning

In terms of timeliness improvement, one of the comparator sites (Norchester) also described a focus on tracking cases by teams using similar excel sheets. This was reported by staff to be embedded and used for staff supervision. The other comparator site (Bridmouth) focussed their improvement work on a whole systems reform based on the idea that improving quality leads to improved timeliness. Technological improvements have included a matching tool and an investigation of the potential future carer and child's needs. They have also focussed on tracking and timeliness but have invested more in prevention of breakdowns (for example by having more timely stability meetings) and they believe that the quality of permanency takes precedence over timeliness where there may be a clash (i.e. a placement decision being delayed by more thorough matching).

Overall, it seems that both the intervention sites and the comparator sites attempt to balance the timeliness of permanence and the quality of it.

Alternative Improvement Story: Improvement in the recruitment and maintenance of a pool of foster carers

The comparator site, Norchester invested in recruitment of foster carers by employing a marketing manager for fostering in 2018. As a result, they were able to redesign all of their marketing material and undertake more targeted recruitment activities. They also appointed an ambassador to go out to events and recruit and implemented a buddy system between newer and more experienced foster carers. Norchester reported that these innovations were associated with an increase from 42 enquiries in 2018 to 65 in 2019 from potential foster carers.

The other comparator site Bridmouth also had strategies to improve support of foster carers. As part of their whole system trauma informed approach over 90% of foster carers have received training in nurturing attachment and are also given the opportunity to ask for consultations with clinical staff about supporting young people in their care. They also had firm plans to set up developmental workshops for foster carers, where they could have interactive training with other more, or less, experienced foster carers on issues like self-harm or suicide during contact between the child and their birth family. Social workers have been trained in non-violent resistance, and there are future plans to provide social workers and foster carers with 'sensory training', which will help them understand and address potential trauma young people display behaviourally.

Generally, there is a national drive towards recruiting and supporting foster carers.⁴⁰ The evaluators compared trends in the number of approved foster places in each of the local authorities the project was implemented in, the corresponding statistical neighbour averages as well the 2 additional comparator site.⁴¹ In 2 intervention sites recruitment of foster carers to improve sufficiency was more in focus than in the other 2 sites. Hence, the increase in approved places between 2017 and 2019 in Readstone and Broadmington can be explained by the more intensive support of Coram-i to strengthen recruitment and retention of foster places; compared to the statistical neighbours where the number of approved places is decreasing from 2018 to 2019. Leybridge and Monkford did not demonstrate an increase in the number of approved places on local authority level also compared with their statistical neighbours, however, according to fostering tracker data in Monkford there is an increase in the number of fostering households. Potential reasons for this are the different unit of analysis and the number of deregistrations which are not considered in the fostering tracker data.

Alternative Improvement Story: Improved outcomes for children looked after

When drawing on the summary statistics of children looked after data, similar trends for SDQ scores are apparent for intervention sites and their statistical neighbour averages. Only 1 statistically significant change was found in relation to youth offending for Monkford and a similar trend can be observed for the average of the statistical neighbours. No statistically significant change between 2017 and 2019 was found for any of the intervention sites using the children looked after data shared with the evaluators with regards to substance misuse. The statistical neighbours show similar change pattern compared to the corresponding site. In the comparator sites offending and substance misuse is overall decreasing.

Alternative Improvement Story: Improved stability of placements

There are a range of factors that have an influence on placement stability apart from timeliness and quality of permanency planning. The evaluation team was not able to provide quantitative evidence based on the tracker that the timeliness and quality of permanency planning improved in all sites.

The statistical neighbours of Readstone and Broadmington showed a small increase in the proportion of children looked after with 3 or more placements,, however, Readstone and Broadmington have a smaller proportion of CLA with more than 2 placements in 2019 than in 2017. Proportions for Leybridge and Monkford increase when comparing with their statistical

⁴⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-in-england-1-april-2018-to-31-march-2019/fostering-in-england-2018-to-2019-main-findings>

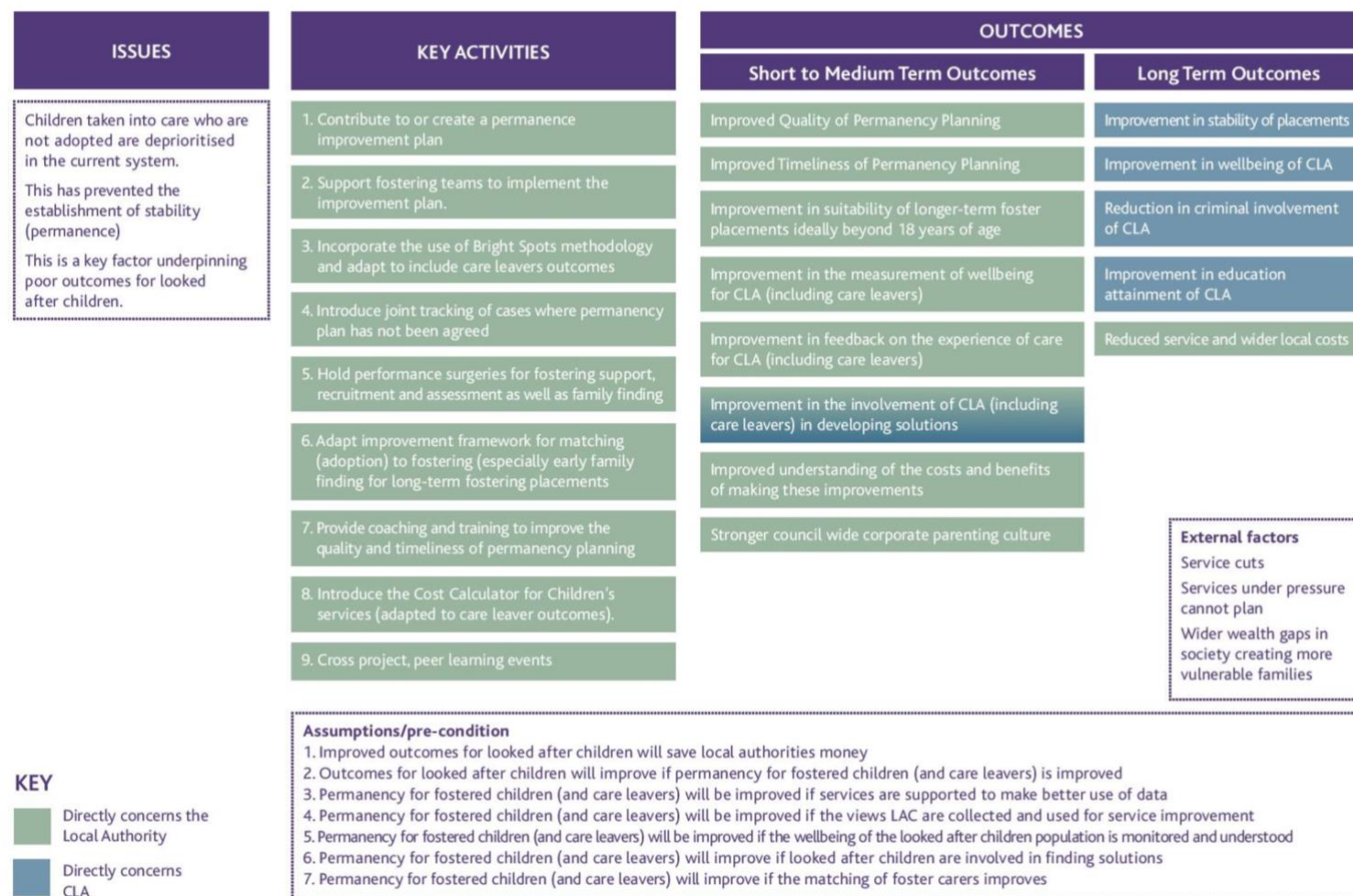
⁴¹ Please note that the unit of analysis differs from the number of foster carer places presented above as these statistics are on local authority level., i.e., independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and LA places.

neighbours between 2018 and 2019. Furthermore, for one of the comparator sites the proportion increased while it decreased for the other one.

In relation to out of area placements, similar trends are shown for the corresponding statistical neighbours, even though proportions are generally smaller for Broadmington and Leybridge compared to the statistical neighbour average. Again, comparator sites show different patterns with one decreasing and the other one increasing.

Information about placement moves and out of area placements for statistical neighbours and comparator sites was only available on CLA population level, hence, it was not possible to compare changes depending on period of care starts and placements types.

THEORY OF CHANGE CORAM-I permanency improvement project



THEORY OF CHANGE CORAM-I permanency improvement project – Broadmington Children's Services

ISSUES	KEY ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES	
		Short to Medium Term Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes
<p>Broadmington City Council were delivering an improvement plan following an Ofsted inspection in 2014 of 'Inadequate'. In 2017 Ofsted reported that the service 'Requires improvement to be good'.</p> <p>General issues: Poor data quality, inconsistent processes, lack of performance –focused culture and systems, delays in approval of placements and permanency planning. High staff turnover/sickness</p>	Set up a Permanency Planning Task and Finish Group	Improved Quality of Permanence Planning e.g. clearer systems for monitoring; practice guidance implemented	Improvement in wellbeing of CLA
	Introduce joint tracking of cases with a plan for permanent fostering but where permanency plan has not been agreed		Improvement of life chances of CLA
	Develop and embed a new practice guidance on permanence and permanency planning	Improvement in suitability of longer-term foster placements (ideally beyond 18 years of age)	Improvement in wellbeing of care leavers
	Hold performance surgeries to monitor all permanence plans that have not yet been achieved	Improvement in quality of FC placements (FCs more highly skilled and placements last longer)	Improvement of life chances of care leavers
	Support revision of foster care recruitment processes	Improvement in cross-organisational working – staff from across system meet to address permanency	Improvement in wellbeing and stability of workforce (unintended)
	Implement performance management systems for foster carer support and reviews	Improvement in the involvement of CLA (including care leavers) in developing solutions	
	Implement support e.g. FC Ambassadors / secure base training / peer mentoring / feedback	Improved staff wellbeing and retention – e.g. reduced long-term sickness, staff stay longer term	
	Incorporate the use of Bright Spots methodology	Increase in the number of in-house foster carers	
	Pilot Care Leaver Element of 'Your Life, Your Care' Survey	FC placements are sustained long-term	
		Bright Spots results influence service planning	
	Contribute to development of QA processes for panel meetings	Permanency is clearly understood and planned for from the front door	
	Implement reviews of Foster carer experiences of support, using FC feedback		

KEY

- Directly concerns the service
- Directly concerns CLA

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THEORY OF CHANGE CORAM-I permanency improvement project – Leybridge

ISSUES	KEY ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES	
		Short to Medium Term Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes
<p>Leybridge was in challenging times. Some areas of the service had poor staff morale. Judged inadequate by Ofsted in December 2015 the service began focussed work on improvement. Coram-i's support dovetailed with this improvement work. Over the course of the intervention the Ofsted rating improved and in 2018 was no longer classed as inadequate but 'requires improvement'</p>	Improve case tracking Hold joint tracking meetings for pre proceedings cases Joint tracking of cases with a plan for permanent fostering but where permanency plan has not been agreed	Improved Quality of Permanence Planning	Improvement in wellbeing of CLA
	Provide or influence guidance and/or training Permanency planning Foster to adopt Permanence planning meetings and case progression Ofsted methodology	Improved Timeliness of Permanence Planning	Improvement of life chances of CLA
		Improvement in suitability longer-term foster placements ideally beyond 18 years of age	Improvement in wellbeing of care leavers
	Ensure permanent fostering plan is approved at senior level	Reduction in delays in pre-proceedings	Improvement of life chances of care leavers
		Improved foster care retention	Improvement in wellbeing and stability of workforce (unintended)
	Establish performance management surgeries for foster care support and reviews.	Shift in perception of social workers from foster carer as client to child as client	
	Support revision of foster care recruitment processes	Improved time scales for foster carer journey	
	Delivery and embedding of Cost Calculator tool	Improved cross organisational working	
	Redesign family finding for children in care-proceeding with plan for permanent fostering	Permanency is clearly understood and planned for from the front door	
	Audit and QA programme for foster carer support		
	Through tracking and permanence focus support a culture shift towards child not foster carer as client		
	Coproduce solutions to gaps and blockages		
	Establishment of Bright Spots in routine of service planning		
	Establishment of use of CCfCS		
	Delivery of profiling workshops and fostering activity day		

KEY

	Directly concerns the service
	Directly concerns CLA

THEORY OF CHANGE CORAM-I permanency improvement project – Monkford

ISSUES	KEY ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES	
		Short to Medium Term Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes
<p>Children's services were rated as 'requires improvement to be good' in 2016 by Ofsted</p> <p>Financial issues: Children's services protected but will be impacted (Fostering Services are stable; Connected Persons Services & Social Workers are not well resourced)</p>	<p>Improve permanency tracking: Bespoke tracker tools for Connected Persons, Foster Support and Family Finding Bi-monthly tracking meetings Connected Persons, Foster Support and Family Finding Update of key policies and procedures as well as update of training</p>	<p>Increased use of data to inform permanency planning</p>	<p>Improvement in wellbeing of CLA</p>
		<p>Improved quality of Permanence Plans (Child's needs led)</p>	<p>Improvement of life chances of CLA</p>
		<p>Improved timeliness of Permanence Plans (driven by child's needs e.g. assess at CLA Review to inform courts; reduce drift)</p>	<p>Improvement in wellbeing of care leavers</p>
	<p>Strengthening role of Reviewing Service</p>	<p>Raised profile of permanence care (fostering; connected persons)</p>	<p>Improvement of life chances of care leavers</p>
	<p>Strengthening family finding for permanent fostering: Family Finder (full time appointment) and Family Finding process Hold Pilot Activity Days and Profiling Events to promote match of long term foster carers with children Support implementation of Life Appreciation Days (LADs) for improved matching</p>	<p>Increased number of in-house permanence carers (reduced IFA use)</p>	<p>Improvement in wellbeing and stability of workforce (unintended)</p>
	<p>Improve training and support package for Foster Carers (long and short term foster carers; and approved Connected Persons)</p>	<p>Improvement in suitability of placements (e.g. use Staying Put)</p>	
	<p>Support the update of Foster Carer register</p>	<p>Improved placement stability</p>	
	<p>Bright Spots Survey for CLA view</p>	<p>Improved feedback on CLA experience of care</p>	
	<p>Conduct foster carer survey for feedback on the service</p>	<p>Improvement in measurement of CLA wellbeing</p>	
	<p>Approval of placements at CLA review (Court Team; and CLA and SG team) with IRO providing Quality Assurance for improved timescales</p>	<p>Improved cross-organisational working (e.g. fostering and connected persons teams)</p>	
		<p>Stronger corporate parenting culture (more child-centred; less bureaucratic)</p>	

KEY

- Directly concerns the service
- Directly concerns CLA

THEORY OF CHANGE CORAM-I permanency improvement project – Readstone

ISSUES	KEY ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES	
		Short to Medium Term Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes
<p>In 2015 Children's services were rated as inadequate by Ofsted and the IFA was rated as 'Requires Improvement' in 2016.</p> <p>Scoping phase identified poor data quality, inconsistent processes, lack of robust performance management systems, and delays in approval of placements and permanency planning.</p> <p>In 2019 Ofsted rated the service overall as 'inadequate'</p>	Governance structure agreed Project board set up and regular meetings taking place	Improved Quality of Permanence Planning	Improvement in wellbeing of CLA
	Support permanency planning Strengthen permanency planning (PPM) meetings through new structure and recording template as well as scrutinising plans at senior level Support the development of training programme for permanence planning Support the development of practise guidance about PPM and flowchart for planning and matching processes	Improved Timeliness of Permanence Planning	Improvement of life chances of CLA
	Improve tracking of cases Introduce joint tracking meetings of cases with a plan for permanent fostering	Increased stability of long-term placements	Improvement in wellbeing of care leavers
	Promote permanent fostering Deliver Activity Days and other events to promote family finding Create tracker for family finding and hold permanence surgeries for family finding	Improvement in recruitment and maintenance of foster carer	Improvement of life chances of care leavers
	Support the strengthening of the IRO role	Improvement in feedback on the experience of care for CLA (including care leavers)	Improvement in wellbeing and stability of workforce (unintended)
	Incorporate the use of Bright Spots methodology	Improvement in the measurement of wellbeing for CLA (including care leavers)	
	Improve foster carers' journey Redesign process of foster carer recruitment and assessment Updating marketing and recruitment strategy for foster carer Create tracker for assessment and recruitment and hold permanence surgeries for assessment and recruitment. Create tracker for fostering support and hold permanence surgeries for fostering support.	Increased number of in-house foster carers	
	Audit of foster carer files	Raised profile of long-term foster carers	
		Increased use of data to inform permanency planning	
		Enhanced corporate parenting culture	
		Bright Spots results influence service planning	
		Permanency is clearly understood and planned for from the front door	

KEY

- Directly concerns the Local Authority
- Directly concerns CLA

Appendix 3: Methodology

The mixed-methods evaluation consisted of 6 main parts:

1. Three waves of qualitative staff interviews in intervention sites;
2. Retrospective case studies with children looked after;
3. Two waves of staff interviews of comparator sites;
4. Local authority quantitative data analysis;
5. Cost-benefit analysis; and,
6. Contribution analysis was used to triangulate evidence from these different data sources using the Theory of Change.

The sections below describe each of the 6 parts in detail.

1. Qualitative staff interviews and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with project leads, senior leaders, team managers and social worker from fostering as well as children's services. Interviews in wave 1 and 3 were carried out face-to-face and wave 2 interviews as telephone interviews. Table 11 shows the number staff members interviewed per site and wave. In addition to interviews, the evaluation included observations by members of the evaluation team of key activities, this included site specific activities such as performance surgeries and joint tracking meetings as well cross-authority learning events. A thematic analysis of interview and observation data was performed in NVivo.

Table 11: Number of qualitative interviews per pilot site and wave

Wave	Total	Readstone	Broadmington	Leybridge	Monkford
Wave 1	48	8	16	17	7
Wave 2	29	13	3	8	5
Wave 3	32	10	10	6	6

2. Retrospective case studies with children looked after

Retrospective case study research with children looked after were undertaken to understand how permanency was experienced from the children's and foster carers perspective. The case studies comprised of face-to-face interviews at 2 time points with children looked after (CLA) and their foster carers as well as of a telephone interview with their social worker. Up to 8 children looked after were sought to be recruited for the cases

studies across the 4 pilot sites through purposive sampling. Table 12 presents the number of interviewees as part of the case studies per site. The case studies followed an arts-based approach with children able to choose to participate in creative methods if they wish to. Interview data was thematically analysed and reported as vignettes in the main body of the report.

Table 12: Number of interviews for retrospective CLA case studies

Interview type	Total	Readstone	Broadmington	Leybridge	Monkford
CLA – first interview	6	1	1	2	2
CLA – second interview	5	1	1	2	1
Foster carer – first interview	5	1		2	2
Foster carer – second interview	3			2	1
Social worker	3	1	1		1

3. Two waves of staff interviews with comparator Sites

Two comparator sites were chosen based on a sampling frame with key indicators. Stage 1 of the process consisted of the definition of these indicators based on the context of the 4 pilot sites. These indicators were: LAC population, emotional and behavioural health of looked after children, out of area placements, local authority type, geography, OFSTED rating, use of Bright Spots, participation in Children’s Social Services Innovation Programme. Information for each of the pilot sites were then compiled. Based on this information the characteristics of the 2 comparator sites were defined as part of stage 2. This stage further involved creating a long list of 18 potential comparator sites which consists of the comparator sites suggested by Coram-I (who have used Bright Spots), statistical neighbours of the 4 participating sites as well other local authorities that are deemed to be suitable comparator sites. Four potential comparator sites were approached and 2 agreed to comparator sites. The 2 selected local authorities represent one with a rather small (<500) and one with a rather large (>1000) population of looked after children. The latest Ofsted for children looked after and achieving permanency rating was ‘requires improvement’ for both comparator sites. Furthermore, they both had average SDQ scores between 12 and 16, a percentage of LAC placed over 20 miles from home and outside of LA area of up to 30% and use Bright Spots.

Staff from comparator sites were interviewed in 2 waves. Both waves were conducted as telephone interviews and involved team managers and senior staff from fostering and children's social care.

4. Local authority data analysis

A list of data needed to evaluate the impact of the project was shared with all local authorities at the start of the project as part of the scoping stage. Changes were made to the data requested as part of the review of relevant indicators. Data was requested from all the 4 pilot sites but not consistently returned from all sites.

- All 4 sites returned anonymised routinely collected SSDA903 child-level data according to the outcome indicators as well as background information about the children looked after including: SDQ scores, placement moves, and placement provider.
- Cost data was shared by 3 out of 4 sites for the cost benefit analysis: Readstone, Broadmington and Leybridge.
- Tracker data was received from all sites. The type of tracker varied per site depending on the priority. The evaluators received joint tracking data from Readstone and Leybridge as these were the 2 sites that had tracker meetings implemented consistently close to the start of the project.
- Foster support tracker data and/or recruitment and assessment tracker were shared by Broadmington and Monkford.

More generally, all data were analysed in IBM SPSS and Microsoft Excel; and figures were created in Microsoft Excel. All data were prepared and cleansed. For the SSDA903 data this included the assignment of missing values, deletion of irrelevant variables, recoding of items, and variable type changes. Datasets were merged depending on the analysis to be carried out. For the tracker data this included an exploratory analysis of the relevant data items and assessing data quality, in particular depending on the year the child came into care or of PPM.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for both tracker data and the SSDA903 data. Significance tests were used to detect changes over time on outcome indicators or assess differences between subgroups. Assumptions for significance tests were explored and for cases that did not meet the assumptions for parametric tests, non-parametric alternatives were used.

The evaluators further drew on national fostering statistics and CLA statistics provided by DfE. For the statistical neighbour statistics, average calculations across the neighbours as provided in the LAIT were used.

5. Cost benefit analysis

The main findings of the cost benefit analysis are presented in the Chapter 3. Key findings 'Did the innovation contribute to a decline in spending for the services/ does the innovation have the potential to contribute to less spending for the service?'. Some further calculations are presented below.

Increasing the use of in-house foster carers

The calculation of saving per child for in-house foster care was calculated using:

1. Costs per week of in-house and external foster carers from 3 pilot sites. Note that where the available metric on internal foster care relates to care involving friends or family, this was scaled up by 38%⁴² to provide an estimate of (non-kinship) in-house foster care.
2. The weighted average of these costs⁴³ were then taken and multiplied by the number of weeks per year, to determine an estimate of (a) in-house provision at £25,500 per year, and (b) external provision at £42,850 per year⁴⁴.
3. This represents a £17,350 difference in costs between in-house and external provision (£42,850 - £25,500 = £17,350). If this difference is wholly due to case-mix then there would be no saving by bringing such foster care in-house. If on the other hand the difference is purely due to shortages in in-house foster care, then the cost margin should be eliminated for children brought into internal foster care. It was assumed that both effects apply in similar proportions, which implies scope for saving of 50% * £17,350 = £8,675 per child per year.

Reducing the number of missing episodes

The evaluation does not have direct data from pilot sites on the link between placement stability and missing episodes. As such, this assessment is not included in the overall assessment of benefits. However, below is an indication of missing episode cost savings:

1. An indication of its potential effects is provided by using the proportional 8.7% effect identified with respect to placement stability (see Chapter 3. Key findings 'Did the innovation contribute to a decline in spending for the services/ does the innovation have the potential to contribute to less spending for the service?').

⁴² This scaling factor is based on data from 1 local authority for which costs for both in-house foster care with friends and family, and in-house foster care with other carers were available.

⁴³ Using weights according to the proportion of in-house cases by local authority – 72% Broadmington, 16% Leybridge, 12% Readstone

⁴⁴ These estimates are broadly in line with the relevant national average figures reported in the Personal Social Services Research Unit (Curtis & Burns, 2019, p.73).

2. As of March 2019, those in foster care accounted for some 19,837 missing episodes. As there are some 56,268 children and young people in foster care this implies an average of 0.35 missing episodes per child in foster care (since $19,837 \div 56,268 = 0.35$).⁴⁵
3. Applying an 8.7% reduction to this number suggests an average fall in missing episodes of 0.03 per child, which for a cohort of 456 equates to around 14.6 missing episodes.
4. National average based on research⁴⁶ indicates that the cost per missing episode per child is of the order of £2,200 per incident. Though the figures relating to different parts of the public sector are not shown with respect to cost per incident, it was possible to draw on their analysis of aggregate savings from a sample that they surveyed, which show the following proportions of costs: police 74%, schools 16%, hospital 4%, and local authority 6%.
5. Since the estimate is that each missing episode entails costs to the public sector of the order of £2,200, this implies an indicative estimate for cost reduction of the order of £32,100 (calculated as $14.6 * £2,200 = £32,100$).

Calculation of unit value of improved mental health in reducing treatment costs:

In calculating the unit value of improved mental health per child 2 issues are taken into consideration: (i) the cost of treatment given that an issue arises, and (ii) the frequency with which issues arise.

In terms of cost of treatment, the review of the literature finds that:

1. For a group of 12 to 15 year olds, front-line education required expenditure of £900 per year, and special education required expenditure of £700 per year, for a 3 year period in dealing with hyperkinetic disorders, conduct disorders and emotional disorders (p.4)⁴⁷;
2. The average cost per counselling intervention for children with mental or emotional difficulties is of the order of £1,125; ⁴⁸

⁴⁵ According to findings from the 2019 evaluation by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) of The Children's Society's Footsteps programme in Greater Manchester.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850306/Children_looked_after_in_England_2019_Text.pdf

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ According to Knapp et al. (2016)

⁴⁸ According to Curtis & Burns (2019, p.80).

3. Average cost of service provision for adults suffering from depression and/or anxiety disorders, per person per year is of the order of £1,025⁴⁹;

In terms of the number of periods of treatment required, the following findings were used⁵⁰:

1. Around half of young men and two-thirds of young women went on to have at least 1 further episode in young adult years after suffering an episode of adolescent diagnosable depression and anxiety; and,
2. For those teenagers with a single episode less than 6 months, persistence into adult years was much lower than those with longer lasting illness or recurrent episodes of ill health.

Since local data from 3 of the pilot sites suggests that high SDQ scores persist for a year or more for perhaps two-thirds, and with a ratio of 2:1 among those with high SDQ between boys and girls, this implies that adult problems will occur for some 67% with sustained problems * (67% boys * 50% recurrence for boys + 33% girls * 67% recurrence for girls) = 37%. Putting these together, the assessment of the costs of avoiding mental health issues is shown below:

Table 13: Assessing unit cost of mental health issues

Effect type	Unit cost	Duration	Cost
Short-term effects (school)	£900 + £600 = £1,500	3 years	£4,500
Short-term effects (treatment costs)	£1,125	Once	£1,125
Medium-term effects	£1,025	37%	£380
Overall			£6,005

Estimation of consultancy costs

1. First of all, the number of workings per site and consultant as set out in Table 14 was calculated.

⁴⁹ Unit Cost Database HE11.0 from Greater Manchester Combined Authority www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/research/research-cost-benefit-analysis/

⁵⁰ according to Patton et al. (2014)

Table 14: Time usage of consultancy by pilot site

Local Authority	Grade	Days per week	Weeks	Days
Broadmington	Senior Practice consultant	2.00	64.0	128.0
Broadmington	Management consultant	2.00	64.0	128.0
Readstone	Senior Practice consultant	2.00	76.8	154.0
Readstone	Management consultant	2.00	64.0	128.0
Leybridge	Senior Practice consultant	2.00	57.6	115.0
Leybridge	Management consultant	2.00	64.0	128.0

Note: number of weeks assume: (i) 4 weeks per month, ii) that 20% of potential workdays in the relevant period are not taken up due to annual leave, sickness absence and Coram-i training).

2. The next step is to consider the daily cost of consultancy for the 2 different job grades. The evaluation team draws on job advertisement data from Coram-i, which suggests a salary range of £35,000 to £45,000 for the junior staff member, and £45,000 to £55,000 for the more senior manager. Then, data from PSSRU (2019) "Unit costs of health and social care" was used, which suggests that national insurance and pensions are of an amount equivalent to approximately 23% of salary, and overheads add on a further 27%, to obtain staff costs of the order of £60,000 and £75,000 for the 2 grades. If one further assumes (a) that the organisation does not seek a surplus; (b) that the junior member of staff works 200 days per year on the role, and the senior manager 150 days a year on the role (leaving 50 days for other tasks such as business development), , this implies a daily rate of £300 for the junior staff member, and £500 for the more senior consultant.
3. On the basis of the above, a total cost of the order of £311,100 in one-off consultancy costs was calculated.

6. Contribution analysis

The evaluation was unable to undertake a counterfactual impact evaluation which involves comparing the outcomes of those who have participated in an intervention ('intervention group') with a group similar to the treatment group ('comparison/control group'), but who have not taken part in the intervention. The comparison group provides

information on what would have happened to the participants in the intervention had they not been part of the intervention.

Instead, contribution analysis has been used to assess if the intervention contributed to the observed outcomes (Mayne, 2012). Contribution analysis aims to test if the theory behind the intervention makes sense and incorporates other influencing factors. It is based on a Theory of Change that shows links between activities and outcomes and collates evidence for these links and by that means shows if the improvement story is credible.

The evaluation team has followed the 6 steps as described in Mayne (2012):

Step 1: Set out the cause-effect issue to be addressed

Step 2: Develop the postulated theory of change and risks to it, including rival explanations

Step 3: Gather the existing evidence on the theory of change

Step 4: Assemble and assess the contribution claim, and challenges to it

Step 5: Seek out additional evidence

Step 6: Revise and strengthen the contribution story

Our findings for each of the outcomes (as set out by the evaluation questions) is provided in the main body of this report together with an 'Alternative Improvement Story' and an overall conclusion after reviewing evidence for the intervention and for the alternative story.

Evaluation questions, outcome indicator and data sources

Outcome indicators	Data
1. Has the innovation contributed to an improvement in the timeliness of permanency planning?	
Increased awareness within the four sites of the timescales for permanency planning	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings (n=10)</p> <p>Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams</p> <p>Observations and documents from three cross organisational learning events</p>
Staff give examples of improvements in timescales for permanency planning	<p>Staff interviews</p> <p>Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings</p> <p>Observations and documents from cross organisational learning events</p>
Timeliness of Permanency planning	Intervention site data recording system/trackers from 2 sites
Timeliness of ADM decision	Intervention site data recording system/trackers from 2 sites
2. Has the innovation contributed to improvement in the quality of permanency planning?	
Perception of positive changes in the system/process with examples given	Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)

	<p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings (n=10)</p> <p>Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams</p> <p>Observations and documents from three cross organisational learning events</p>
Perceived effects of intervention/service change on LAC's mental health and wellbeing, close relationships, education experiences and stability with examples given	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>6 Retrospective child/young person case studies (interviews with child/young person foster carer and social workers)</p>
3. Did the innovation contribute to improvement the recruitment and maintenance of a pool of foster carers (FC) who can meet the needs of its Children Looked After population?	
The Service has a clear and active Sufficiency Strategy (with examples given, validated if possible)	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings (n=10)</p> <p>Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams</p> <p>Observations and documents from three cross organisational learning events</p>

The Service has an up to date foster carer register which records training & development needs and skills for every FC	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings (n=10)</p> <p>Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams</p>
Staff report that foster carers are viewed more positively (with examples given)	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>Observations and documents from three cross organisational learning events</p>
Perception of outcomes reported by LAC including, e.g. experience of achievement of permanency, support from social workers (and other themes if emerging)	6 Retrospective child/young person case studies (interviews with child/young person foster carer and social workers)
Deregistration of foster carer: Number of deregistered foster carers and reasons why	Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)
Recruitment of foster carers: Number of individuals/couples making an inquiry	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>SSDA903 Intervention site, Comparator site, Statistical neighbours</p> <p>Intervention site data recording system/trackers</p>

Recruitment of foster carers: Number of foster care applications completed	Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32) SSDA903 Intervention site, Comparator site, Statistical neighbours Intervention site data recording system/trackers
Recruitment of foster carers for long-term fostering	Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32) Intervention site data recording system/trackers
Timeliness of foster carer approval	Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32) Intervention site data recording system/trackers
Number of matches for long-term fostering	Intervention site data recording system/trackers
4. Did the innovation contribute to the improved stability and safety of placements?	
Perception of outcomes reported by LAC including, e.g. experience of achievement of permanency, support from social workers	6 Retrospective child/young person case studies (interviews with child/young person foster carer and social workers)
Perception of outcomes reported by staff including, e.g. experience of achievement of permanency, examples of actions arising from interventions that results in increased stability and safety of placements	Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32) Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6) Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings (n=10) Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams

	Observations and documents from three cross organisational learning events Staff interviews/ focus group, observations
Placement stability	SSDA903 statistics for Intervention sites, Comparator sites, Statistical neighbours
5. Has the innovation influenced the culture of children's social care teams in terms of valuing data for permanency planning, shared accountability, putting the voice of LAC at the centre of service planning.	
a Staff demonstrates that they value data for permanency planning (with examples, validated if possible)	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings (n=10)</p> <p>Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams</p> <p>Observations and documents from three cross organisational learning events Staff interviews/ focus group, observations</p>
a Data is used strategically across services (with examples, validated if possible)	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings (n=10)</p> <p>Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams</p> <p>Observations and documents from three cross organisational learning events Staff interviews/ focus group, observations</p>

<p>a Staff are attending and participating fully in PS and JTM</p>	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings (n=10)</p> <p>Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams</p> <p>Observations and documents from three cross organisational learning events Staff interviews/ focus group, observations</p>
<p>b Staff report examples of services taking joint responsibility for case issues (validated if possible)</p>	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings (n=10)</p> <p>Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams</p> <p>Observations and documents from three cross organisational learning events Staff interviews/ focus group, observations</p>
<p>c Bright Spots used to inform service improvements</p>	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings (n=10)</p> <p>Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams</p>

	Observations and documents from three cross organisational learning events Staff interviews/ focus group, observation
d The Service has an increased understanding of the true costs of different placements	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings (n=10)</p> <p>Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams</p> <p>Observations and documents from three cross organisational learning events Staff interviews/ focus group, observations</p>
e Cost calculator model utilised for strategic decision making.	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p> <p>Observations of performance surgeries and tracking meetings (n=10)</p> <p>Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams</p> <p>Observations and documents from three cross organisational learning events Staff interviews/ focus group, observations</p>
6. Did the innovation contribute to key outcomes for children looked after?	
Staff report examples of intervention/service change on LAC's mental health and wellbeing, close	<p>Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)</p> <p>Staff interviews comparator sites (Wave 1 n=8) (Wave 2 n=6)</p>

relationships, education experiences and stability	
Children, young people, foster carers report examples of intervention/service change on LAC's mental health and wellbeing, close relationships, education experiences and stability	6 Retrospective child/young person case studies (interviews with child/young person foster carer and social workers)
Average (mean) SDQ scores per child	SSDA903 statistics for Intervention sites, Comparator sites, Statistical neighbours LA data recording for four sites
% of banded SDQ scores that are a cause for concern	SSDA903 Intervention site, Comparator site, Statistical neighbours LA data recording for four sites
Educational engagement (absenteeism)	SSDA903 statistics for Intervention sites, Comparator sites, Statistical neighbours LA data recording for two sites
Educational engagement (exclusions)	SSDA903 statistics for Intervention sites, Comparator sites, Statistical neighbours LA data recording for two sites
Substance misuse	SSDA903 statistics for Intervention sites, Comparator sites, Statistical neighbours LA data recording for four sites

Conviction	SSDA903 statistics for Intervention sites, Comparator sites, Statistical neighbours LA data recording for four sites
Wellbeing of CLA population improved	Bright Spots at one time point from two sites and at two time points from one site
7. Did the innovation contribute to a decline in spending for the services/ does the innovation have the potential to contribute to less spending for the service?	
Cost calculator model utilised for strategic decision making	Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32) Minutes of intervention site project boards/teams
Assessment of costs and benefits of intervention	Cost-Benefit-Analysis
8. Did the innovation contribute to increased wellbeing of staff? (unintended outcome identified in round 2)	
Social workers feel valued, motivated and supported by the intervention	Staff interviews intervention sites (Wave 1 n=48) (Wave 2 n=29) (Wave 3 n=32)
Sickness absence rate	Children's social work workforce statistics for Intervention sites, Comparator sites, Statistical neighbours
Agency ratio	Children's social work workforce statistics for Intervention sites, Comparator sites, Statistical neighbours Team level data for two intervention sites
Staff turnover rate	Children's social work workforce statistics for Intervention sites, Comparator sites, Statistical neighbours

	Team level data for two intervention sites
Vacancy rate	<p>Children's social work workforce statistics for Intervention sites, Comparator sites, Statistical neighbours</p> <p>Team level data for two intervention sites</p>

Appendix 4: Site summaries

Monkford

Area context at project start, January 2017

Monkford is a large service with over 1000 children who are looked after. Nearly 25% of the cared for population were placed outside of the county. Of the total fostered population, 56% were in an independent foster care agency (IFA) and 44% were with in-house foster carers.

In 2013, 3 successive Ofsted inspections judged services for at risk children and young people in Monkford as 'inadequate'. Monkford was on its own 'improvement journey' prior to the Coram-i consultancy partnership, delivering its own focused work to improve services and with some evident success. By 2016, Ofsted found Monkford's children's services to be no longer 'inadequate' and with children no longer 'at risk of immediate harm'. Nevertheless, Ofsted found the services were still 'requiring improvement'. A particular area of concern was the high proportion of agency staff. In 2018 the county council faced severe financial difficulty that put in jeopardy the improvement work progress. Monkford had put into place a care leaver's team; restructured services to better support those on the edge of care; and there was a focus on improving the quality of placements. There were also several areas of improvement work that required investment.

Context of Coram-i's work

Coram-i's scoping work identified areas of focus:

1. Improving the quality and timeliness of permanency planning so as to minimise any delays to achieving permanency.
2. Improving placement stability by:
 - identifying suitable long-term foster placements
 - ensuring sufficient support is provided to such placements, and
 - developing ways that make placements last beyond the age of 18 wherever possible.

An action plan was agreed, and monthly monitoring meetings were held between Coram-i consultants and representatives from each of the relevant areas of children's services.

The Coram-i pilot put into place new processes to bring about improvements in permanency planning and timescales for fostering. Specifically, these innovations were: 2 Family Finder posts, an early Family Finding process; and 3 data-based tracking systems

in Family finding, Connected Persons Tracking and Fostering performance surgeries (called 'Fostering Support Tracking').

A revised permanency planning practice guide has been produced and is in place.

The revised tracking system puts increased and high level (senior management) scrutiny of permanent fostering plans into place. Previously there was also no clear or reliable data on matching, or on placement stability and disruptions.

Reliable data and systems were flagged as a significant issue for the Fostering Service at Monkford, in particular since funding cuts have reduced business support staff. Systems and data were not accurate enough to be reliable at the beginning of the pilot, and existing systems were not being used to full capacity (e.g. CareFirst). Fostering data systems have been cleansed and redesigned.

The foster carer register was also cleansed, updated and is now being regularly kept up to date so it can support early permanency work (e.g. it can be looked at in conjunction with the Connected Persons data tracker).

Late in the project delivery period a revised panel model was agreed by the Assistant Director in Monkford to give the services greater oversight of the child's journey in proceedings.

Improving Placement Stability

The pilot has introduced innovations in ways of finding high quality long-term foster placements. Coram-i's work with Monkford has involved focusing on Family Finding (i.e. the recruitment of foster carers for specific children) and also on recruiting specialised foster carers who can meet individual children's complex needs.

Two 'Activity Days' were successfully piloted. The children and carers are prepared for the day and the aim is to match children by providing more balanced profiles (involving life appreciation work), and for children and potential carers to meet face-to-face to see how they get on. The child would then have met any carer they may be placed with already and have a greater sense of comfort in the move.

The activity days are supported with new approaches to profiling children based on their lived experiences rather than more negatively framed paperwork presenting children as a series of complex needs.

A Fostering Recruitment and Fostering Duty Tracker have been implemented and are being run by the LA. Additionally, Monkford have worked with their communications team to raise the profile of long term foster care (e.g. on the LA website and in social media

dedicated pages) and they have increased the recruitment of people who are able to offer long term places.

The co-location of Placement Management Services and Fostering Duty has led to improved cross-organisational working across these service areas. Fostering Duty meet with the Family Finder and the Placement Management Service fortnightly. In the Fostering Support Tracking Meetings, supervising social workers review placements, report on carer capacity, and communicate with carers by a newsletter and monthly meetings with the National Foster Carer Association, who are engaged with and have a good relationship with Monkford.

Placement support, including support after the age of 18.

Improved foster carer supervision, training and retention for long term care is being put into place through improved and bespoke support packages for long term carers and for children's complex needs.

The National Foster Carer Association (NFCA) has been involved directly with Monkford's carer support and Coram-i consultants have worked closely with the Association and reviewed the training offer. The improvement in long term foster carer recruitment indicates carers are happy with converting to long term placements and the support received. Improved retention is also evident.

Since the pilot the training has been improved to more specifically meet the complex needs of children in long term foster care (fostered children may likely be older and with more difficult histories and complex needs requiring specialist support to stabilise placements and ensure positive outcomes for children).

The Fostering Support tracking meetings and trackers support foster carer retention and the trackers capture data on improvements made (increased in-house places, increased placement stability, reduced disruption to child/young person). Monkford's foster carer training and support package for permanency includes training on Staying Put for children staying in long term care over the age of 18.

The fostering support tracking process monitors disruptions so this can inform learning and feedback into the Family finding work (pre-approval). Learning emerging from tracking cases has also been used to improve the design of services.

Context following Coram-i's departure, December 2018

Following the official project end in December 2018, the second Bright Spots report was delivered and shared with Monkford in September 2019.

The service remained impacted by the financial difficulties of the local authority.

Ofsted inspected Monkford's children's services following the project end in June 2019. The local authority was rated as inadequate in the following areas: 'The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection'; 'The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers'; and 'Overall effectiveness'. In the area of 'The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families' they were rated as 'Requires improvement to be good'. The report noted that the children's services are failing to keep children safe, but also acknowledged that the new senior management in place has already produced some key improvement in a short amount of time.

Readstone

Area context at project start, January 2017

Readstone is a large service located in a large urban area. Over 20% of children are living in poverty with the proportion of children entitled to free school meals being lower than the national average. The proportion of children and young people from minority ethnic groups is much higher than the national average. Compared with other local authorities, the children looked after population is rather small (under 200). Around a quarter were living outside the local authority, more than 20 miles from their home.⁵¹

Context of Coram-i's work

In 2015 Children's services were rated by Ofsted as inadequate. The 2 relevant areas for the innovation project 'children looked after and achieving permanency' and 'Experiences and progress of care leavers' as well as 'Leadership, management and governance' were furthermore rated as inadequate by Ofsted. The IFA was rated as 'Requires Improvement' by Ofsted in 2016.

Coram-i has been working with Readstone since summer 2016 to strengthen the adoption service. For the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, Coram-i undertook a scoping activity and identified 2 main aims for the work in the site are:

1. Achieving permanency as quickly as possible by improving the quality and timeliness of permanency planning.
2. Improving placement stability by identifying suitable permanent foster placements, ensuring sufficient support is provided to such placements, and developing ways that make them last beyond the age of 18 wherever possible.

⁵¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-interactive-tool-lait>

Following the scoping stage Coram-i agreed an action plan with Readstone for the main areas of work: Permanency planning, recruitment and assessment, family finding and matching, and measuring CLA's wellbeing and experience of care.

Permanency planning

This first area of work includes the development of a permanency planning structure to undertake permanency planning meetings. Coram-i has collaborated with the reviewing service to strengthen their role in driving forward permanency planning. Furthermore, a permanency planning meeting recording template was developed to record dates and reasons.

Coram-i is supporting the development of a training programme for permanency planning and has advised the newly appointed training officer on the content of the training.

Coram-i also recommended to raise the age of children being presented to fostering panel for a permanent fostering match from 12 years to 16 years old.

To increase the scrutiny of permanent fostering plans Coram-i has suggested to scrutinise the plans by senior managers or the fostering panel. To realize this suggestion work was undertaken to set up a permanency panel. Terms of reference for the internal panel have been written. Furthermore, a revised Child's Permanency report has been developed.

Work has been undertaken to shift social workers' perception that the foster carer is the main client for example through the fostering support surgeries. These take place monthly and are chaired by a Coram-i Consultant.

Recruitment and assessment

Coram-i has supported the recruitment and assessment team manager and the team in redesigning the process and related documentation to make it more customer focused. Recruitment and Assessment Performance Surgery was held monthly to track assessment of foster carers. In addition to National Minimum Fostering Standards internal timescales have been agreed, this includes the response time to an enquiry, including writing it up and having it signed by the team manager.

Family Finding and Matching

The marketing and recruitment strategy has been taken over by the Coram associate as well as supervising family finding social workers. As part of the work an Activity Day for Fostering has been delivered. This further included DVDs and profiles of children. A profiling event was planned.

The early family finding court permission has been suggested and was being discussed with the judiciary, legal and family court.

Monthly family finding performance surgeries took place. Joint Tracking Meetings were undertaken monthly to improve the quality of matching. In addition, the Coram Associate has increased scrutiny to matching meetings by chairing those meetings when necessary.

Foster carer retention

Fostering support performance surgeries were chaired monthly and recommendations to support foster carers were made. This allowed to check any inconsistencies, reviews and any other support needs. The views of foster carers who leave the service were being captured with a revised exit interview process. Following recommendations from Coram-i the site was recruiting a dedicated person to undertake foster carers reviews.

Readstone has invested in undertaking file audits in the fostering support team which the Coram associate is delivering to include developing the audit tool and the approach to audits, based on the suggestion that the audit should be undertaken jointly with the supervising social worker. This work has led to Slough now looking at their current ICS system so that it is easier to use, which in turn will make it easier to populate the data - this is a complex and large piece of work, supported by Coram-i, and the internal stakeholders within Readstone.

The fostering support performance surgeries also served the purpose of assessing the vacancies of foster carers to increase effective use. Further work was planned to increase the understanding of the vacancies rate at a strategic level.

Measuring LAC wellbeing and experience of care

The first Bright Spot Your Life, Your Care Survey has been delivered and a report has been shared with the site. This report was discussed within the service and some recommendations have been taken on. This includes for example social workers not wearing their badges when they visit children in foster carer in school.

Overall

As the main aim of the innovation is to improve the quality and swiftness of permanency planning, an underlying method introduced is the tracking of children. Children are tracked from the point of entry in care to the age of 16 years - this includes children in court proceedings as well as those who have been accommodated through the agreement of parent/s with parental responsibility.

Tracking children's as well as foster carers' journeys has highlighted data inaccuracies and gaps. The Coram-i analyst was working with the service to understand the current challenges in the data. The parallel work on the tracker that was introduced as well as the ICS system of the Trust has shown that the ICS does not record all needed information.

Another area of work has been to improve cross-organisation working through Joint Tracking, active family finding including the support of social workers and managers to family find and match children in placement. The IRO service met with the fostering and LAC teams to bring appropriate scrutiny of plans. Coram-i has also brought together business systems teamed with the fostering service to improve systems and preparation for inspection.

Context following Coram-i's departure, December 2018

Following the official project end in December 2018, Readstone agreed with Coram-i an extension of the support being provided by the Coram-i consultants to have a longer hand-over period and ensure staff are trained to take on roles and processes that were handled by Coram-i. One Coram-i consultant continued working 1 day a week in the site until March 2019. The second Bright Spots report was delivered and shared with Readstone in September 2019.

The children's services as well as the Independent Fostering Agency were inspected by Ofsted during and/or following the project end. The children's services were rated as 'requires improvement to be good' with Ofsted noting that 'An increasingly strong culture of challenge, support and learning is helping to improve practice.' The IFA was rated in 2018 as well as in 2019. While the rating in 2018 was 'requires improvement to be good' in 2019 Ofsted rated the service overall as 'inadequate' including 'overall experiences and progress of children and young people', 'How well children and young people are helped and protected' and 'the effectiveness of leaders and managers'.

Leybridge

Area context

Leybridge has a population of children and young people of over 60,000 making up around 21% of the population. About 20% of children under the age of 16 years live in low income families and over two-thirds are from minority ethnic groups. The index of multiple deprivation was around 100 in 2017 and higher proportions of free school meals than the national average were received. Leybridge has a looked after children population of just under 300 with a rate of around 50 per 10,000 children. More than half were living outside the local authority and more than half were placed with foster families.

Context of Coram-i's work

Leybridge Children's Social Services was judged inadequate in the Ofsted inspection report published in February 2016. Leybridge developed a Sufficiency Strategy as well as an Improvement Plan following this report. The service has shown improvement in Ofsted monitoring inspections since then. In the latest relevant Ofsted report published in July 2018 Children's Services was rated as 'requires improvement with element of good practice' for the experiences and progress of care leavers.

During the scoping phase Coram-i set out the priorities for Leybridge aligned with the ongoing improvement work. There were 2 main aims:

1. Improving the quality and timeliness of permanency planning
2. Minimising delays to achieving permanency by identifying suitable long-term foster placements, ensuring sufficient support is provided to such placements, and developing ways that make them last beyond the age of 18.

Pre-proceedings

All the children who were subject to Public Law Outline (PLO) were tracked (work started in February 2018) and this continued on a monthly basis with face to face meetings with social workers and managers. The PLO process focussed on timeliness, and problem solving both strategic and operational policy/practice and systems (e.g. streamlining the parenting assessment).

Permanency planning

Leybridge took a whole systems approach to improving permanency planning through a task and finish group chaired by the Assistant Director. Coram-i worked alongside this group, providing advice and systems support through the performance and tracking meetings. The focus was securing matches for children who had been with their current foster carers for a considerable period but could not be matched with their current carers permanently. Other key work areas included: focus on consistency of permanency and legal planning meetings and improved scrutiny of the matching of children and permanent fostering plans (to bring in line with the scrutiny of adoption plans). Coram-i continued this work beyond the life of this project funding.

Family Finding and Matching

Coram-i's focus on family finding and matching was to support the redesign of the fostering recruitment and assessment process and related documentation. Considerable work was undertaken to strengthen the marketing materials and information events. The family finding process was highlighted as a gap. The original structure of family finding

located in the adoption team does did not allow for joined up working with the fostering service. Coram-i aimed to ensure that profiles (DVDs) were completed, prospective carers were visited on a timely basis, and early family finding court permission was sought. This redesign continued to be supported by Coram-i beyond the life of the project.

With Coram-i support, foster carers' reviews and file audits took place to strengthen the quality assurance framework. Reflective group work for supervising social workers and managers in the fostering service was established. Coram-i also influenced changes at the case work level to ensure that appropriate and timely therapeutic support is provided to both children and carers.

Quicker timescales for child's and foster carer's journey

Joint tracking and performance surgeries were established to help social workers understand the importance of data and their role and accountability in recording accurately on the system. With a data focus and with transparency, social workers were supported to prioritise, reflect on the impact of ways of working and address time delays.

Cross-organisational working

As well as bringing different parts of the service together (e.g. child in need, fostering and adoption teams) and addressing problems with transferring cases across teams, the joint tracking and performance surgeries also aimed to highlight gaps in cross organisational working e.g. adult mental health and drug and alcohol services.

Context following Coram-i's departure, December 2018

Following the end of the project Coram-i were commissioned by Leybridge to continue working in the fostering service on improvement work in family finding. This was based on needs that had been identified and work that had been started in the project period. Inspections since 2018 focussed on children in need. They were also commissioned to continue with the tracking meetings, permanency planning work.

Broadmington

Area context

Broadmington has a population of approximately 200,000 children and young people under the age of 18 years, comprising 22% of the total population in the area.

Approximately 36% of the local authority's children aged under 16-years-old were living in low-income families. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups accounted for 49% of all children living in the area. Approximately double the proportion of children and young people in the area were entitled to free school meals, compared to the

national average. 1000 children are being looked after by the local authority, the majority of those live with foster families. Of those, the majority lived out of the authority area but in neighbouring authorities.

Context of Coram-i's work

During the Coram-i scoping activity it identified 2 priorities:

1. Improving the quality and timeliness of permanency planning
2. Minimising delays to achieving permanency by:
 - identifying suitable permanent foster placements
 - ensuring sufficient support is provided to such placements, and
 - developing ways that make them last beyond the age of 18 wherever possible.

At the time of scoping activity, Broadmington was already delivering an Improvement Plan, developed in response to the rating of 'Inadequate' by OFSTED in 2014. This work resulted in positive progression in areas such as compliance to timescales for children's assessments, timeliness in achieving adoption placements, and improved quality of the workforce through increased recruitment and training for staff. Following an OFSTED inspection in October to November 2017, the service was rated as 'Requiring improvement to be good'. The work undertaken by Coram- i can therefore be viewed in the context of a service already implementing a range of improvements, and a focus on accelerating changes that improve outcomes for children and young people. However, as the rating identified, the journey to improvement was ongoing, in particular around permanency planning when adoption was not the viable option.

Permanency planning

A permanency planning task and finish group was set up and led by Broadmington for this work in March 2018. Piloting of Coram-i's intervention began in 1 locality of the city, involving performance surgeries and joint tracking meetings with fostering recruitment and assessment teams and the fostering teams. However, the Coram-i tracking approach was not taken on and instead another more streamlined and less detailed tracking system was used because of the preference of the senior staff at Broadmington. Coram-i agreed to work with this desired approach. The work then migrated to other teams based in different areas. This led to new practice guidance on permanency and permanency planning.

The local authority's focus of recruiting higher quality foster was supported by Coram-i through the introduction of an Activity day for Fostering.

Family Finding and Matching

Coram-i supported the redesign and piloting of the fostering Recruitment and Assessment process. Changes were also made to the family finding role making it more visible. This had not been approved by the end of the evaluation.

A new Foster Carer Ambassador scheme was designed, to create a 'pool' of foster carers to support and promote fostering recruitment with the site.

Coram-i supported the development of child profiles to support family finding.

Coram-i worked with the site to improve the preparation and chairing of matching meetings.

Placement

Coram- i have supported the site to understand the needs of children once in a placement. The 'Your Life, Your Care' survey was delivered across the site and a care leaver element of the survey was piloted and tested.

Quicker timescales for child's and foster carer's journey:

The focus of joint tracking and performance surgeries was capturing, recording and reviewing of data, so that data can inform service delivery decisions and actions. Data quality remained a barrier throughout the project.

Cross-organisational working:

This was supported through joint tracking meetings, which were well attended by different parts of the service: the child's SW, the team manager, the family finder and an IRO service staff member.

Context following Coram-i's departure, December 2018

No update from Ofsted at time of writing.

Appendix 5: Further findings

Additional findings

Out of area placements

Child-level data that included the information if the child was placed outside the local authority and at least 20 miles from home was available from Monkford and Leybridge. For Readstone and Broadmington the data analysed was reported as part of the SSDA903 data.

For Monkford there was a statistically significant increase in the proportion of children being placed outside Monkford and at least 20 miles from home between 2017 and 2019 ($p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .08$). The proportion increased from 11% in 2017, to 15% in 2018 and 18% in 2019.

For Leybridge, the proportion of looked after children decreased from 19% in 2017 to 16% in 2019, though this is not statistically significant.

Broadmington stayed stable at 9% in 2017 and 2019, while the proportion of out of area placements decreased in Readstone from 29 in 2017 to 25 in 2018, however, no data is available for 2019.

Bright spots

As described in the main body of the report the Bright Spots 'Your Life, Your Care' survey was implemented in all 4 sites at 2 time points to capture the voice of children in care. It was impossible to gain retrospective consent for the data to be shared for the evaluation, so that the presentation of the results is based on the reports prepared Coram Voice for each site. The survey was aimed at the whole population of looked after children so that it was not possible to draw any conclusions based on the type of placement or when the child came into care. Therefore, one cannot attribute any changes directly to the intervention.

Children completed the survey anonymously and it was not possible to track responses over time, thus, no inference statistics comparing the responses at both time points were calculated. Reports from 2 sites for both time points were received so that it was possible to describe the results. Below findings for the wellbeing indicators used within the Bright Spots survey are presented for 2017 and 2019 for Readstone and Monkford. The overall response rates differed per year with a decrease in the response rate noticeable for both sites. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution.

(a) Happiness yesterday:

- a. Around two-thirds reported to have been happy yesterday in 2017, this compares to over 90% in 2019.
- b. In both 2017 and 2019 the majority completing the survey reported to have been happy yesterday

(b) Life satisfaction:

- a. Over half reported high life satisfaction, but also nearly one-quarter low satisfaction in 2017. In 2019, more than two-thirds reported to be satisfied with their life.
- b. In both 2017 and 2019 most young people (11-18 years) were satisfied with their lives.

(c) Are the things you do worthwhile:

- a. Around two-thirds thought they life was worthwhile in 2017, however also 20% had a low score. In 2019, no young person in care reported a low score.
- b. Only a small proportion of young people had a low score in 2017 and 2019.

(d) Positivity about the future:

- a. Most young people in care completing the survey felt positive about the future both in 2017 and 2019.
- b. The vast majority felt positive about the future in 2017 and 2019.

(e) Life is improving:

- a. In 2017 the majority of children felt their life was improving, even though also around 13% felt it their life was getting worse. In 2019, no child thought their life was getting worse and the vast majority felt it was improving.
- b. The majority felt that their lives were improving in 2017 and in 2019. Even though the proportion was slightly higher in 2017.

Staff wellbeing quantitative indicators

Indicators applied for staff wellbeing are (i) staff vacancy rate; (ii) staff/social worker turnover; and (iii) agency worker rate. Team-/locality level data on several indicators was available for Broadmington and Readstone. This is available for Broadmington for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 on locality-level and for Readstone for 2018 and 2019 on team-level limited to the teams that Coram-i worked with. This includes fostering as well as children's services teams that Coram-i worked with. The evaluators further used

available data on children's social workers employed by local authorities within their children's services department.⁵²

Staff vacancies: According to data shared with the evaluators for Broadmington, there was a general decrease in the number of staff vacancies between 2017 and 2019. In fact, the vacancy rate increased between 2017 and 2018 in the locality Coram-i first introduced the tracking, but then decreased in 2019 below the rate in 2017. Using the statistics on children's social workers further shows that there is a reduction in the rate between 2017 and 2019. In Readstone, a similar pattern across all teams Coram-i worked with is observable. The number of vacancies decreased between 2018 and 2019. Interestingly, a different pattern emerges when inspecting the social worker vacancy rate of the children's services in Readstone which is increasing since 2018. Social worker vacancies show that Monkford's rate is decreasing and Leybridge's rate increasing between 2017 and 2018, before stagnating in 2019.

Staff or social worker turnover rate: In Broadmington, the staff turnover rate decreased from 2017 and 2019 across the localities from around 24% to 16%. In particular, fostering teams have seen a decrease from 31% to 10% between 2017 and 2019. In Readstone, staff turnover rate also reduced from 2018 with 18% to 12% in 2019. This compares to increase in social worker turnover in the local authority between in 2018 and 2019. In Monkford and Leybridge social worker turnover rate are similar in 2017 and 2019.

Agency worker rate: Broadmington further saw a reduction in the agency worker rate between 2017 and 2019 across localities. The locality where Coram-i started working showed a continuous decrease and fostering showed the largest decrease between 2017 and 2019. This general decrease is also represented in the proportion of agency social workers in children's service teams. In Readstone, there was a small increase in the agency rate between 2018 and 2019 for teams that Coram-i worked with. This small increase can also be found for the agency social worker rate. While Leybridge's agency social worker rate is generally decreasing between 2017 and 2019, Monkford experienced a dip in 2018.

Overall, indicators to measure staff wellbeing for Broadmington and Readstone showed positive change (e.g., reduction in agency worker rate) for the teams that Coram-i worked with. However, the evaluation was not able to triangulate these findings with staff interviews of wave 3. There was no local data available from Monkford and Leybridge, therefore, no conclusions are possible for these 2 sites.

⁵² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-childrens-social-care-workforce>

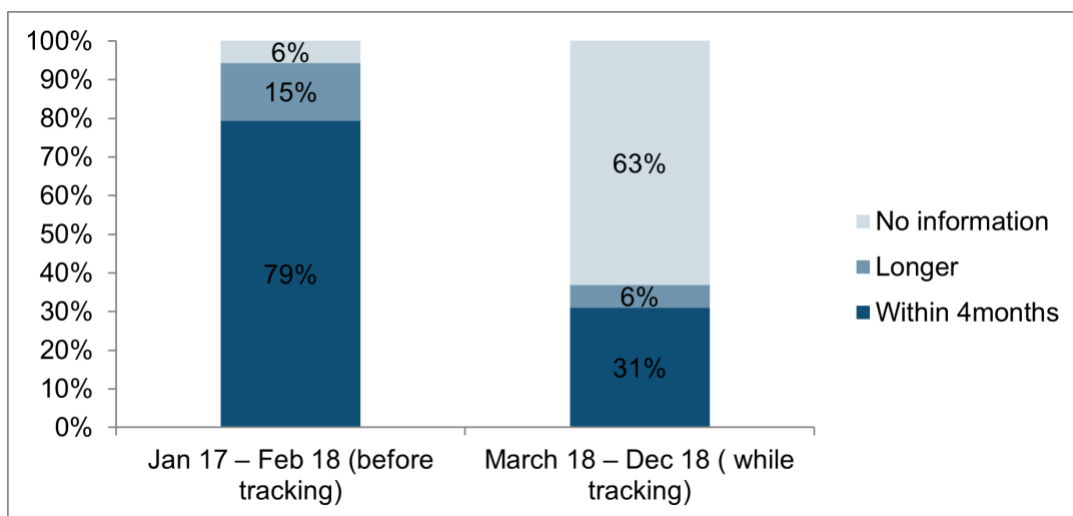
Additional figures and tables

Table 15: Descriptive statistics of time in months from Becoming Looked After (BLA) to 2nd CLA review in Leybridge

Year	N	Mean	SD
Jan 17 – Feb 18 (before tracking)	133	2.93	0.87
March 18 – Dec 18 (while tracking)	63	2.89	0.86

Source: Leybridge tracking data.

Figure 8: 2nd CLA review held within 4 months of BLA in Leybridge



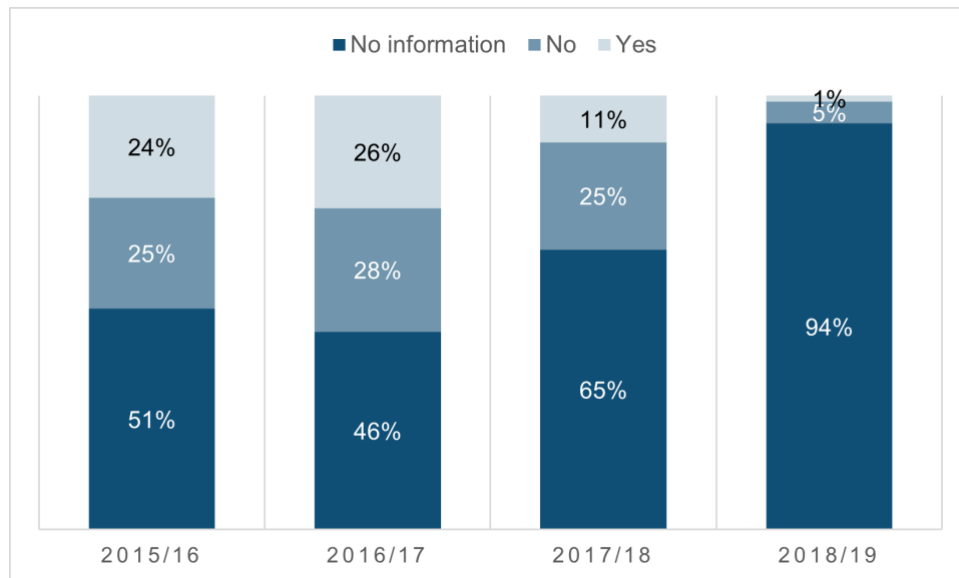
Source: Leybridge tracking data.

Table 16: 2nd CLA review held within 4 months of BLA in Readstone

Year	No	No information	Within 4 months
2016/17	17%	0%	83%
2017/18	8%	2%	90%
2018/19	2%	76%	22%

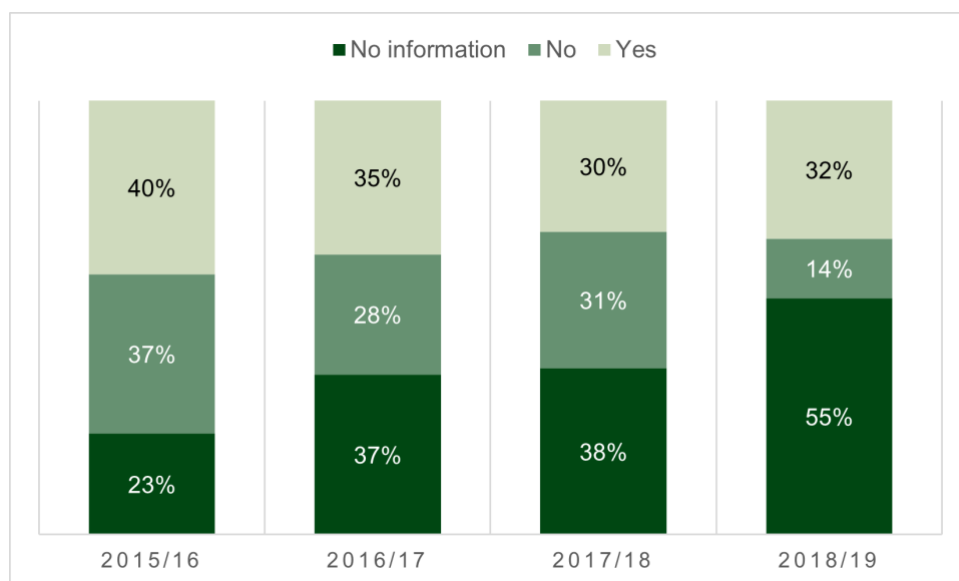
Source: Readstone tracking data.

Figure 9: Permanency plan agreed by 2nd CLA review in Leybridge



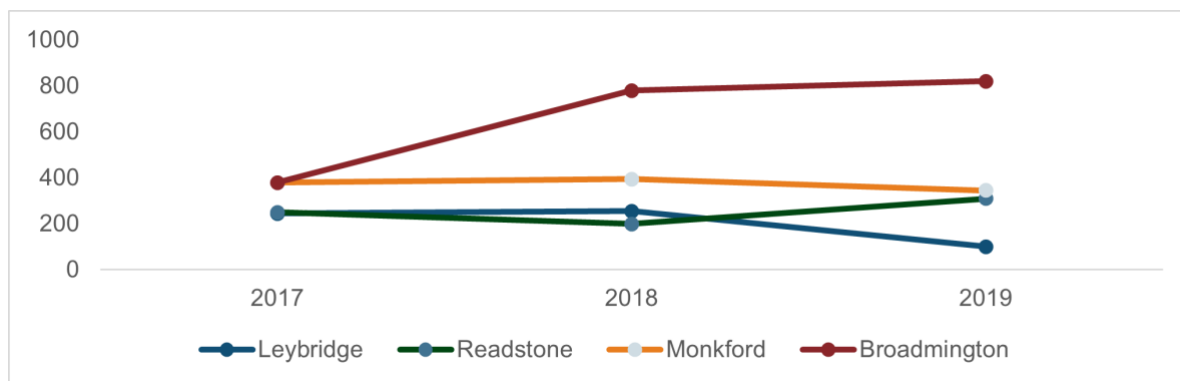
Source: Leybridge tracking data.

Figure 10: Permanency plan agreed by 2nd CLA review in Readstone



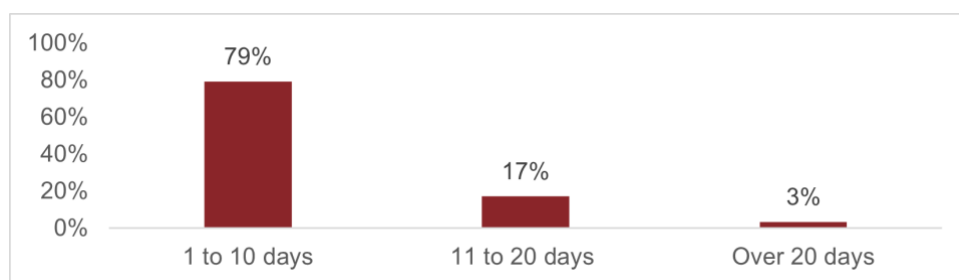
Source: Readstone tracking data.

Figure 11: Number of initial enquiries from new prospective fostering households per site



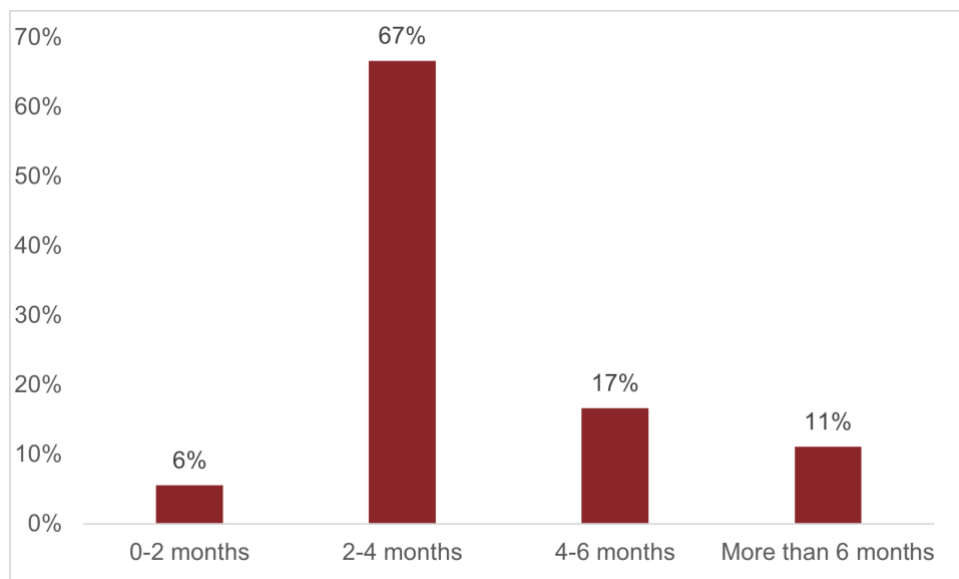
Source: LAIT

Figure 12: Number of working days between initial enquiry and IHV



Source: Broadmington recruitment tracker data; N=29.

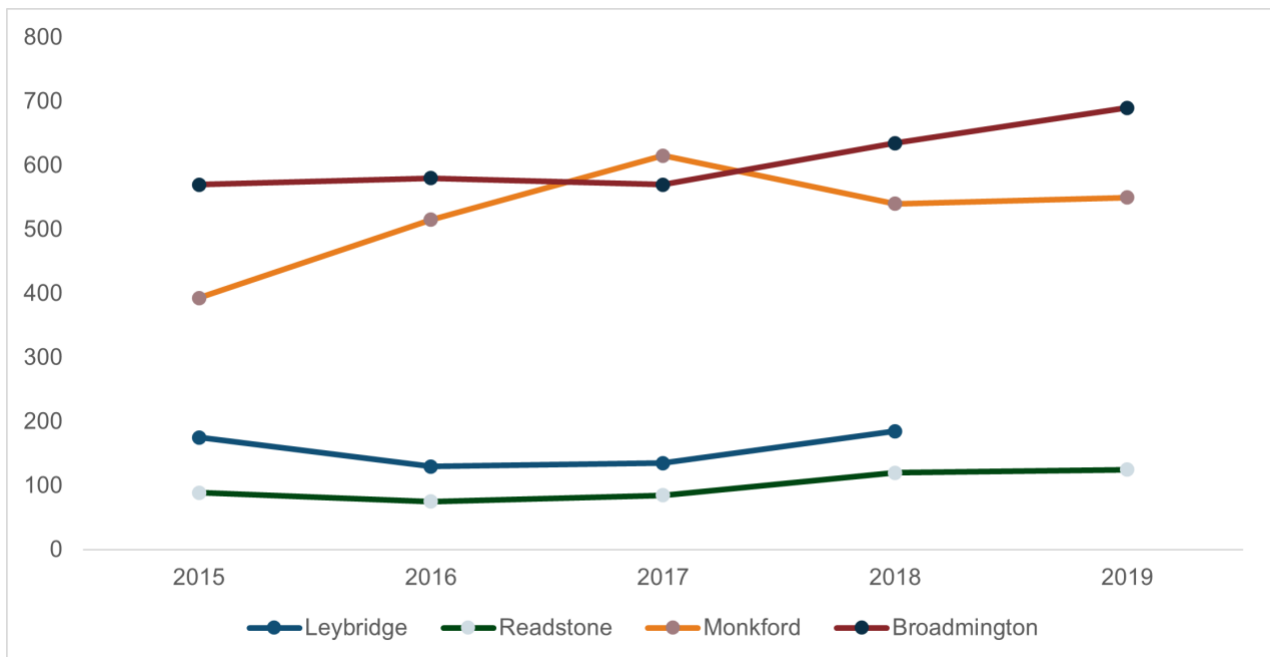
Figure 13: Number of working days between application and panel



Source: Broadmington recruitment tracker data; N=18.

When looking at the overall number of foster places available there was a general increase noticeable for all 4 sites.⁵³ Especially, in Broadmington the number increased from 2017 onwards.

Figure 14: Number of approved foster places per year



Source: LAIT; Data refers to all fostering agencies.

⁵³ Please note that this refers to all agencies.

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