

Adoption Annual Report 2022-2023

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Introduction

Wirral is part of the Regional Adoption Agency incorporating Sefton, Knowsley, and Liverpool, called Adoption in Merseyside (AIM). There has been no head of service within AIM for over six months since the previous head of service left. Very recently AIM has an interim head, Mark Tobin for a maximum of three months. Mark Tobin is very experienced and is provided a lot of support and energy into the service in a short space of time.

Much of the current work is aimed at improvements in a wide range of areas many of which have been set out in a review of AIM which was independently undertaken in 2022.

A key feature of the recommendations is focused on increasing the number of recruited adopters.

During 2022 to 2023 there were only 22 adopters recruited across the region (all 4 areas). A significant work stream will be focused on improving marketing and communication around the service. It will also be focused upon consolidating some of the working processes across the four local authorities to ensure there is more consistency in work streams, personnel, and enough capacity to deliver on the services required.

There are a great number of very experienced and capable people within AIM who have been working incredibly hard. The planned approach will aim to support them more effectively; however it is a concern that Mark's time within the service will end during August 2023, and there will still be no permanent head of service to replace him. It will be imperative that heads of service from across the four regions have the capacity to support and drive the operational progress of the service, allied to the strategic board's guidance and oversight.

There were 25 Wirral children adopted between 1st April 2022-1st April 2023

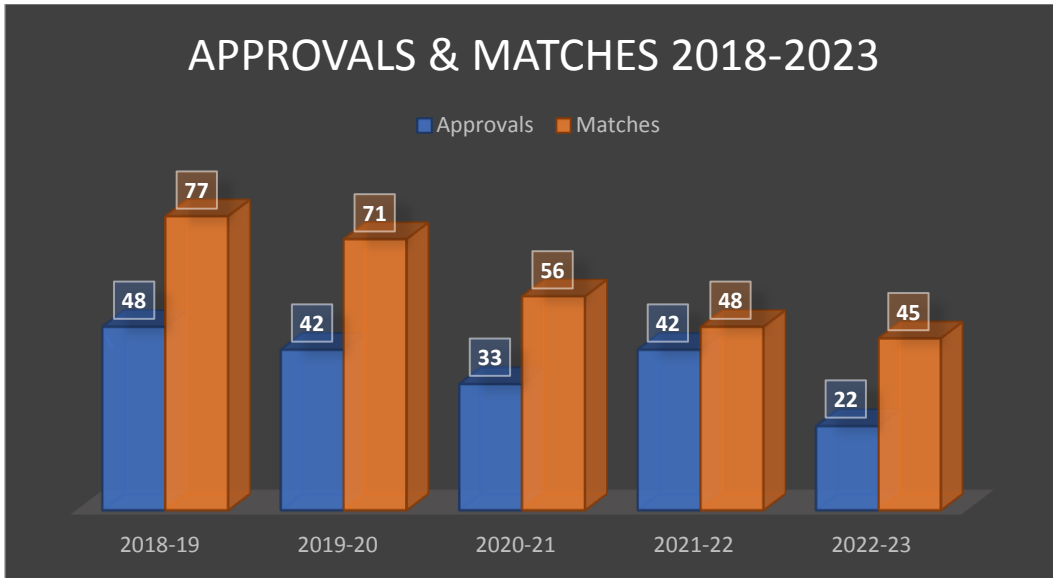
There were 20 Wirral children adopted between 1st April 2021- 1st April 2022

There were 25 Wirral children adopted between 1st April 2020- 1st April 2021

Relevant Datasets

Approvals April 2023 – March 2023: (Data from AIM July 2023)

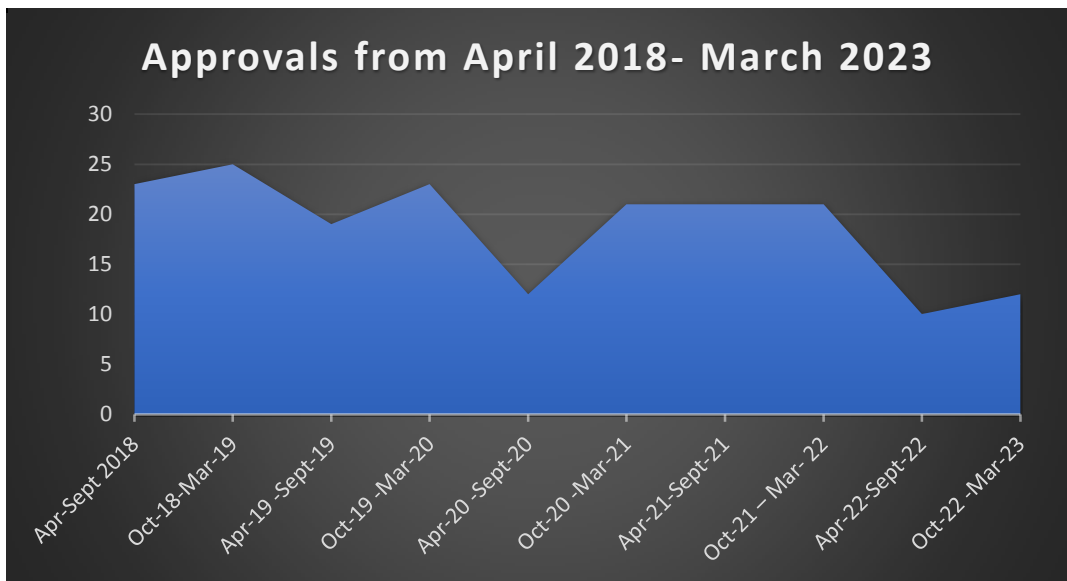
There were 22 adopters approved in the past year 2022-23, as can be seen from the chart below, this is the lowest number of adopters approved since AIM began in 2018.



2022-23 - Local Authority breakdown of where our adopters lived:

- Knowsley 1
- Liverpool 9
- Sefton 5
- Wirral 7

5 Year Performance trends from 2018-2023



As can be seen from the above chart there was a decrease in 2020 due to Covid lockdown impact, then a dip between April and September 2022, as discussed above re Q.1 2023-24 then trend is beginning to take an upward route.

Matched Children

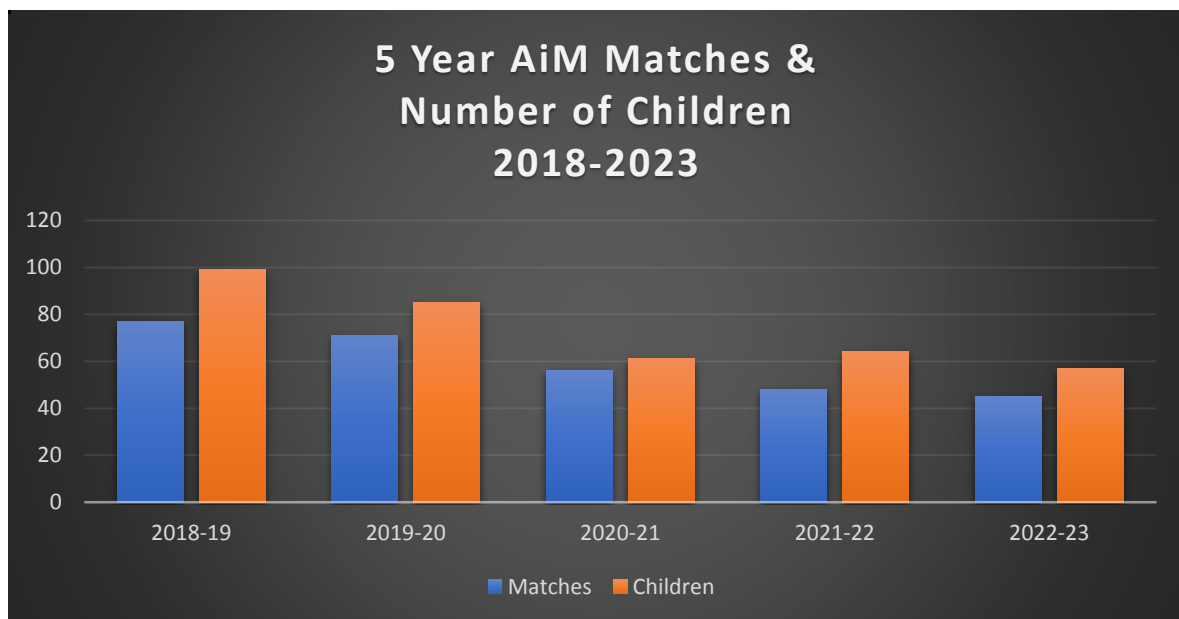
There were 45 matches in 2022-23. This included 57 children, 11 sibling groups, 10 sets of 2, 1 set of 3 sibling group.

- Knowsley 3 single children – 1 disrupted
- Liverpool 22 matches, 5 sibling groups, 1 sibling set of 3, 4 sibling sets of 2
- Sefton 6 matches, which included 1 sibling group of 2
- Wirral 13 matches, which included 5 sibling groups of 2

83% of the children matched are under 4 years old, 17% were aged 4 and over. In 2021-22 75% were under 4 years old so this has increased, 3% were 6 or over and this is the same. The gender difference is 57% males 43% females.

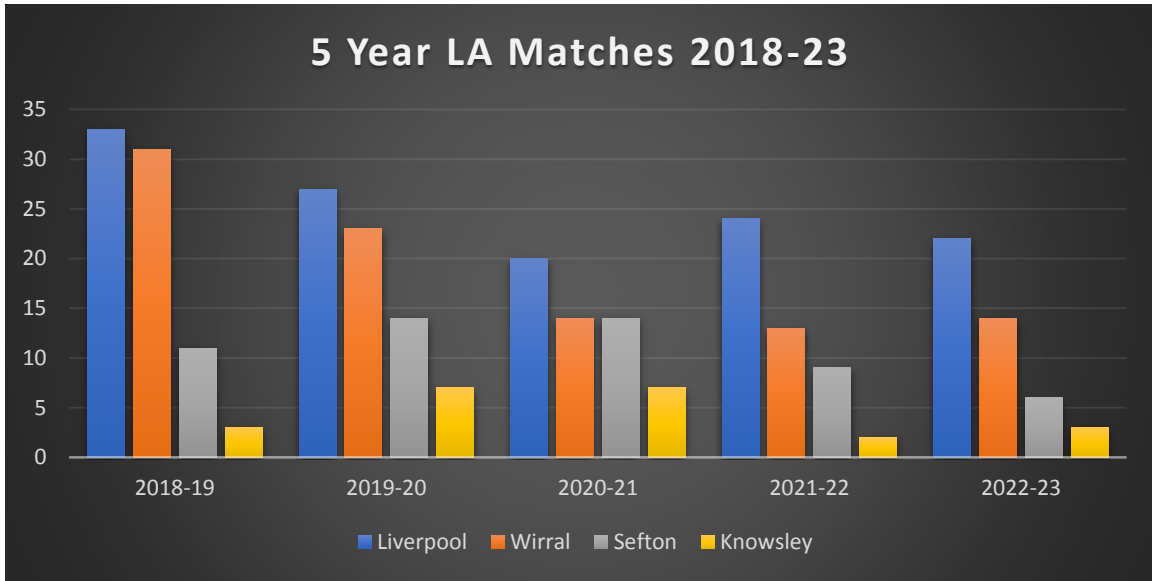
Local Authority	2021-22 48 matches	2022-23 45 matches	Trend from the last reporting period 2021-22
Knowsley	2 matches, no sibs	3 matches no sibs, 1 disrupted	1 more in the last year
Liverpool	24 matches, 8 sibs 1x3	22 matches 28 children 5 sib groups, 1x3	2 less in the last year
Sefton	9 matches, 1 sib group	6 matches 1 sib group x 2	6 less, 66% decrease
Wirral	13 matches, 5 sibs	14 matches 19 children 5 sib groups x 2	1 more in the last year

Matches - 5-year performance trends from 2018-2023



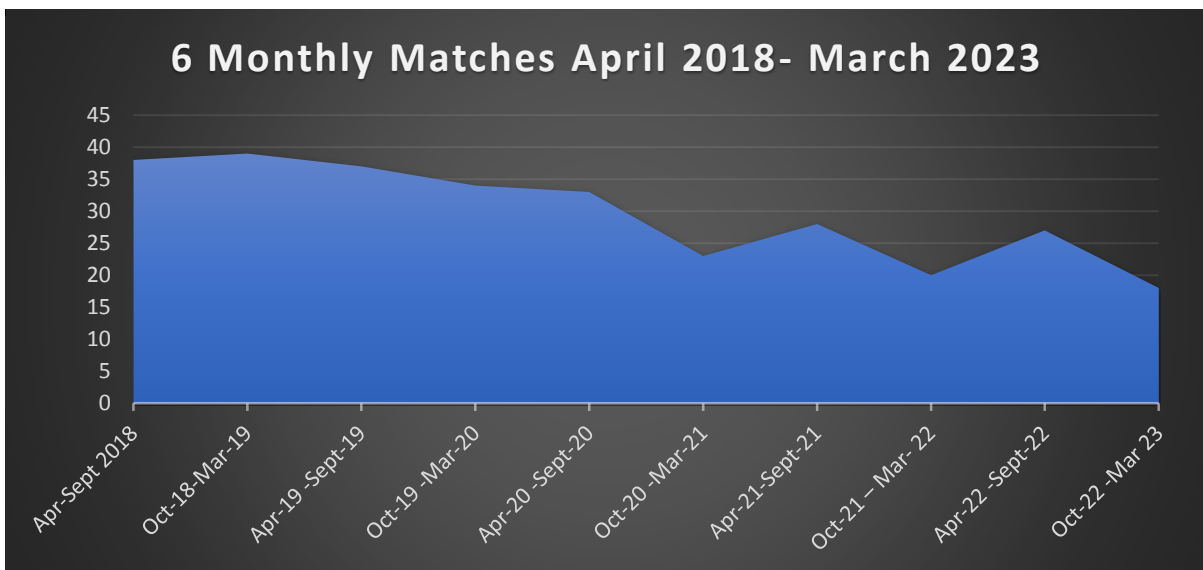
- Year 1 2018-19 - 78 matches, 99 children
- Year 2 2019-20 – 71 matches, 85 children
- Year 3 2020-21 – 55 matches, 61 children (sharp reduction re Covid year)
- Year 4 2021-22 – 48 matches, 64 children
- Year 5 2022-23 – 45 matches, 57 children

Breakdown of Local Authority Matches



Liverpool being the largest local authority has always had more matches in AiM and in the past year 2022-23, Liverpool matches represent 49% of all AiM matches. This is followed by Wirral with 31% of AiM matches, then Sefton with 13% followed by Knowsley with 7% of AiM matches.

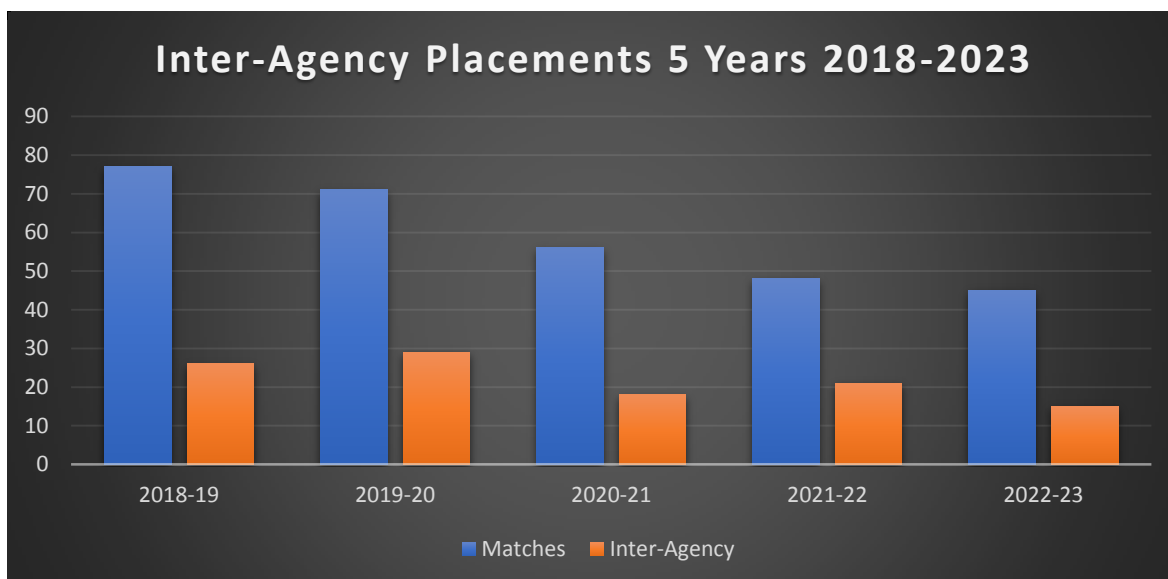
Direction travelled of matches over 5-year period of AiM



As with approvals matches have seen a year on year decrease in the number of matches and the number of children matched, however Q1 2023-24 and the demand for Panel throughout July and August it is projected matches will far outweigh the previous year 2022-23.

Inter-Agency Placements

There were 15 inter-agency placements in 2022-23, this represented 33% of all the AiM matches. This is 11% lower than the previous year. Q1 2023-24 sees this drop further with 31% of the 16 matches being inter-agency placements.



- Year 1 2018-19 - 26 of the 77 matches were inter-agency, 32%
- Year 2 2019-20 – 29 of the 71 matches were inter-agency, 41%
- Year 3 2020-21 – 18 of the 56 matches were inter-agency, 33%
- Year 4 2021-22 – 21 of the 48 matches were inter-agency, 44%
- Year 5, 2022-23 – 15 of the 45 matches were inter-agency, 33%

Wirral Specific Context

Average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, adjusted for foster carer adoptions (Scorecard indicator A10)

For 2022 Wirral's figure has risen significantly from previous year. The average for 2021 was 363 days, based on 25 adoptions, but this has risen in 2022 to 809 based on 18 adoptions. The reason for the large rise is legacy cases adopted in the year that have impacted our figure.

Wirral's 2023 figure has dropped from 809 days to 652 based on 25 Adoptions which is still too high. As with previous year we have legacy cases adopted in the year which have impacted the figures.

With regard to Wirral's three-year averages for 2017-20 our figure was 443 and for 2018-21 our figure was 425 so under the target of 426. Our figure for 2019-22 rose to 521 due to the issues already highlighted in 2022 reporting year and for 2020-23 it has risen again to 585, this is due to legacy children's cases now reaching adoption.

Average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family (Scorecard indicator A2)

For 2022 Wirral's figure has risen from 257 to 375 based on 18 adoptions, again the legacy children's cases have had a major impact on the figures. We are seeing an increasing trend of Parents appealing the placement order, which adds significant delay to the A2 figure.

For one particular Court matter involving 3 siblings the parents appealed the placement order to the High Court which took 18 months, then subsequently appealed the adoption order. Our figure has risen from 375 to 424 based on 25 Adoptions. Again this is due to legacy cases with a sibling group of two having a figure of 1029 days, their Placement Order was granted in December 2018 but they were not matched until October 2021 and Adopted in January 2023. This was following a previous Match withdrawing and family finding having to restart.

Wirral's 3-year averages for 2017-20 was 203 which rose to 209 for 2018-21 and for 2019-22 the figure rose to 269. The figure for 2020-23 has risen again to 340, the reason for the year-on-year increase is due to legacy children's cases which have now reached adoption.

Average time (in days) between a child entering care and a local authority receiving court authority to place a child, for children who have been adopted. We have been told by DfE that there is no target set as yet so have no way of knowing if we are within target or not. (Scorecard indicator A20)

For 2022 Wirral's figure has risen significantly from 230 to 389 based on 18 adoptions, one child's adoption took 1250 days due to repeated attempts to rehabilitate through Mother and Baby placements and Placed with Parent; before eventual ADM, Placement Order and adoption. We received a Placement Order on another child in January 2022 after 122 weeks in the Court arena. Parental appeals have also impacted our figures for 2022. Of the 18 adoptions we have 15 that are under 426 days but with 3 cases of 1250; 1270 and 581 this has had a negative impact on our A20 figure.

Wirral's figure rose again from 389 to 454 based on 25 Adoptions. This figure has been impacted by our legacy cases as such as two siblings of 836 who had their ADM reversed in March 2020, before the PO could be revoked the foster carer applied to adopt. Also, impacting the figures are delays in Court due to Parental appeals. If for example we removed the two highlighted children above our figure would be 412 based on 23 adoptions, this figure is within the target.

The 3-year average for 2017-20 was 272 which rose slightly in 2018-21 to 274, the figure for 2019-22 was 295 and it has risen again for 2020-23 to 346 which is mainly due to legacy children's cases who have now been adopted.

Conclusion

- The fundamental challenge for AIM is to improve the supply of adopters coming into assessment by a renewed focus on the early stages of the process and on redevelopment of the website and affiliate marketing.
- AIM requires a new permanent head of service to maintain momentum provided by the temporary head of service Mark Tobin
- There is further work to do within Wirral to reduce the timescales for some children between their time coming into care at the time they are adopted. This work is primarily focused on early matching, and clarity and timeliness of court process.