

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

16 JULY 2020

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Children and Young People - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Lisa Evans

ADOPTION TEES VALLEY

SUMMARY

This report provides the latest in a set of bi-annual reports on the of Adoption Tees Valley (ATV), the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) established on 1 May 2018. It details the work of ATV in 2019/20 story so far, initial performance information and plans for improvement. A similar report will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board on 7 August 2020.

REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT

To fulfil the requirement to update on progress of the regional adoption agency in line with the requirements of regulations

DETAIL

1. Adoption Tees Valley began operating as a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), as defined in the Education and Adoption Act (2016) on 1 May 2018.
2. It brings together the former Local Authority adoption services of Darlington; Hartlepool; Middlesbrough; Redcar and Cleveland; and Stockton.
3. This report as the second bi-annual report for 2019/20 covers the 6 month period to March 2020, and also provides an overview of the year.
4. The provisional data shows a reduction in timescales for children from entering care to moving in with adopters. A small number of children continue to have extended timescales, sometimes for reasons associated with Court decision making, and care planning for further siblings.
5. The information on timescales from Placement Order to a match have remained the same over the last year. There is variation in the timescales for children, and while many children are achieving timely matching, some children wait longer.

6. The service has made significant improvements in recruitment, which has contributed to availability of adopters for the children referred.
7. The number of children who have been referred for an adoption placement remains high creating demand for placements. The number of children placed for adoption within the year has been the highest over recent years which has meant that although recruitment has been stepped up, there has been a rise in the number of placements with VAAs, and other RAAs over this last year.
8. In terms of adopters, assessment timescales are improving, and once approved there has been a small reduction in the numbers of prospective adopters who wait more than 3 months before they are matched.
9. Recruitment of adopters has gone well, with a significant improvement on the previous year. 50 adoptive families have been approved.
10. The staff team has remained stable, while some new social workers, temporary business partners and support workers have joined the team. Team working is collegiate, and supportive, bringing a positive culture to the agency.
11. Adoption support has been offered to many more families, across a greater range of tier 1, 2 and 3 services.
12. The adopter voice has become more embedded and the Partnership Forum has begun to take shape.
13. The children's group has started up, with the first cohort getting benefits from this group experience.
14. There are also some key challenges:
 - a. There continue to be more children requiring families than adopters who are available, and so recruitment of adopters is a key priority.
 - b. There remain some challenges to achieve timely referrals, and provision of information for family finding.
 - c. Timescales for placement remain a challenge for some children.
 - d. Volume of Life Story work has continued to challenge the service.
 - e. Services for non-agency adoptions compete with resources for children in our care who require permanence through adoption. The service has had to create a waiting list for step parents, and this can be lengthy.
15. The overall picture is that the new organisation continues to work well, and has led to improvements in process, timescales and experience for adopters and for children placed for adoption.
16. Further details are included in the attached report.

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