Adoption Tees Valley

Bi Annual Report

1st May 2018 - 30th September 2018

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Service Manager

Index

Executive Summary

Adoption Tees Valley began operating as a Regional Adoption Agency, as defined in the Education and Adoption Act (2016) on the 01.05.2018.

It brings together the former Local Authority adoption services of Darlington; Hartlepool; Middlesbrough; Redcar and Cleveland; and Stockton.

The contribution of the Elected Lead Members for Children's Services across the five Local Authorities and the five Children's Services Directors is recognised and valued within this first report of Adoption across the region. Without the courage, leadership and determination to ensure that the Tees Valley achieved a collaborative and well planned Regional Adoption Agency, through committing resources and support, this agency could not have enjoyed the successful start it has.

This report is a review of adoption activity, as defined by the Adoption Leadership Scorecard (ALB) measures for the first five months of operation of ATV, and represents the bi annual reporting period of 01.05.2018-30.09.2018. In subsequent years the full half year report will be covered.

Adoption Tees Valley has enjoyed a successful start with a number of children achieving placements who had waited some time for adopters. Additionally a significant number of adopters who were waiting at the time of transfer have now been matched with children, and in many cases the children have moved in.

A key aim of the RAA programme is to impact on timeliness of children waiting for adoption.

This report will show that it is early days to review and evaluate the impact of the move to the RAA on the Adoption Scorecard timeliness (A1, A2 and A3) measures as there is a time lag in adoption work, and scorecard measures reflect adoption matches and placements that are for children who are now adopted, but for whom the adoption journey started some time ago.

However, early indicators which are available are that timeliness is improving for children, and that with a greater "pool" of adopters more children, including "hard to place" children have achieved their permanent families through adoption. The time between Placement Order to match has slightly increased, and this is reflective of some of the early work that inevitably needed to take place, in managing the change process of five separate teams coming together as one.

Adoption Tees Valley has worked collaboratively with senior leaders, and social work teams across the Tees Valley, and there is now a well-developed mechanism for early referral of any child with an adoption plan. The impact of this is that ATV has been able to track and plan for these children, and

early permanence is being achieved for more children, and in many cases adopters are being identified at an early stage.

In the first six months, 24 children were placed for adoption.

The greatest need across Tees Valley is for adopters for siblings who are to be placed together.

A further aim of the RAA programme is to impact on the time that adopters wait for a match.

At the outset Adoption Tees Valley "received" 45 adoptive families who were approved, but not yet matched. Within the period of this report, 26 families were matched, either with children from within, or outside of the Tees Valley area.

ATV has had a significant impact on the pool of adopters waiting, and many have now have children placed with them. While the timeliness for this cohort of adopters is not as good as aimed for in the longer term, this is because many have these waited some time prior to regionalisation.

It would be fair to say that adopters have benefited from the RAA by having more children available, with whom they are well matched.

ATV has recruited a steady stream of new adopters, but within this period there were just three new approvals, with a further 20 prospective adopters in assessment at the period end. Again, the change process has impacted on getting prospective adopters to panel, however, this is an improving picture.

Adoption Support

The vision for Adoption Tees Valley is to be a centre of excellence and resource for adopted children and their families throughout the period of their childhood, and beyond where necessary. We know that there can be considerable support needs for children and families after the Adoption Order is granted, and sometimes even shortly after placement. Many adopted children have needs associated with early trauma; attachment difficulties; separation and loss; and may need some help with recovering and managing the long term impact of these issues.

Adoption Tees Valley is setting out to deliver a core offer to all adopters and children, through regular engagement events, activities, and then through training, workshops and informal support. The service is also the agency through which therapeutic support can be commissioned, funded by the Adoption Support Fund (ASF).

The first six months have been busy, active, and a time of huge development and change for staff and managers, as well as those who are in the adoption journey during the transition.

We are hugely proud of the achievements and this experienced staff team have recently agreed that this has been a positive move for adoption in Tees Valley.

The Lead Elected Council Members for Children's Services who have supported the planning, decisions and resource allocation to Adoption Tees Valley, within the five Tees Valley Councils.

Left to right: Anne McCoy, Stockton BC; Mike Carr, Middlesbrough BC; Craig Hannaway, Redcar and Cleveland BC; Cyndi Hughes, Darlington BC; Brenda Harrison, Hartlepool BC.

Introduction

This is the first report for Adoption Tees Valley since the new Regional Adoption Agency "went live" in May 2018, when the adoption services of each of the five Local Authorities of Darlington; Hartlepool; Middlesbrough; Redcar and Cleveland; and Stockton joined together to become one new agency, providing the local government adoption services for the Tees Valley area.

There has been a great deal of planning and preparation of the full business case for the new Regional Adoption Agency, which was approved by all the constituent Councils in 2018. The commitment, collaboration and perseverance of the Councils, supported by Directors of Children's Services, Elected Members, staff and stakeholders across the Tees Valley deserves recognition in this first half year report. Adopters, and partners from the Voluntary Adoption Agencies within the North East region contributed to the development of the RAA, and through a lot of hard work, and support from the Department for Education, Adoption Tees Valley was launched as the 10th national Regional Adoption Agency on 01.05.18.

Recognition is due also to Sue Reay, who took the reins of the project plan, and steered the group to a successful implementation.

Thanks also to Stockton Borough Council, a worthy host for the new agency, and to the many staff working within the Council who have given their support to make this a successful transformation of services.

Why Regionalise Adoption?

For many years the Government has sought to improve the timeliness and reduce delay in achieving permanence through adoption, for children where this is their plan. In 2015, the Government set out a new plan for the transformation of adoption services, in its paper "Regionalising Adoption" which was enacted in the Education and Adoption Act 2016.

The Government's position was that structural change would improve the process for children and adopters leading to shorter waiting times for both. By creating larger, regional adoption agencies the aim is to have a greater pool of adopters readily accessible for matching with children, and better strategic approaches to commissioning. The Department for Education (DfE) expects the RAA programme to deliver consistently good and innovative adoption practice that ensures improved life chances for children. Partnership working between local government and voluntary/independent agencies is encouraged, and promoted, to achieve the very best for children.

Adoption Tees Valley

Adoption Tees Valley is now located in a single building in Oxbridge Avenue, Stockton, within the site of the Grangefield Academy. The premises are a standalone building with good accommodation for the whole of the adoption team, managers, and staff, and with good space for panel; training; and for events for adopters, and other stakeholders. It is positive to have such a significantly well adapted building for the purpose, and has enabled good team building, and collaborative working, plus a range of events for children and families.

Benchmarking

Included within this section is information about adoption across the Tees Valley in previous years, and the half year position of ATV against some key performance and ALB scorecard indicators.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 (YTD)
Population of children aged 0-17 Tees Valley	144,531	144,996	144, 996	145,691 (mid 2017)
Looked After Children (end of period) Numbers Tees Valley	1,370	1,585	1,717	1,832
Adoptions Tees Valley	65	60	70	47

At 31.03.18		At 30.09.18	
Average time in days for child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family during year, Tees Valley **ALB scorecard A1**	435	Average time in days for child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family during year, Tees Valley	394
Average time between Placement Order and a match, across Tees Valley **ALB scorecard A2**	157	Average time between Placement Order and a match, across Tees Valley	165
Number of approved adopter families waiting to be matched **ALB scorecard A11**	45*	Number of adopter families waiting to be matched	19
Percentage of adopted families matched to a child who waited at least 3	Range 17-71%	Percentage of adopted families matched to a child who waited at least 3 months	100%

months from approval to match **ALB scorecard A12**		from approval to match	
Number of adopters in assessment **ALB scorecard A13**	19*	Number of adopters in assessment	20
Number of children looked after with a plan for adoption, not yet placed **ALB scorecard A9**	99*	Number of children with a plan for adoption, not yet matched	82
Number of children with a plan for adoption and Placement Order, not yet placed **ALB scorecard A14**	68*	Number of children with a plan for adoption and Placement Order, not yet placed	43
Number of children in a Foster For Adoption placement **ALB scorecard A17**	5*	Number of children in a Foster For Adoption placement	7
Number of children from ethnic minority backgrounds adopted from care in the year **ALB scorecard A6**	3	Number of children from ethnic minority backgrounds adopted from care year to date	3
Number of children aged 5+ adopted from care in the year **ALB scorecard A7**	14	Number of children aged 5+ adopted from care in the year	5
Number of sibling groups waiting to be adopted	29*	Number of sibling groups waiting to be adopted	35
Number of children in sibling groups waiting to be adopted, or placed, together	73*	Number of children in sibling groups waiting to be adopted, or placed, together	74
New Agency decisions that a child should be adopted within the year **ALB Scorecard A15**	79*	New Agency decisions that a child should be adopted within the year to date	42
Number new Placement Order granted within year **ALB scorecard A16**	60	Number new Placement Order granted within year to date	30
Number of children for whom permanence decision has changed away from adoption **ALB scorecard A5**	9*	Number of children for whom permanence decision has changed away from adoption	12

Number of adoptions from care in year	70	Number of adoptions from care year to date	47

*Data not available for one Local Authority, therefore figures are higher than given.

Brief summary of the benchmarking information:

- Looked after children's numbers are rising across the Tees Valley;
- Timeliness of placing children for adoption has improved;
- Timeliness of achieving court authority to place, to a match has slightly increased;
- At the outset of ATV, there were 45 adopter families waiting to be matched, and "transferred in" to the new agency. By the end of quarter two, there were 19 waiting to be matched, with many of those waiting at the end of 2017/18 having been matched with children and progressing to placement;
- ATV has recruited a steady number of adopters, with 20 in Stage1 or Stage 2 of the assessment process at the end of September 2018;
- Similarly, the number of children waiting with an Agency Decision and Placement Order, has reduced, with many of those children having been matched;
- There continue to be a regular number of children for whom Agency Decisions and Placement Orders are being granted - the rates are comparable to the previous year, although looked after children numbers are rising;
- The numbers of children adopted is showing an increased rate in the year to date, in comparison to the previous three years;
- Foster For Adoption is being more widely used as a means of achieving early permanence for babies and infants. This is in keeping with national strategy, and best practice; and
- Across Tees Valley, there continues to be a high need for adopters for siblings, and for adopters for children in the older age range, of five years of age and above. Some children aged five and over also need to be placed alongside their sibling(s).

Staffing

Transfer and Staff Structure

Adoption staff from across the five Local Authorities (LA) were transferred into Adoption Tees Valley, with TUPE arrangements being in place.

The principle for establishing the staffing complement was that each LA would transfer to ATV the staff that had previously been deployed into

adoption work. For three of the five LAs (Middlesbrough; Redcar and Cleveland; Hartlepool) staff had worked solely on adoption, and transferred directly into ATV. In two of the LAs (Darlington and Stockton) staff had undertaken both adoption and fostering work, and therefore the full-time equivalent staffing resource was transferred, or to be recruited to.

The transfer of existing staff meant that a high degree of adoption expertise was brought into the new RAA including good case knowledge of children and adopters. For Darlington, only one staff member transferred and therefore some gaps occurred during the transitional phase, while new staff were allocated those children or families. The transferred staffing arrangements provided for a relatively high staffing establishment from the outset. In addition, at the start of the new service there were 2.6 full time equivalent (FTE) social worker vacancies; 1 adoption support vacancy; 1.5 business support vacancies and 0.5 Marketing and Recruitment Worker vacancy.

The Service Manager was appointed from outside of the previous Tees Valley adoption services and started in April 2018, with some support from an interim Service Manager during the transitional period.

The two team managers and two assistant team managers were recruited from within the Tees Valley LAs, with three officers having been promoted from previous positions.

Prior to going "live" the ATV Board supported a staffing structure change, allowing for the appointment of a full time Business Manager, as a direct exchange for 0.7 FTE social work resource. This post was recruited to, and a consequent reduction in social work posts available was made.

The staffing structure is appended to this report (Appendix 1).

1 x Service Manager	17 FTE Social Workers	1 x Business Manager
2 x Team Managers	1.5 Adoption Support Workers	3.1 x FTE Business Support Workers
2 x Assistant Team managers		0.5 x Marketing and Recruitment Worker

The implementation plan set out a generic staffing structure with all social workers undertaking work across the range of functions of adoption business. Following early team consultation, and review of effectiveness and efficiency, it was decided to scope out lead managers for the key functions as follows:

- Recruitment and Assessment;
- Family Finding; and
- Adoption Support.

Staff were consulted, and efforts made to allocate staff to key areas of interest, although some staff are allocated to teams and functions that were not their preferred first option, but where they have experience and expertise.

The new model is in transition, and is geared towards being a dynamic workforce model, enabling a focus on establishing consistent practice in core areas, but also allowing staff to undertake some work outside of their core function, for worker satisfaction, and operational flexibility, to meet demand as required.

Staff Supervision, Support and Involvement

From the outset of Adoption Tees Valley, we have set out to establish a culture of engagement, support and staff contribution to best practice in the new RAA.

There have been two team building events, one shortly before the go live date to allow staff to meet and get to know each other better. The second allowed for more contribution to service planning, and to the development of Adoption Tees Valley values, and vision. From this second event came the move to change the structure to more specialist teams.

Managers, social workers and business support staff have worked together on new practice models, based on prior experience within the five LAs.

Feedback- a team member said…

Pulling together a team from five LA's has to be acknowledged as working really well. My own experience has been one of a friendly work force with everyone willing to support each other. The opportunity to involve staff in new process planning has been welcomed, even though on top of a busy caseload it has been challenging to find the time".

All staff receive supervision from their named line manager, on a monthly basis.

There are fortnightly team meetings, which are well attended and staff contribute items to the agenda.

Staff have contributed to practice development, and there are some examples of excellent practice that have been taking place within one or two LA's now being delivered across Adoption Tees Valley.

For example...

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Chemistry Visits

Chemistry visits are opportunities for adopters to have a contact with children during the matching and selection process, before match is finalised at panel. The child is unaware of the prospective adopters' potential to be new parents, but a direct contact allows adopters to meet the child, usually under the guise of a friend of the foster carers and allows for a different "real" experience of the child to inform their decisions, but often serves to build the bonding process.

Adopters who have been matched with children through Adoption Tees Valley have consistently told us that these chemistry visits have been hugely important and helpful to them in building knowledge of the child, and helping prepare for parenting them.

This builds on the practice and experience in Middlesbrough Council, who were early pioneers of chemistry visits.

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Staff Training and Development

All social work staff are qualified and are HCPC registered.

Staff have undertaken a range of workshop sessions to help develop core skills for working together in Adoption Tees Valley, with a practice model designed for this agency. For example, Family Finding Workshop; Assessment Workshop.

Guest Speakers have been invited to do focussed "all staff" workshops- for example, Nikki Hill, psychologist at Aspire has undertaken a session with social workers on specialist assessments for therapeutic work funded by the Adoption Support Fund application.

All staff have received training in use of the Charms data base.

Additionally, workers have had the opportunity to elect to do training in specific areas, for example, Undertaking Sibling Assessments, through the Northern Regional Consortium.

Team Managers and Assistant Team Managers have attended events run by other RAAs, to consider developing national practice initiatives. For example, One Adoption West Yorkshire's "Early Permanence Planning" training.

The Service Manager is engaged with the national RAA Heads of Service leadership programme, focussed on leadership of change in adoption under regionalisation programmes.

All staff will have an appraisal and Personal Development Plan within the first year of operation of ATV.

Recruiting Adopters

At the outset of Adoption Tees Valley, 19 prospective adopters were in assessment. Not all 19 transferred into ATV Panel for consideration of suitability to adopt, as Panels continued within the LAs until July 2018; the first ATV Panel took place on the 01.08.2018. Some families were approved within the LAs between 01.04.2018 and 31.07.2018, and some continued with stage 1 and stage 2 assessments within ATV in this period.

Like all new RAAs there were some teething issues as new staff came together, with new system development, and in many cases new managers. The regionalisation programme is a major change initiative.

It quickly became apparent that it was necessary to establish a lead management role for recruitment and assessment and this has been implemented.

Marketing

During May to September there was not a dedicated marketing campaign, partly due to establishing the agency, and also the marketing officer did not join the agency until August 2018.

In October a recruitment campaign for new adopters was supported by additional marketing, largely via social media, and a small google campaign. The BBC took up press coverage during National Adoption week, and three separate interviews were done on BBC Radio Tees. Additional Information events were held within the LA areas, for prospective adopters.

This campaign has been outside of the first half year reported in this report, and will be more fully evaluated in the full Annual report.

<u>"Pipeline"- Prospective adopters in assessment</u>

May to September	
Enquiries to Adopt	34
Initial Visits to prospective adopters	21
Stage 1 starts	12
Stage 2 starts	2
Agency Decisions on suitability to adopt – Adopter Approvals	3

Adopter recruitment is a priority for ATV. It is imperative that we align our marketing efforts with the profile and numbers of children in the Tees Valley area requiring adoption, and with projected needs moving forward.

<u>Preparation for Adoption Groups</u>

There have been two Preparation for Adoption training groups held within the period of this report.

The groups were attended by nine prospective adopter families. This included nine couples and one single adopter.

Feedback has been positive from prospective adopters about the preparation group training.

Panel

A Panel Chair's Report has been co-produced by the two independent panel chairs, as required under Adoption NMS (2014) Standard 17.2.

As the Panel has only met for two months of the period under review, starting its business on 01.08.2018, the report is confined to this two month period of the panel's operation.

The report has been made available in full to Adoption Tees Valley managers and the team; to the ATV board; to the panel members, and wider stakeholders. For the purposes of this Half Year Report, a summary of the information is included here.

Panel runs each week, and is one half day, considering a maximum of three cases.

The panel is constituted under Adoption Agency Regulations (2005), and National Minimum Standard 17.

The ATV panel considers all adopter applications for approval within the Tees valley region, and the agency decision is made within ATV by the Service Manager.

The ATV panel considers all matches of children in Tees Valley Local Authority care with adopters, including adopters from outside of the Tees Valley region. The panel makes a recommendation on matches, and the agency decision is made by the Local Authority Agency Decision Maker.

Constituting Panel

ATV recruited two experienced Independent Chairs for the adoption panel: Jenny Parkin and Sue Holton, who are experienced senior managers within regional agencies, and have brought significant adoption expertise to the role.

Recruitment and selection took place to achieve a full Central List of suitable people to become panel members, and induction training was provided to all panel members. Recruitment took account of the demographics of potential panel members, and a mix of experience and skills has been brought into panel, including those with adoption experience; social work members; educational experience; therapeutic experience and qualified medical practitioners (Doctors). The majority of central list members have not been on a panel elsewhere, and therefore induction was particularly important to help them understand the role. Some who have been members elsewhere have had to adjust to a different way of the business being conducted, which is inevitable in any new panel.

Early into the panel process, the Service Manager observed panel, so that any differing styles and procedural points could be discussed, in order to maximise consistency and expectations.

The Panel chairs have identified that panel works best when there is a mix of membership. They have now also raised that there is a need to appoint two Vice Chairs, and this is planned as part of the agency and panel development.

Number of cases considered

Number of suitability to adopt considered	4	Recommended/Not recommended	3 recommended
		Deferred	1
		Unanimous/Not unanimous	All unanimous
Number of Adoption	6	Recommended/Not recommended	All 10 children

Matching cases considered	(includes 4 sibling groups of 2 children)		recommended
		Deferred	0
		Unanimous/Not unanimous	All unanimous
Number of Children's Adoption Plans Considered (Relinquished)	0	**Outcome: Recommended/Not recommended Deferred: Unanimous/Not unanimous**	n/a
Number of Adopter Reviews of Suitability	0	**Outcome: Recommended/Not recommended Deferred: Unanimous/Not unanimous**	n/a

It was noted that there have been two Foster For Adoption cases which have promoted better early permanence outcomes for the children.

From a starting point of no Panel, the agency has now established a strong, and robust panel, with clear processes, and membership reflective of the local communities, and with significant adopter representation, and adoption expertise.

Quality

A quality feedback mechanism has been introduced whereby panel members provide their feedback on the quality of reports presented to Panel.

Records document that there has been positive feedback in respect of many of the reports presented.

Regarding applications to adopt (Prospective Adopter Reports) some feedback was provided that better proof reading is required to correct minor errors, and on the presentation of the analysis of information.

Regarding matches, it was noted that Children's Permanence Reports (CPR) on occasion are out of date, and should be updated prior to matching panel. Also, some accuracy issues were noted.

The panel has set out with a secure electronic method of distributing panel papers. It is recognised that there have been some challenges associated with this, which are being addressed.

All feedback has been incorporated and taken on board by staff and managers in ATV.

Training is planned in early 2019 for children's social workers across Tees Valley, to assist with preparing the CPR.

Feedback has been received in a small number of cases from applicants and social workers attending. All have been positive about the experience of panel. The agency has noted that further mechanisms are required to make sure that all applicants/attendees are encouraged to give feedback.

<u>Timescales</u>

Of the three prospective adopter applications recommended for suitability, one was within six months of the acceptance of registration of interest.

Of the 10 children matched at panel, two were matched within the ALB scorecard timescale of four months from Placement Order to match.

All Agency Decisions on panel recommended matches and approval have been completed within timescales.

It is recognised that the transfer of all cases from the LAs to ATV has created some delay - a nationally recognised feature. This will be addressed now that panel, and approval processes are more embedded.

Panel training has been provided to all central list members, through a detailed induction training programme.

Additionally, the Medical Advisors have had separate induction training, to consider issues specific to their role.

Feedback from all members has been positive about the training provided.

Some themes and issues, as highlighted have been raised, for ATV and wider Children's Services development, to promote best practice for children.

Market Position Statement

Adoption Tees Valley will be seeking to set out a market position statement, to reflect the profile of needs within Tees Valley, including an analysis of Adoption Support needs for adopted children, their families, and birth families. The market position statement will inform the agency recruitment strategy; the ATV commissioning approach; and will enable a strategic approach to working in partnership with local Voluntary Adoption Agencies; multi-disciplinary partners; and neighbouring RAA's and LAs.

Through the Regional Adoption Leadership Board, ATV's internal analysis of current and recent historical needs, the numbers of children with an ADM and those placed for adoption, ATV is setting out to take a strategic

approach to recruiting adopters to meet the needs, and developing the "core" offer for adopters.

None Agency Adoptions

Adoption Tees Valley has responsibility for step parent adoptions.

The parents (one birth parent and one step parent) may apply directly to Court, or may apply to Adoption Tees Valley for an assessment, which will subsequently be presented to Court.

May to September	
Enquiries for step parent adoption	12
Initial Visits	5
Step Parent assessments underway	10

Referrals of Children and Family Finding

At the outset, ATV had 68 children transferred, at some stage during their adoption journey, who were not yet placed. In most cases children were able to remain with the Family Finding social worker who had been case worker in the LA.

A key focus for ATV in the early stages of the agency was to establish a clear mechanism for referrals of children from the LAs.

Early Notifications

An early notification system was designed and communications were rolled out across the five LAs to ensure that children's social workers knew how to make a referral for the child, at the earliest point when there was identified consideration of an adoption plan. The children referred may be in a twin track process, however, ATV has encouraged early notification in order to plan for needs, and numbers of children to be adopted.

Permanence Champions

It is considered essential to ensure close tracking and management of all children as they are referred to ATV, and to establish close and good working relationships with each of the five partner LAs.

A new role of Permanence Champion has been created, which is held by either an Assistant Team Manager, or one of the experienced Grade M Social Workers within the team.

Permanence Champions and Early Notifications

Managers and social workers in ATV wanted to maintain and build on their strong working relationship with all of the partner LAs and in particular children's social workers. Team members recognised the value of their working relationships with children's social workers prior to the RAA, and knew it was vital to continue to know about children at the earliest possible opportunity, to give the child the best chance of an adoptive family in good timescales. The development of Permanence Champions emerged from this thinking. The five Permanence Champions are allocated to each of the five LAs. Thus, each LA has a Permanence Champion who advises and supports children's social workers on permanence and adoption planning, including advice on life story work. Children's social workers can arrange to have a case discussion, or seek adoption advice. The Permanence Champions also receive the early notifications of children via secure referral, and ensure that the children are entered into the tracking system. They are then responsible for monitoring the progress of children's plans, and ensuring that ATV is notified when the ADM decision for adoption is made. Once this event takes place, the child is allocated to a formal Family Finder within ATV.

A Children's Services Manager in one Local Authority has said "My Managers are talking very positively about ATV and Kath (Permanence Champion) is very supportive".

New Early Notifications of Children to ATV 1.5.18-30.09.2018	58

Linking, Matching and Placing Children

Once a child has an ADM for an adoption plan, they are allocated a Family Finder. There is then a proactive approach to seeking families, internal to ATV pool of adopters, or an external search.

Children are referred to Adoption Match - the Adoption Register, at three months, if no family is found before that time.

ATV has also commissioned Link Maker, which is a national matching database. This is utilised to seek families for children, as well as undertaking court searches.

In the first six months of the year the following placements have been made

ATV children placed with ATV adopters	15	Non TV children placed with ATV adopters	6
ATV children placed with non ATV adopters	9		
Total ATV children placed	24	Total children placed with ATV adopters	21

A key aim of the RAA programme is to impact on timeliness of children waiting for adoption.

At this stage it is very early to review and evaluate the impact of the move to the RAA on the Adoption Scorecard timeliness (A1, A2 and A3) measures as there is a time lag in adoption work, and scorecard measures reflect adoption matches and placements that are for children who are now adopted, but for whom the adoption journey started some time ago.

A further aim of the RAA programme is to impact on the time that adopters wait for a match.

It is crucial that ATV works towards a best practice and efficient method for linking and matching children, which enables all available and waiting adopters to be considered for all children with a plan for adoption.

ALB Scorecard A11 reflects the numbers of adopters waiting. ATV has impacted on this figure, with 26 adopters having progressed to a match within the half year period considered.

A13 is the number of adopters in assessment, not yet approved. This has remained steady at 20, reflecting that while adopters are being matched, more are applying to adopt.

A12 is the percentage of adopters who waited at least three months for a match. This has been all adopters matched within the first half year. ATV will aim to make impact on this figure, moving forward. As the waiting pool of adopters is matched with children, there will be fewer who have had a lengthy wait, and the ambition is to recruit adopters who are able to consider

and meet the needs of the children who require an adoptive family in the Tees Valley area, thus providing families for children in this region.

Matching Events

Internal Matching Event

Following a practice model developed by Coram BAAF, and used successfully within Middlesbrough Adoption Team, a matching event was held in September 2018.
The principle behind the Matching Event is that adopters are invited and are able to consider children waiting in much greater detail.
Much like the Adoption Register, and Link Maker, it is designed to enable adopters to take a lead in considering which children they feel a connection with.
A lot of preparation work was done with children's social workers, foster carers, and ATV Family Finding social workers, to prepare profiles, small video clips and information about individual children waiting. A great deal of care was taken to balance confidentiality, while enabling adopters in Tees Valley to find out more about children waiting.

Through the contribution of foster carers, and the children's social workers, adopters waiting for a match were able to find out much more about a "real" little person- not just a short profile. Foster carers were extremely helpful in coming to the event, and were well equipped and prepared to talk about the children they care for.

At the event adopters were given a "slot" to avoid everyone turning up at once. Prospective adopters selected which children they wanted to find out more about, and were able to spend the time they needed to talk to social workers, foster carers and managers of the service.

In total 19 children were profiled at the event, and an initial 18 links were generated. In some cases more than one family expressed interest in finding out more about a particular child.

The resultant outcomes were that eight children have been matched with adopters directly as a result of this event.

If the agency had needed to go externally for adopters for these children,

this would have cost in excess of £202,000

This is considered to have been a very successful event, with some of the children linked having waited over 19 weeks, and one prospective adopter family having waited in excess of 21 months since approval.

It is planned to hold a region wide event where approved adopters from regional Local Authorities and VAA's will be invited to consider children waiting in Tees Valley.

One of our team said…

"It was fantastic to be able to tailor our own event, in our own premises, and have the ability and creativity to bring the children to life with the fantastic support of children's social workers, family finders and foster carers. From the event we created links for eight children, seven of whom had some complex matching considerations. Overall, it was a success and is definitely something that will continue to feature in the Adoption Tees Valley calendar, with the next one already planned for 7 February 2019"

One of our adopters said…

"I think it was a very positive event. The team were supportive, positive, and engaging and there was a very relaxed atmosphere. All the team were knowledgeable and had time to speak to me, and took time to sit down and discuss the children"

As part of the national programme of regionalisation, Adoption Tees Valley is working with the Department for Education and other RAAs to explore and develop practice in relation to matching children with adopters waiting.

ATV is currently working towards planning for more effective and targeted methods of considering adopters for all children with an adoption plan, and Placement Order.

With greater numbers of children, and adopters within the RAA, there is more opportunity for children to have options for a greater number of prospective adopters.

Early into the life of Adoption Tees Valley as a live operational agency, two siblings were matched with adopters from within the RAA cohort, but not within their original LA area.

The siblings were considered hard to place, due to some special factors including health needs. They had waited for over 22 months, despite being relatively young. The LA had searched nationally for adopters and were beginning to consider alternative permanent arrangements.

By working closely across the newly formed regional team in Adoption Tees Valley, an opportunity for a link was explored and developed. Social workers were able to talk to each other on a daily basis, and follow up on barriers and issues to be resolved. Prospective adopters were identified, and they also worked closely with social workers around plans for the children, and how they would meet needs. Linking activity included a chemistry visit, which allowed the adopters to get to see the children.

The outcome was that the children were matched with adopters within the region, and have now moved in. They are doing amazingly well, and have been given the opportunity for the security and stability of a permanent family, through adoption.

Profile of Children with an Adoption Plan

The rate of Agency Decisions for an adoption plan (ADM) and Placement Orders, which are key performance indicators for numbers of children requiring adoption have remained steady within this half year, with around 42 new ADMs and 30 Placement Orders granted.

Numbers of children adopted has increased in the first half year. There has been an average of 65 adoptions per year over the last three years, and 47 in this half year to date.

The numbers of early notifications is indicative that there is a "bulge" in the numbers of children coming through, which would also reflect an increase in looked after numbers.

The Tees Valley region has a high and rising number of sibling groups who require adoptive families, with a plan to place the children together. There are 35 sibling groups waiting to be placed, and 74 children who make up this cohort.

The data on children aged five years and over is not reflective of ATV current work, as this is measured in respect of children who have been adopted within the period. Currently, there are three children aged five and over who have a Placement Order, and are not yet placed.

The region has fewer children of black / minority ethnic (BME) status than many other areas of the UK. However, there is a small but rising number of children with dual heritage, and of BME heritage who require adoption.

Adoption Tees Valley is working closely with regional Local Authorities, through the Regional Adoption Leadership Board (RALB) to develop a regional profile of children waiting for adoption, and this data set is probing deeper into the health needs, and levels of developmental delay and/or uncertainty for children with an adoption plan.

The agency has started to gather more detailed information regarding children with developmental delay, and health needs, to form a better picture of the needs of children, and to establish a Market Position Statement.

This will inform the Recruitment Strategy and Commissioning priorities moving forward.

Life Story Books

Adoption Tees Valley is responsible for the completion of life story books as part of the adoption preparation and support work, and as required under Adoption Regulations.

Staffing capacity at the outset has led to some delay in progressing this work for all children, as required by the second adoption review, and prior to the Adoption Order being granted.

Work is underway with individual LAs to agree responsibility for life story books for those children transferred into ATV.

The agency is now progressing skills/workforce development for the new adoption support worker, to enable the 1.5 adoption support workers to manage and progress this work.

Early evaluation of time commitment and volume would suggest that additional resource will be required to undertake this work in the timescales required. This will be addressed as part of the service business planning moving forward.

Adoption Support

Demand for adoption support has been an area of significant increase from that evident prior to ATV going live, although clear information from which to benchmark is not available.

On 01.05.2018 there were 91 cases requesting post adoption support transferred into the agency.

This was a significant number, and was a challenge in terms of allocation of staff resources to manage and assess. Anecdotal feedback is that cases may have been held in "waiting" until the new RAA went live, and this explains a higher than predicted demand for post adoption support.

Allocations

Managers sought to allocate within the generic team structure cases where post adoption support had been requested. This area of work was one which contributed to a recognition that specific teams would be more effective and the new team structure was developed, with three full time equivalent workers being identified for post adoption support work, although this is being tasked to six social workers, each of whom will spend 50 % of their time on post adoption work.

A lead Team Manager has also been identified for Adoption Support work.

It was evident that additional resource was required to manage and respond to families and children who were in need of support, including access to therapeutic support funded by the Adoption Support Fund.

In order to respond to need, ATV negotiated with After Adoption to utilise some of the contractual hours of the contract (see below) to undertake initial contacts and assessments. This was hugely beneficial, and enabled more work to be allocated to experienced adoption support workers.

An additional temporary social worker has also been employed, again to assist largely with managing the post adoption support assessments, and need.

<u>Adoption Support Fund (ASF)</u>

The Adoption Support Fund is available to fund therapeutic services and work with adopted children and their families. Prior to ATV going live, each of the local authorities had named "ASSA's and Administrators"- those responsible for assessing and applying for funds.

Work has been undertaken in partnership with the LA's and Mott McDonald (who administer the fund on behalf of the government) to transfer all responsibilities for applications to ATV, including management of invoices and payments to providers of the therapeutic work.

Stockton Borough Council, as host LA for Adoption Tees Valley, work closely with the managers in ATV to ensure that applications and income are managed, for the benefit of children, families and providers.

Number of successful applications to ASF , in this period	35
Value of successful applications, delivering therapeutic services to children	£111,173
Number of unsuccessful applications	1

<u>Planning for Therapeutic Adoption Support services</u>

Currently, there is no preferred provider list for therapeutic providers, which are largely funded by the ASF.

ATV has already begun planning for procurement to achieve a preferred provider list, which will be put out to tender in the New Year.

The intended outcomes are to have all providers of therapeutic services assessed and evaluated against quality, performance and delivery criteria, and from this list providers will be selected to provide services, which may include family choice where appropriate and required.

<u>Commissioned Services</u>

Prior to the implementation of Adoption Tees Valley three contracts were in place for independent adoption support services, with Local Authorities either collectively or individually within the region.

These contracts covered delivery of independent birth parent support; post adoption support and post box management.

The contracts were novated to Adoption Tees Valley and were extended to 31.03.2019, through a legal extension process.

Work is currently underway to review need and strategic commissioning priorities, to ensure that ATV is well supported to provide all services as set out in the Statement of Purpose, and meets its aims and regulatory duties for provision of adoption support.

Post Box

Adoption Tees Valley is responsible for the management of all post box (letter box) arrangements for children adopted through the partner LAs.

The volume of this work is significant and it is a considerable project to ensure that all prior arrangements are set up within the ATV system.

ATV has managed around 300 post box transactions in the first six months. No benchmark data is available with which to compare previous delivery against current cases.

There are in excess of 1300 post box contracts within ATV and there is currently work underway to transfer all contracts into the ATV Charms data base.

ATV has allocated social workers to be available once per month in each of the LA Children's Services settings, to be available to birth parents, to assist with letter writing, or resolving an issue around indirect contact.

Independent Birth Parent Support/ Support to Contact

ATV has responsibility for delivering independent support to birth parents, and this is managed largely through independently commissioned services, currently delivered by After Adoption and DFW Adoption*.

ATV meet with the providers of these contracted services, to review the work undertaken, and whether there are further actions which can be taken to achieve best value for service users, and for the Councils. Through contract reviews, After Adoption agreed to undertake additional work in respect of post adoption support, to assist ATV with meeting needs and fully utilising the contractual costs.

ATV have also negotiated with After Adoption to extend the access to the service to Middlesbrough BC, which did not have a contractual arrangement in place.

*DFW Adoption is to become a merged charity between DFW Adoption and Adoption Matters.

Post adoption social workers and the post adoption support workers in ATV also manage on a case by case basis some contact arrangements for adopted children with siblings, or with birth parents.

Post Adoption Support Groups

ATV has delivered two post adoption support groups in the first half year.

These have provided support to adopters to gain more peer support and insight into available therapeutic theories and frameworks, to assist with attachment focussed parenting development. One group sought views of adopters as to what they needed, and one focussed on PACE model- Playfulness; Curiosity: Acceptance: Empathy.

Feedback from the groups has been positive, and the plan is to develop and deliver more.

Adoption Support- Future Planning

Adoption Tees Valley is planning towards a three Tiered Approach to Adoption Support, which will include children pre-adoption order, where required.

We know many of the children have a need for therapeutic support, once the move to their permanent family has taken place, and we want to ensure that there is timely access to the right level of support, at the right time, for all children and families.

Tier 1	Engagement Events; Groups; General Support; Open Door
Tier 2	Themed Workshops and Training Events; Mentoring and Buddying
Tier 3	Assessment for post adoption needs; Application to ASF; Case allocation; Multi Agency working

We do not know how long the Government will continue to fund the ASF. It is currently due to be funded until 2020. However, we will build on the access, assessment and procurement mechanisms to ensure that while this funding is available, it is utilised as fully as possible for the benefit of children and adoptive families.

Quality Assurance

National Minimum Standard 25.

Much of the work of the agency in the first six months has been to set up the RAA and move from a planning phase to an implementation phase of the plans outlined in the final business case.

The following mechanisms have been implemented for managing and monitoring the work of the agency, and the quality of work.

- Tracking systems to enable regular monitoring of children and adopter journey's; timeliness, and outcomes.
- A performance, assurance and challenge meeting (PAC) has been held with the senior adoption lead for each LA, after the first six month data has been generated. All children for each LA have been tracked and monitored, and agreement about direction, or decisions signposted where applicable.
- Monthly management meetings are focussing on the key performance information required, and how this will be generated from Charms, and/or other sources.
- A balanced scorecard has been generated quarterly detailing key performance data, user feedback/satisfaction measures; complaints/compliments; finance. This has been presented to the Board, which has a role in questioning, challenge and being satisfied of the effectiveness of the service.
- The Adoption Panel now operates a quality monitoring mechanism for assessments/matches presented, which is monitored by the Panel Advisors and Chairs, for improvement.
- The Adoption Panel Chairs provide a report bi-annually to the Service Manager, which will be presented to the Board; Panel; and to the team, for learning and improvement where required. The first six month report has been produced and is commented on within this Bi- Annual Service report.
- Staff performance is monitored via supervision, which is monthly for all staff.
- A new case practice audit tool has been developed, although not implemented within the first half year. This will be implemented in the second half of the year, as an audit, assurance, and learning mechanism.
- Staff will have an annual appraisal, and Personal Development Planning will be aligned to appraisal and review.
- All Central List members and Panel Chairs will have an annual appraisal.

- Team meetings take place fortnightly, and are used to convey policy and practice information, involve staff in developments and any quality improvements that are required.
- An adopter focus group took place in September, in which the managers of the service sought to gather views about what is important to adopters. Key issues for this group were involvement of adopters and the adopter voice; life story book completion; practice around how children are placed, and what it feels like for adopters and children ensuring longer term support, including for male adopters.
- Service user feedback will be sought on an annual basis via a Consultation Survey. This applies to adopted children and adopters. User feedback will be used to inform improvements, or consolidate areas of good practice. A survey has been prepared and is ready to go out to adopters.
- The Service Manager, and Team Manager, post adoption support, have reviewed and monitored work undertaken by external agencies for post adoption support, to ensure that work supports outcomes and delivers best value.

Procedures

The work of the management team, and team has been to build on good practice from the partner LAs, and to harmonise adoption practice across the region. Learning from neighbouring and national RAA development, it has been a deliberate decision to engage with staff and wider partners in the development of new practice, and change as ATV has become embedded as the new RAA.

A deliberate decision has been taken to hold on policy and procedure setting, while the change process has been underway.

The agency has now entered into a contract with Tri X- a national policy provider company, used by many LA Children's Services, and a draft policy framework has been supplied.

Work is now underway to establish the ATV policy and procedure, to reflect national regulations, and standards, which will be published through Tri X in early 2019.

Complaints/ Early Resolution

ATV received two pieces of feedback that service users were dissatisfied in the reporting period.

Both were resolved to the satisfaction of the service users within three days, and avoided a formal complaint.

Governance

Adoption Tees Valley has a Management Board, chaired by the Director of Children's Services at Hartlepool Borough Council, Sally Robinson. The Board comprises of all five Directors of Children's Services, and one Non-Executive Director, there is currently a further non Executive Director vacancy.

The Management Board has met monthly during this reporting period and receives an update by the Service Manager about the progress of the service, any issues requiring Board resolution, and about emerging adoption matters nationally and locally.

The Board receives a financial update quarterly, and a balanced scorecard quarterly, detailing key ALB scorecard and performance information.

A partnership collaborative group between ATV and the Senior Adoption Lead Managers for the five Local Authorities meets monthly, to progress practice and implementation of the new agency.

Summary and Plans for the next 12 months

The first half year has been an exciting period for those involved in adoption work across the Tees Valley. There has been a huge commitment, not only from the staff who have moved across into the new Regional Adoption Agency, but also from children's services leaders within the Tees Valley region, the councils, senior staff and social workers. Also, wider stakeholders, including multi agency partners, VAA's, and adopters and foster carers.

The new agency is now set up, and effectively doing what it is there for, which is to find families for the children with an adoption plan in the Tees Valley region. We have also placed a number of children from other Local Authority areas with adopters in the Tees Valley region, and are working with the national agenda of reducing delay for children who require adoption.

Most people reflect that the RAA is a success, when considering the numbers of children who have achieved a match within this first six month period. At the end of the first six months, the numbers of adopters waiting had dramatically reduced, and this is due largely to the success of matching children with those adopters. It is early days in terms of the lag effect to really know whether the timeliness for children has improved, as children adopted within this half year were mostly matched and placed prior to the RAA.

A summary of what is working well includes:

- The physical building is a great space for ATV, and has been widely used by team and by wider LA stakeholders;

- The team is co-located in this building and has unified as new team, which enables the service to be more effective;
- Engagement events have been positive, and well attended, with many adopters feeding back that they are pleased to be involved to a greater degree in the agency. Lots of children have already started to get to know the building and team, and each other;
- Early notifications to ATV of any child who may have an adoption plan;
- Permanence Champions provide close links with LAs;
- The Adoption Panel now implemented, and well chaired by two experienced chairs, and a strong central list;
- Matching within the available pool of adopters successful;
- A successful internal matching event, well supported by LA foster carers and social workers;
- Some children who have waited for some time are matched, and are now living with their new families;
- The first six months is indicative of reduced comparative costs in interagency fees;
- Good cross agency working, with all LAs committing to involvement and development; and
- Collaborative working with LA's tracking individual children's plans.

Plans for the next 12 months

- Development of Market Position Statement, and a Recruitment Strategy, to target recruitment of adopters to the needs of children waiting, and coming through the system;
- A recruitment campaign in January 2019;
- Clear targeted approach to family finding, which will include greater collaborative and strategic work within the NE region, and through the Regional Adoption Leadership Board;
- Development of Adopter Partnership Forum, to enable adopter influence in service development;
- A clear development of post adoption support services, through a tiered intervention model;
- Commissioning for therapeutic providers list, and for post adoption support services;
- Complete the transfer of post box, and contracts into Charms system;
- Collaborate with wider multi-disciplinary services within Tees Valley, for better support and outcomes to adopted children and their families;
- Start a Young People's group, to influence service design, and enable young people to access the right services; and
- Progress allocation of life story work, and a model of social worker contribution to the child's life story.

Appendix 1 - Staffing Structure

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │ Adoption Tees Valley     │
                    │ Service Manager          │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
                                 │
      ┌──────────────────────────┼──────────────────────────┐
      │                          │                          │
┌───────────────┐      ┌───────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Team Manager  │      │ Business Support      │   │ Recruitment and         │
│   x2          │      │ Manager               │   │ Marketing Officer       │
│               │      │                       │   │                         │
│               │      │                       │   │ (18.5 hours)            │
└───────────────┘      └───────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────────┘
      │                          │
┌───────────────────┐  ┌────────────────────────────┐
│ Assistant Team    │  │ Senior Business Support    │
│ Manager x 2       │  │ Officer                    │
│                   │  │                            │
└───────────────────┘  └────────────────────────────┘
      │                          │
┌───────────────────┐  ┌────────────────────────────┐
│ Social Worker     │  │ Business Support Officer x2 │
│ x 17              │  │                            │
└───────────────────┘  └────────────────────────────┘
      │
┌───────────────────┐
│ Support Worker    │
│   x 1.5           │
└───────────────────┘
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