

Annual Report 2019-2020



Transform a child's life...

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Glossary

ADM- agency decision maker

PO- Placement order

RAA- Regional Adoption Agency

VAA- Voluntary Adoption Agency

1. Introduction

Adoption Tees Valley has now been running as an operational Regional Adoption Agency for almost 2 years.

This is the second full Annual Report, for the reporting period of 1.4.19-31.3.20, a year where there has been more embedding of the practice, procedures, and systems for delivery of the adoption service to the Tees Valley Local Authorities.

One of the biggest achievements is to have expanded the adopter voice into the RAA over this past year. As we continue to develop adoption in Tees Valley, and bring in new ideas for new ways of working, it's really important to listen to the views of adopters, and those who use the service, to improve their lives.

We have been really pleased to expand the Adopter Partnership Forum, which is now a monthly meeting between the Agency and adopters.

The Directors have now also welcomed 2 newly recruited non-executive directors to the Board, who are adoptive parents, and who will share decision making and setting the strategic direction of the RAA.

Pete, one of the new non-executive directors:

I was overjoyed to become a non-executive director earlier in the year: I know how hard everybody works at ATV and how passionate they are about what they do and why they do it, so to be able to contribute towards this is a huge honour and privilege.

It has also been great to be involved in the Adopter Forum meetings. As a result of the forum meetings we have brought about an improved communications strategy to ensure as many adoptive families as possible are aware of the vast support available through ATV (from ASF and therapeutic support to parties and support network meetings), we have contributed towards the planning of a 'youth group' for adopted children, we have contributed towards plans for reaching a wider sector of the community (including the BAME community) and we have been able to use the wide and varied experiences of attendees to ensure fair and balanced discussion of all topics in the eyes of existing adopters, where they not only speak for themselves but also the children in their care.

Alongside Pippa, I feel we have already started to make worthwhile contributions in terms of the adopters' voice shaping how things move forward, particularly during

current circumstances as to how support can be provided to all families, and I look forward to continuing to work closely with ATV in the future.

The Service and its key stakeholders can now begin to consider whether the RAA is delivering on the ambitions of the regionalisation of adoption programme, and work in a more informed way where challenges remain, to support improvement.

Is there evidence that children are achieving permanence through adoption more quickly? Are more children who cannot return to birth family finding permanence through adoption?

Within this year, the service has focussed on improving timescales, and progressing early permanence for children, where this is appropriate for their plan.

The provisional data shows a reduction in timescales for children from entering care to moving in with adopters. Encouragingly, those LA's where timescales were the highest have shown improvement. A small number of children continue to have extended timescales, sometimes for reasons associated with Court decision making, and care planning for further siblings. Where it is identified that there is delay ATV and the LA seek to work together in a collective, but robust way, to address causes of delay, and progress planning for children.

The information on timescales from Placement Order to 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.

In ATV further analysis is being undertaken to understand the profile of those children who have waited longest, and those for whom the plan has changed from adoption to permanence via long term fostering. This will help focus the recruitment strategy in a more targeted way. It will also help think more about the therapeutic needs of children prior to seeking an adoptive family, and what we may need to think about collectively, to help prepare children and adopters, where emotional needs are more significant, and create vulnerability. We already know that we have a high demand for adoptive families for siblings, and we regularly promote this in external marketing.

Early permanence has been promoted and developed more fully across the RAA footprint this year, and we have seen a total of 16 children have an EP placement within the year, at some stage. Within the previous year, 7 children had an EP placement.

The benefits of early permanence for children are that the child has the opportunity for earlier attachment to their permanent parent/caregiver, and reduced moves between carers at this crucial early stage of life.

Through ATV, more prospective adopters are being introduced to the notion of early permanence, and are considering this within their assessment, supported by feedback from adopters who have taken this route.

Adopters who offer fostering for adoption/EP are being helped to support contact arrangements and a number of them have met with the child's birth parent(s) and been able to work together with them in care planning. The indicators are that this will provide better long term outcomes for children, with a greater sense of their identity held within the adoptive family as they grow up.

We have increased the numbers of children who have had early permanence placements, but we know we need to do more, together. Regional training has been planned, but was postponed due to the recent pandemic.

The service has made significant improvements in recruitment, which has contributed to availability of adopters for the children referred. Additionally, there has been strategic work with regional Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) to encourage them to contribute to sufficiency within this region, and a greater number of children have been placed with regional VAA's, either within the North East region, or within a neighbouring region.

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 VAA's, and other RAA's over this last year.

What about adopters? Are those wishing to adopt children achieving their ambitions in a more timely way?

The evidence would suggest that ATV is making impact on the journey of those wishing to adopt. 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. Exploration into the 4th month beyond approval shows that around half of all approved adopters are matched by this point.

Most adopters are being linked and matched with a child, or children quickly following approval.

Almost all ATV adopters are taking children from the Tees Valley region, which we celebrate. This means children remain within the region of their birth identity, and often important links with siblings are more easily maintained.

Are adoptive families receiving timely and high quality adoption support?

In the first ATV Bi-annual report, the vision for adoption support was set out:

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.

The service has placed considerable focus on the adoption support offer to adopters and children, within the service, and for those who have adopted prior to ATV setting up. The service is responsible for provision of adoption support to adopters who may have moved into the area, or who have adopted a children from a local Authority outside of the area, and are now 3 years post adoption.

ATV now offers a post adoption support offer to each family for one year following the granting of an adoption order. This is with the aim of maintaining and building on the relationship with the assessing worker, to help families to engage in a longer term way with the service, and with the Tier One and Tier Two support services. Our long term goal is to reduce the levels of need for higher Tier services in the longer term, through earlier lower level support to children and families.

This year has seen the recruitment of an Adoption Education Support Worker, funded collectively by the 5 Local Authority Virtual Schools, and ATV is now able to offer education support, guidance and advice where required for children.

Additionally, the service has started a Children's group, for adopted children, to be alongside other adopted children, and build a sense of identity and belongingness with other children with adoption in common.

Where families require an adoption support assessment, there is a wait for this. The service has reviewed the way in which more timely support can be offered, and a new "triage" approach is planned.

2. Covid 19

The coronavirus pandemic started in March 2020, and has continued to impact on adoption in Tees Valley into this reporting year, 2020-21.

Although this would fall into the next reporting period, the response to Covid is relevant to report within this period, for scrutiny and assurance about the service being delivered to children, prospective adopters and birth families.

The pandemic led to a quick response, and the building was closed, with workers moving to home based working very quickly. Stockton Borough Council is the host Council for the RAA, and operationally the service has been aligned with SBC procedures for managing risk.

The service is closely connected with the national RAA Heads group, and practice, guidance and changed procedures have been undertaken in line with national review and evaluation, and local consultation.

The Government issued amended regulations for adoption, under the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations, 2020.

- ATV has not removed the requirement for an adoption panel, which would be permitted under the amended regulations. ATV has continued to hold a weekly adoption panel, via video conferencing, chaired by an independent Chair. The local guidance has permitted reduction to 3 panel members if required, however, almost all panels have been attended by at least 5 panel members.
- ATV has used the flexibility permitted under amended regulations, to allow prospective adopters to enter stage 2 of the assessment process, without the medical or DBS being returned, in stage 1. Each case is considered by the Recruitment Manager, for decision making.
- No adopter has been approved without all checks, references and medicals including DBS, being returned and satisfactory, unless permitted under existing regulations governing fast track assessments.

Further, the RAA has worked together with Medical Advisors, and the 5 Local Authorities, to ensure that appropriate care is taken to fully understand children's needs, and prepare adoptive parents for children coming to live with them.

The adoption work has continued throughout "lockdown".

Recruitment and assessment of adopters has continued, using video conferencing, including for preparation training, and all assessment work. No adopters will be approved without at least one home visit by the assessor, to the adopters and all members of the household.

- Adopter approvals have continued.

- Children have continued to be referred, and matched with adopters.
- During the early stages of lockdown, no children were moved on to their new families. Careful risk management is now being used to plan for, and move children on to their new families, with whom they are matched, where it is safe and right to progress that plan.
- ATV has applied for Government funding, under the Covid 19 additional adoption support fund, and has commissioned additional support for adoptive parents via the Adopter Hub; psychological support; access to NVR support.

3. What has gone well, and what are the key challenges?

- ✚ 91 children have stated their permanent family life with their new adoptive parents.
- ✚ 69 families have been created, offering children and adopters the opportunity for the rewards of family life.
- ✚ 3 sets of sibling groups of 3 have been placed. A further 16 sets of 2 siblings have been placed, enabling children to grow up with direct birth relatives.
- ✚ There has been some excellent examples of working together between ATV and the partner Local Authorities. See case study 1.
- ✚ Recruitment of adopters has gone well, with a significant improvement on the previous year. 50 adoptive families have been approved.
- ✚ ATV has worked together with the national Steering Group, to plan for a wider national approach to raising awareness about adoption, and the need for more families.
- ✚ 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.
- ✚ Adoption support has been offered to many more families, across a greater range of tier 1, 2 and 3 services.
- ✚ The adopter voice has become more embedded and the Partnership Forum has begun to take shape.
- ✚ The children's group has started up, with the first cohort getting benefits from this group experience.

- ✚ The Virtual School heads have worked collectively with ATV to co-fund the Education Support Worker post, which is having impact and benefit in children's lives.
- ✚ The whole of the adoption support service has been enhanced, with funding from ASF. Therapeutic parenting training is now regularly delivered via different providers and models.
- ✚ More families are benefitting from direct therapy provision, through the access to the ATV Provider framework, and ASF funding.

Key challenges

- ✚ There continue to be more children requiring families than adopters who are available, although nationally the gap is beginning to close.
- ✚ Sufficiency of adopters recruited through ATV is a key priority, in order to maximise financial resources, and enable children to be placed with adopters who the RAA supports, locally.
- ✚ The volume of work has been a challenge in this year, taking account of expansion in all areas.
- ✚ While in the main there is improvement to working closely together with all 5 Local Authorities, there remain some challenges to achieve timely referrals, and provision of information for family finding.
- ✚ Timescales for placement remain a challenge for some children. We need to have a shared and deeper understanding about the cause of this.
- ✚ Volume of Life Story work has continued to challenge the service.
- ✚ 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.

Case Study 1: Working together – Hartlepool Borough Council and ATV- the experiences of 2 social workers

Hartlepool social worker says:

I feel that Hartlepool Borough Council and Adoption Tees Valley work in partnership with one another and this has a direct impact upon achieving early permanence for those children who have a plan of adoption and are waiting to be matched with their forever family. In respect of baby A, I submitted an Early Notification Form to Kath, the Permanence Champion, one month prior to A's birth. At this early stage I was mindful that further assessment with parents and wider family members was required however felt it was important to ensure that Adoption Tees Valley were fully aware of A to ensure that

family finding could commence without delay, should this be the final decision made by the Family Court. Myself and Kath met after I had submitted the Early Notification and Kath also visited A in the foster placement. I feel that this helps ATV to get a real sense of the child and assists greatly when exploring potential families who would be an excellent match.

Care proceedings concluded for A with a Placement Order granted. Kath was fully aware of all court dates and I liaised with her to inform her that final orders had been made. Kath forwarded me two family profiles and I received the PAR for a couple I felt would be the better match for A. An initial visit was completed by myself and Kath to meet the prospective adopters and their Social Worker. I felt the open communication between HBC and ATV hugely contributed to how quickly things progressed from final orders being made. Following matching, permanence was achieved for A without delay throughout the process from the Early Notification Form, to being placed with the forever family.

For A and prospective adopters this means that they are able to see milestones such as baby learning to crawl, weaning, taking the first steps and celebrating the first birthday. A has managed the transition into the adoptive placement without issue and I feel this has been helped massively by placement at a young age and how well the plan of introductions were facilitated by all involved.

Kath says:

My role as Early Permanence Champion for Hartlepool is to liaise with social workers to ensure that referrals for children with possible plans for adoption are received as soon as possible so that early internal family finding can commence without any delay. When a referral is received, it is my role to arrange an adoption process meeting with the social worker so that all relevant information about the child is received and court dates are shared so that I am able to monitor the case to ensure that there is no delay should a Placement Order be granted. I remain involved with the case up until a Placement Order is granted and the case is then transferred to a Family Finder.

4. 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 ASGLB scorecard indicators.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Population of children aged 0-17 Tees Valley	144,531	144,996	144, 996	145,691	146,120
Looked After Children (end of period) Numbers Tees Valley	1,370	1,585	1,717	1,862	2151
Adoptions Tees Valley	65	60	70	83	61

At 31.03.19		At 31.3.20	
Average time in days for child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family during year, Tees Valley ASGLB scorecard A1	446	Average time in days for child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family during year, Tees Valley Govt threshold is 426 days Current national average: 486 days	432
Average time between Placement Order and a match, across Tees Valley ASGLB scorecard A2	210	Average time between Placement Order and a match, across Tees Valley Govt. threshold : 121 days Current national average: 178 days	210
Number of approved adopter families waiting to be matched ASGLB scorecard A11	7	Number of adopter families waiting to be matched	22
Percentage of adopted families matched to a child who waited at least 3 months from approval to match ASGLB scorecard A12	75%	Percentage of adopted families matched to a child who waited at least 3 months from approval to match	71%
Number of adopters in assessment ASGLB scorecard A13	28	Number of adopters in assessment	35
Number of children looked after with a plan for adoption, not yet placed ASGLB scorecard A9	92	Number of children with a plan for adoption, not yet matched	76

Number of children with a plan for adoption and Placement Order, not yet placed ASGLB scorecard A14	53	Number of children with a plan for adoption and Placement Order, not yet placed	56
Number of children in a Foster For Adoption placement (on the 31 st March) ASGLB scorecard A17	5	Number of children in a Foster For Adoption placement, on the 31.3.20	3
Number of children from ethnic minority backgrounds adopted from care in the year ASGLB scorecard A6	5	Number of children from ethnic minority backgrounds adopted from care in the year	5
Number of children aged 5+ adopted from care in the year ASGLB scorecard A7	12	Number of children aged 5+ adopted from care in the year	2
Number of sibling groups waiting to be adopted	32	Number of sibling groups waiting to be adopted	30
Number of children in sibling groups waiting to be adopted, or placed, together	68	Number of children in sibling groups waiting to be adopted, or placed, together	68
New Agency decisions that a child should be adopted within the year ASGLB Scorecard A15	106	New Agency decisions that a child should be adopted within the year to date	82
Number new Placement Order granted within year ASGLB scorecard A16	74	Number new Placement Order granted within year to date	67
Number of children for whom permanence decision has changed away from adoption ASGLB scorecard A5	35	Number of children for whom permanence decision has changed away from adoption	19

*Data is provisional and will be verified in August 2020

Analysis of performance information within ATV:

- Adoptions from care have reduced from the previous year. Due to the time lag for adoption, this is reflective of the start-up year for the RAA, when it took time to establish procedures, and referral mechanisms, both within ATV, and between the Local Authorities and ATV. The data

in section 9 shows that placement activity has been higher this year, and so the dip in adoption orders granted during 2019-20 is not reflective of a general trend downwards in adoption activity in the region. In 2018-19 an additional 14 children were placed with ATV adopters from outside of the region.

- Average time for a child from entering care to moving in with their adoptive family (A1) has reduced this year. There is a significant range between Local Authorities, and in some LA's a very small number of children with delay in being placed for adoption can impact on the overall average.
- Average time between Placement Order to Match (A2) has remained the same, but the same principle exists that a small number of children can impact on overall figures.
- The number of adopters waiting, not yet matched at the year's end has increased to 22, from 7 last year. This is reflective of more adopters being approved, and moving through the process of approval, and matching. Although approved adopters were not yet formally matched, on the date of 31.3.20, in practice there are very few who are not linked quickly following the approval panel, and ADM. Section 5 shows that ATV has recruited and approved 50 adoptive families this year, and although this is positive, demand for placements exceeds this number, and prospective adopters are usually linked following approval.
- The percentage of adoptive families who wait at least 3 months from approval to match is 71 %, highlighting that many adopters are matched quickly following approval.
- The numbers of adopters in assessment has increased.
- The number of children with a plan for adoption, not yet placed has reduced, and with a Placement order, not yet placed, has slightly increased, from 53 to 56. Further exploration of these figures is undertaken regularly, to understand how many children are waiting, with no link being pursued with a specific family. In reality these numbers are very low, and are often less than 3 in a given Local Authority. Children are still considered to be waiting, not matched, until the matching panel considers their case and the Agency Decision Maker confirms the decision.
- The numbers of children in a fostering for adoption placement on the 31.3.20 was 3. Throughout the year, there have been a total of 16 children in EP placements at some point.
- The number of children with a revocation of their adoption plan has reduced this year, from 35 to 19.

For ATV, there are clear challenges to ensure that children referred are enabled to be matched with a suitable adoptive family in a timescale

that meets their needs. This depends on a number of factors: a strong sufficiency strategy, which is targeted and based on analysis of the needs of children coming through the system for whom adoption will be their final care plan. Sufficiency is dependent on achieving recruitment and approval of adopters who can meet the needs of children in this region. Also on securing a strategic approach to working with VAA's in the region to provide additional regional placements for children. The RAA has improved on recruitment of adopters this year, however, has relied on external VAA's, and some LA's, to support the sufficiency required for the increase in numbers of children requiring placement this year.

Timely placement for adoption also relies on good practice in referring children to the RAA, and provision of timely information, and documentation, to support family finding, as illustrated in case study 1. There have been some challenges in this arena over the last year, and ATV continue to work closely with all 5 LA's at an operational level to support best practice, and resolve delays, where these are evident.

Finally, where children are a little older they require help to be prepared for a move to a new family. This takes time, but should not be underestimated as a vital part of adoption and permanence planning, for children's long term wellbeing.

5. Marketing

In total last year ATV received 292 enquires by people wishing to consider adoption. The agency social media channels grew steadily and there are now over 1,000 followers across Facebook and Twitter. [@AdoptTeesValley](#)

The ATV Marketing Officer summarises the work undertaken this year, to promote Adoption Tees Valley to prospective adopters within the regional "footprint" and

In the past year we have improved ATV's branding to give us a more competitive, modern edge and make us stand out in a crowded market. Alongside this we launched our new website which is much more user friendly and most importantly is "mobile phone compatible" which the previous website wasn't. Adopters were consulted on both projects and we have received positive feedback from them. As the website has just been launched, in March 2020, it is too soon to see its impact at the time of this report.

Last year small campaigns were run throughout the year, using key times to promote adoption. For example, Christmas was a good time to engage with prospective adopters in the region, and promote information about children waiting, which generated a lot of interest.

It was agreed that ATV would collaborate with the national adopter recruitment campaign, in National Adoption Week (October) which was being planned and supported through the RAA Heads of Service group, and DfE. While a lot of national preparation work was done for a longer term sustained approach to marketing for adoption, the national promotional campaign wasn't ready to fully launch in October. The follow up plan has unfortunately been **impacted by Covid, but we continue to work** closely with the national steering group, to benefit from centralised funding for marketing and promoting awareness of adoption.

We have however run regular smaller campaigns across digital platforms such as social media and google ads. Across Google Ads we reached 216,000 people which generated 13k clicks through to our website, on Facebook we reached 218,300 people via a range of methods including sponsored adverts, sponsored events and video adverts, this converted to 2,657 engagements with us via clicks to website and event responses. We were also featured on Radio including TFM and BBC Tees though this was via PR and not paid media.

We continue to update our mailing list which is now at over 300 people and regularly keep in touch with our adopters by sending out a monthly newsletter. The newsletter always includes a written piece from our adopters which we call 'adopter voice' the newsletter has been very well received.

6. Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Adopters

Louise Addison, Recruitment Manager, summarises:

During the last year there has been a lot of focus on improving the recruitment process in terms of improving timescales of assessments and working on increasing the number of adopter approvals. There has also been an emphasis on supporting adoption applicants to consider a wider range of children including sibling groups and harder to place children and early permanence placements.

The ongoing recruitment campaign on social media sites has proven to be successful and enquiries continue to rise. The new web page has launched which is more efficient and accessible to the user. Navigation around the page has been streamlined and data can be monitored more efficiently.

The impact of Covid -19 has brought some challenges to the recruitment process which has meant we have had to work quickly to adapt and continue to offer a service. We have revised the processes and are now offering virtual information evenings and preparation training. The volume of enquiries has risen significantly during this period which was unexpected

however it is a positive that people who have been considering adoption are now coming forward.

The main aims for the forthcoming year include strengthening the recruitment campaign to provide a wide range of adoptive placements for our children including early permanence carers, adopters who can care for a sibling group and children with more complex health needs.

The Service set out a challenging target of 60 new approvals for the year. This was based on projected need, generated through review of placement activity in 2018-19, and Placement Orders (PO) granted through the Courts within that period.

Recruitment processes have become more established, and the service is offering information events to provide more information to prospective adopters. During the year these have been improved, to deliver a presentation, and now all Information Events are supported by one of the ATV approved adopters, who will provide feedback and answer questions. This has been welcomed by prospective adopters.

“Pipeline” – Prospective Adopters in Assessment

	April- September	October-March	Totals
Enquiries to Adopt	101	191	292
Initial Visits to prospective Adopters	23	42	65
Stage 1 Starts	33	28	61
Stage 2 Starts	29	25	54
Adopter Approvals	27	23	50

Timescales for Assessments

- The national target for assessments is 182 days.

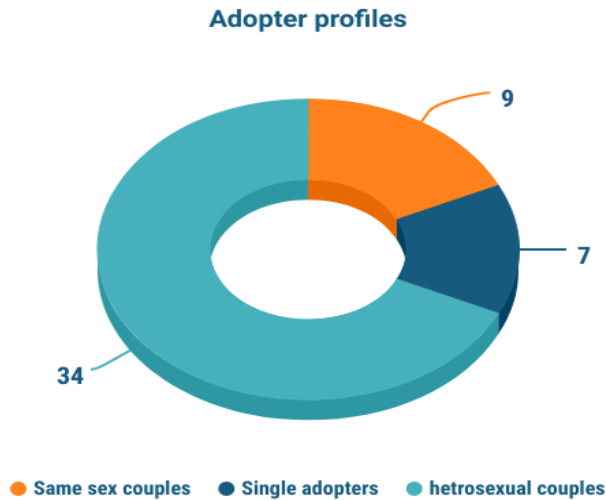
In ATV the average timescale for assessments completed is 202 days, which is outside of the government threshold.

The main reason for this delay is length of time for return of stage 1 medical checks, and length of time generally for some of the additional stage 1 checks, including DBS. In almost all cases, stage 2 is completed within the required 4 months period, i.e. 121 days

- The national target for “fast track” assessments is 121 days.

The ATV average timescale for fast track is 130 days, which is slightly outside of government timescale.

Characteristics of prospective adopters approved



1 family approved was of BAME heritage

34 families were first time adopters

7 were foster carers for the child, going on to adopt

9 were second time adopters

Preparation Training Groups

There have been 6 Preparation for Adoption Groups held over the year, with a total of 49 families attending.

Of the 49 families within this year,

- 9 were single applicants (19 %)
- 33 were heterosexual couples (67%)
- 7 were same sex couples (14%)

1 family were of BAME ethnicity.

Preparation groups are held bi-monthly, and take place over 4 days.

All applicants, including foster carers for a child they wish to adopt, are required to attend the full Preparation training course, if they have not previously adopted.

Applicants who have adopted previously are not required to attend again, but are encouraged to do so.

The Preparation group is delivered by 2 social workers, with one lead social worker who has responsibility for the preparation training in ATV.

The course covers, a range of information which helps to prepare applicants for becoming adoptive parents, and is a starting point for gaining an understanding of the loss, trauma and abuse which adopted children may have experienced, and importantly, what the long term impact of these adverse early experiences may be. They also consider the long term identity needs of adopted children, and are introduced to an understanding of the importance of birth family; life story work; letter box; indirect and direct contact. Applicants are provided with information about the potential benefits of considering a meeting with birth parents, where it is safe to do so. There is a session on parenting needs of adopted children, including therapeutic parenting.

The Team Manager delivers an introduction to parenting with PACE, which is a recognised approach for therapeutic parenting: playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy.

Applicants have the opportunity to meet with a range of key people during the 4 day preparation training course, including:

- Adopters
- Foster carers
- A Birth Mum who has had her children placed for adoption
- Virtual School Head
- Childcare Solicitor, giving information about legal processes in adoption

Applicants are asked to reflect on their learning and development during the training course, and to consider this within their assessment.

"Excellent, very thought provoking, probably the most useful session of the 4 days"

An applicant on the session by a birth mother.

"Very useful and I will definitely do more research around this"

An applicant on the session on therapeutic parenting and the PACE approach

"Most useful session by far. An expertly compiled selection of adopters"

An applicant on the sessions providing opportunity to talk to, and ask questions of adoptive parents.

"I'm feeling very supported and looking forward to the next stage"

An applicant on the support offer provided by ATV.

Adoption Tees Valley would like to acknowledge and recognise the many adoptive parents, foster carers, and the birth mothers who give up their time, to help families at the start of their journey gain the best possible insights into all aspects of adoption, and who care deeply about getting the very best for children.

7. Adoption Panel

As agency business has increased so too has the business put before the Adoption Panel. Reviewing information from the first 6 months of the year, through into the second half, business has been increasing, most especially in relation to adoption matches.

Adoption Tees Valley operates a weekly Panel meeting, each Wednesday morning, which will hear a maximum of 5 cases.

It has been necessary to put on additional panels, in the afternoon, to manage the business, and allow either approvals or matches to proceed, without undue delay caused by panel scheduling.

The agency has recruited 2 Vice Chairs, who are now able to support the work of the agency, and have chaired the panel on a small number of occasions over the year.

There is no dedicated role of Panel Advisor to the agency. Team managers have operated this role, as part of their duties. Due to the volume of panel business, and a weekly panel, the agency has extended the role of Panel Advisor to Assistant Team Managers also. This means that there are now 4 managers operating as panel Advisor, in rotation.

	April- September		October to March		Totals
Panels	23		23		46
Panels Cancelled	2		2		4 (due to no cases, or Panel training)
Cases presented, per panel	1	2	1	2	
	2	8	2	3	
	3	12	3	13	
	4	1	4	4	
	5	0	5	1	

Total number cases	58	68	126
Adopter Approvals	27	24	51
Single Adopters	2	6	8
M/F Couple	22	13	35
Same Sex couple	3	5	8
Brief reports	1	0	1
Adoption Matches	29	43	72
Total numbers of children		57	
Child's plan for adoption-relinquished baby	1	0	1

There is a 6 monthly meeting between Panel Advisors, Panel Chairs and the ADM.

The meeting considers panel business, mechanisms for panel working, feedback and quality, and improvement areas.

Panel members have reported finding business heavy, and difficult to manage within scheduled time, especially where there are 3 matches, and where siblings are considered for matching. The agency seeks to distribute cases where possible, however, timescales for matches and for approvals also mean that cases need to be presented to schedule. The majority of panels consider 3 cases, however, there are panels where 2 cases are presented, or occasionally just 1. Where the cases exceed 3, the panel extends into an afternoon session, which is resourced additionally.

Although not technically within this year, ATV has responded to Covid, by moving Panel to a video conferencing meeting.

This has presented some technical challenges, but Chairs, panel members, and the agency have learned together and developed together, to ensure practice is robust, and meets the requirements. More time has been allowed for cases, and where the panel is extended to the afternoon, a different chair is used for that session.

Appraisals have taken place for the majority of panel members within the first year, although some appraisals have been delayed, and these are being attended to.

There has been discussion around the question of Panel's role in considering and questioning the financial aspect of the adoption support plan, where a

match is being presented. Panel Chairs are of the view that considering financial implications or pressures on a family around adopting a child, are part of their remit when recommending a match and that they should offer advice in this respect.

There has been policy development work between the 5 Local Authorities, and ATV, to set out a clear process for seeking an adoption allowance, prior to panel, where one is required, to allow the prospective adopters to care for the child. A policy is now in place, which establishes that any financial element of the adoption support plan, which requires the LA agreement, must be authorised by the relevant LA, prior to matching panel.

Panel chairs have commented that the quality of PARs is generally of a high standard.

There is mixed feedback on the quality of CPR's and panel minutes are now identifying the quality of CPR, in order that the Agency Decision Maker for the child's match is aware of panel feedback on quality issues, and can take action accordingly.

8. Non-Agency Adoptions

This area of work continues to be a significant challenge for ATV. In addition to the increased volume of adoption work for children in the care of the LA, and increased adopter approvals, ATV is responsible for provision of the step parent adoption assessments, and court reports.

	Total
Enquiries	34
In progress/allocated	10
Waiting allocation	44

The ATV Recruitment manager has allocated an adoption support worker to conduct initial discussions with applicants waiting to be assessed, and this has identified that in a number of cases, the situation has changed, or the family situation was unsuitable for such an order. It's important to recognise that where a step parent adoption is sought, this has the impact of dispensing permanently with the legal parental responsibility for one parent (usually the birth father), and this is a serious legal judgement, which Courts do not always agree is in the best interests of the child, or meets the threshold for such a drastic order.

ATV has within the year allocated one dedicated social work practitioner to the role of step parent assessor. It remains to be seen whether this will help to manage the focus, and reduce the waiting list.

9. Referrals of Children

The benchmarking information shows numbers of children with a Placement Order have slightly decreased on the previous year. This is suggestive that there will be a reduced demand for adoption placements for children, although early tracking is indicating a number of children coming through Court proceedings, where a PO is a likely outcome.

The now embedded procedure for all 5 Local Authorities with ATV is that children are referred at the earliest point at which adoption may become their plan: Early Notification.

Children referred are “tracked” by the Permanence Champion for ATV, for that Local Authority. The permanence champion maintains active links with their “link” Local Authority, providing advice and guidance to children’s social workers; once the ADM (agency decision that adoption is in the child’s best interest) is made by the senior officer in the Local Authority, the ATV permanence Champion and the Child’s Social Worker will hold an Adoption Process Meeting. This scopes out the timescales expected in Court, family finding activity, and the processes for permanence planning in adoption.

Early Notifications to ATV

	April-September	October-March	Totals
Early Notifications 2019-20	88	76	164
Early Notifications 2018-19	58	111	169

10. Placements of Children for Adoption

This year has seen an increase in the numbers of children who are placed for adoption. 91 children have been placed for adoption, which means they have been matched with their adoptive parents, and placed in their new family.

	2018-29	2019-20: April-September	2019-20: Oct-March	Totals 2019-20
ATV children placed with ATV adopters	38	24	36	60
ATV Children placed with external adopters	15	9	22	31
External children	14	1	1	2

placed with ATV adopters				
Total ATV children placed	53	33	58	91
Total placements	67	34	59	93

Over this year, there has been a 72% increase in numbers of Tees Valley children placed, compared with the last reporting year.

Overall, there is a 39% increase in placement activity this year, compared with the previous year.

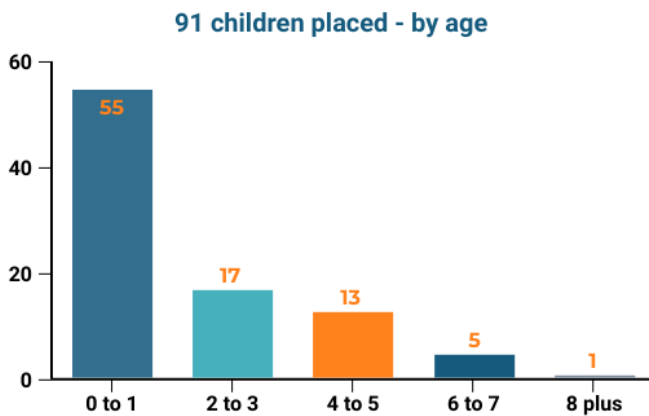
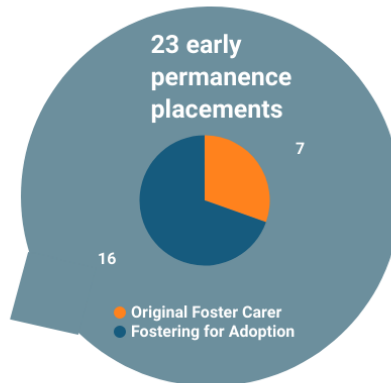
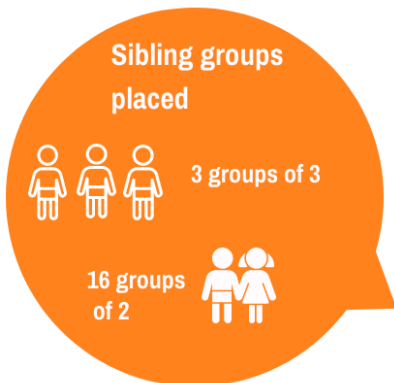
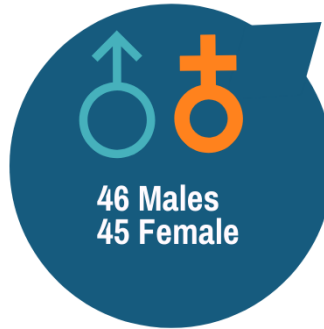
In addition to the 91 children matched for adoption, 3 children have been placed in early permanence/fostering for adoption placements, which means that the adopters have been temporarily approved as foster carers, in order that the child can be placed more quickly, with their permanent family.

Prospective adopters consider carefully whether they wish to consider becoming early permanence carers, and therefore take a child through Fostering for Adoption. There are some risks that the Courts may not authorise a placement for adoption, through a Placement Order, and the child may be returned to the birth family, or another family carer, as dictated by the Court authorised care plan. Careful assessment and planning underpins early permanence placements, and the level of uncertainty around likelihood of an adoption plan is discussed with prospective adopters.

For the child, early permanence placements mean that they are able to be placed with their likely permanent parents much earlier, which research indicates provides better outcomes for children. Additionally, the child, usually an infant, has reduced moves in foster care, which also is an indicator of better outcomes.

Adoption Tees Valley has a strategic and operational development priority for early permanence, and is working with key stakeholders to deliver on this plan for more children.

Profile of Children Placed for Adoption



The biggest area of need for ATV in family finding is to find families who wish to adopt a sibling group. There continues to be a high referral rate of siblings requiring placement together.

Other key areas of need are children with some developmental uncertainty, including children who have a pre-natal history of maternal alcohol abuse, which may indicate potential Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

These needs, along with promoting wider thinking about early permanence, are key features of the marketing and recruitment strategy.

11. Disruptions

There have been 3 disrupted placements this year.

One was a sibling group of 2 children, and one was a single child.

A disruption meeting has been held for the sibling group. Due to Covid, the disruption meeting for the single child has not yet been convened.

Additionally, 2 sibling groups of children, and one single child had their planned adoption placements stopped during introductions, due to adopters withdrawing during the introduction period.

Appropriate permanence planning has secured permanence via adoption, or permanent fostering in all cases.

12. Adoption Support

One of the key priorities for ATV is to enhance the level of support available to adoptive families. This is a government objective, and is held as a key aim in Adoption Tees Valley. We know that many families enjoy a rewarding family life, following the adoption of their child. However, we also know from extensive research, and our own experience and feedback as a Regional Adoption Agency, and through the prior work of the individual Local Authority adoption services, that many adoptive families need support in the future, or from the point of placement.

We aim to recognise and value this, and create a community for adopters and children in ATV, which helps, and supports families, and recognises that throughout the child's childhood, and beyond, it is quite expected that additional help, support, and advice will be required.

Lynne Cardwell, Adoption Support Team Manager summarises:

There has been a steady but significant increase in the number of families requesting Adoption support from Adoption Tees Valley. This should not be viewed as a negative indicator of families struggling to cope, but is likely to be as a result of Adoption Tees Valley being well embedded and more widely known about within the Adoption Community. Work has continued

to ensure the knowledge about our more comprehensive service offer is more widespread and this ensures more families know where to come when they need support. We are a product of our own success, however this sadly leads to waiting times for families due to the high demand for this service.

Adoption Tees Valley have a dedicated Post Adoption Support Team with a wealth of experience.

Workers understand that while adoption is rewarding, like any other parenting journey, it can also be challenging. Our team offers a range of support services to families throughout their adoption journey and beyond using a tiered approach, which has been designed to offer the right level of support at the time our families need it.

The support we offer ranges from picking up the phone for an informal chat right through to therapeutic support services. We work closely with a range of accredited providers to enable access to therapeutic services. If at any point you need further support access outside of what Adoption Tees Valley offer we will manage your application to the Adoption Support Fund to enable you to do so.

As part of our support services we also have a dedicated Education Support Worker who specifically focuses on supporting adopted children and their families with key transitions, to access education support services and assisting schools in meeting the needs of these children, including pupil premium plus.

On Services during Covid:

The team have supported 132 families this last year and have secured funding to have bespoke therapeutic services delivered as needed by accessing the Governments Adoption Support Fund. During this COVID-19 crisis the team has ensured that the adoption support service is still available although most of the sessions are now held by virtual means. Therapeutic providers have been creative in how they can still support families when not able to hold face to face sessions. Indeed ATV have managed to hold sessions for our children's group that had just got up and running before the lockdown began. This is an area we still wish to continue although more difficult using remote virtual sessions however, the staff team all have a "can do" attitude and I am proud and delighted at their constant dedication to this much valued area of our service.

Adoption Support: support services delivered

	April-September	Oct-March	Total
Adoption Support Referrals	Full year only counted		147
Adoption Support Assessments undertaken	33	99	132
Adoption Support Fund-applications	98	77	175
Adoption Support Fund-value of applications	£278,460	£414,373	£692,833
Education Support – number of children/families	Full year only counted		28 (to June 2020)

The increase in applications to the ASF reflects more group applications which have been made to deliver Therapeutic parenting training to families.

The 3 Tier Model

ATV continues to operate and deliver a 3 Tier model of adoption support, with Tier 1 being available to all families, Tier 2 being targeted and Tier 3 being for those families and children in greatest need of support.

Tier 1	Continued adoption support to all families for the first year post Adoption Order, by the assessing adoption social worker; Engagement Events; Support Groups; General Support; Access to on line support group; Newsletters for adopters; closed Facebook site, offering information; membership of the Adopter Hub (new under Covid 19 adopter support provision);
Tier 2	Themed Workshops and Training Events; Mentoring and Buddying; Education Support- advice, information
Tier 3	Assessment for post adoption needs; Specialist psychological assessments; Application to ASF; therapeutic

	<p>interventions, including DDP; Play Therapy; Child Counselling; Cognitive and Behavioural Therapy; Sensory Integration; Creative Therapies.</p> <p>Case allocation to a social worker; Multi Agency working; Education Support for direct case involvement.</p>
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Over the last year, the service has increased the range of supports available to adopters and children through the service.

The following additional supports have been developed, and are now part of the formal "Adoption Support Offer" to adoptive families in Tees Valley.

Education Support to Adopted Children, and their Families

ATV works in partnership with the 5 Virtual Schools across Tees Valley. The Virtual School heads meet quarterly with the ATV Service Manager, and Adoption Support Manager, and have agreed to co-fund the Education Support Worker post within the agency, using the Government grants for the extended duties of Virtual schools to adopted children.

Leanne Albesson has been working as an Education Support worker in ATV, for almost one year, and her post has been extended for a further year, by agreement with the VS heads. Leanne has offered direct support to achieve the best outcomes where children are struggling in school; advice and information about levels of additional needs provision, to assist parents and schools advocate for the right level; information and training to schools around adoption; advice and information to Designated teachers about ATV, and additional therapeutic support available.

Leanne has recently completed the Thrive training for practitioners, and has been well positioned to share information, and support literature with families during the Covid 19 pandemic, and "lock down".

Some comments from adoptive families where education support has been provided are included here:

"It has been so helpful to have your input, without it, we would definitely not have an IEP or a forthcoming educational psychologist assessment. Thank you so much for all your help again. It is really appreciated".

"We don't have to worry that he is going to be excluded anymore, now that you have helped him to get in to a school with the right support, he is much happier in himself".

"Thanks for meeting with me and supporting us, I feel a lot more positive about his future within school".

Children's Group

ATV has started a children's group, with young people, with the aim of helping children in the age group 7-11 years to link to ATV, and to other children who have adoption in common. Experience through the engagement events has highlighted just how isolated adopted children can feel, and how they can find a great sense of belongingness, and shared identity, just by knowing that they are not the only one who is adopted.

The first group had a closed group of 10 participants, and took place in the ATV building. The group was facilitated by Leanne Abelson, Abigail Hogarth (Adoption Support Worker) and Alyssa Dale (Post Adoption Social Worker).

The children were beginning to make friendships, and get comfortable with the group, when it unfortunately had to stop temporarily, due to Covid 19.

The group has continued to be facilitated, albeit in a different format, on line.

One Year Post Adoption Support offer to all families, following the Adoption Order

ATV are now offering to continue with a low key adoption support offer to all families, following the granting of the Adoption Order. This is to help families to take up the opportunity to engage with Tier 1 and Tier 2 services, and Tier 3 where needed.

Adopter Hub Membership (PACT UK)

Following the provision of emergency funding during Covid 19, ATV surveyed all adoptive parents, to seek views on how they are managing under Covid lockdown and what additional support would be of value. The vast majority of adoptive parents identified that they felt they are coping well.

Membership of an adopter support organisation was identified to be of value. The ATV Service manager and Adoption Support manager consulted with the 2 new Non-Executive Directors, and it was identified that Adopter Hub represented the best value and widest offer for adopters.

Therapeutic Parenting Training

The service is now offering a regular opportunity for adoptive parents to undertake therapeutic parenting training, according to their needs, and the age/stage of their child's developmental needs.

The following training has been offered over the course of the year:

Nurturing Attachments	3 days- April/May 2019	Kim Goulding company	20 families
Therapeutic Life Story Work- telling about adoption	2 days- July 2019	Bridgett Betts	13 families
Nurturing Attachments	3 days- September/Oct 2019	Kim Goulding Co.	8 families
Future Stars Early Intervention	10 week programme, started September	Integrate Families	3 families
SEND Law	0.5 day session		4 families
Therapeutic Life Story Work- telling about adoption	2 days- September	Bridgett Betts	10 families
Future Stars Early Intervention- Sensory	10 week programme January 2020	Integrate Families	5 Families
An Introduction to Non Violent Resistance	3 days- November 2019	Gail Humphries Future Families	8 families
An Introduction to Non Violent Resistance	3 days- January 2020	Gail Humphries Future Families	5 families
Nurturing Attachments	3 days	Kim Goulding Company	8 Families

Framework of Preferred Therapeutic Providers

Within this period a significant amount of work was undertaken by ATV supported by Stockton Procurement team, to establish a framework of therapeutic providers, who can deliver high quality, therapeutic interventions for children and families, based on the assessment of needs in the Adoption Support Assessment. A provider list for specialist assessments has also been established through the procurement process.

This planning concluded with a new framework being implemented, of preferred providers, commencing 1.9.19 which meets EU public procurement regulations. 8 providers were awarded preferred provider status, with a further 5 selected as providers of specialist assessments.

ATV values the work done by the Therapeutic Providers, recognising this offers families a range of specialist provision, according the needs identified

through the adoption support assessment. Providers work creatively, and in partnership with ATV to deliver high quality tier 3 support to children and families.

Case Study 2- Adoption Support

ATV were contacted by parents, who were concerned about their 15 year old daughter. They had adopted her when she was 18 months old, but she had been experiencing some emotional problems of late. They had subsequently discovered that she had made contact with her birth mother through social media and more recently she had arranged a face to face meeting with her.

A Post Adoption Support Assessment was undertaken. It was evident that parents had developed a secure relationship with their daughter and had a good understanding of her needs. While they were initially quite shocked about her meeting up with her birth mother they had been able to take stock of the situation and asked for help to put in place the support they thought she needed. As part of the assessment we discussed how Therapeutic Life Story Work had the potential to help their daughter make sense of her past history and improve her emotional well-being. If she wished to have further contact with her birth mother, then support would be provided to all to ensure that this was maintained in a way that met their daughters needs and made her feel safe. This was discussed with the young person who felt happy to engage in the help that was being offered.

ATV has developed a commissioning process with partner service providers in the region. This was the first time that this process was put into practice. The assessment report was sent out to relevant service providers inviting them to offer a plan of work to the family in line with the recommendations from the assessment. We received two proposals back, which we were able to share with the family who made the final decision on which service to go with.

An application was made to the Adoption Support Fund, which was agreed and therapy started at the beginning of the year. The young person has developed a good relationship with her therapist. She trusts her to talk about her thoughts and feelings. This is long term work and in March we were worried that it might be disrupted due to face to face meetings having to end. This has not been the case though and therapy has continued with the assistance of video conferencing and it is expected to continue for the remainder of the year. Parents are pleased with the service and have noticed a positive difference in their daughter's overall wellbeing - even in such challenging times.

Support for Birth Families and Adult Adoptees

ATV previously commissioned services for birth parents, birth relatives, and adult adoptees from After Adoption. Unfortunately, this Voluntary Adoption Agency closed at the end of March 2019, and some very rapid remedial work was undertaken, to seek an appropriate new provider, who could offer these vital independent support services.

Adoption Matters (formerly DFW Adoption, a local VAA) had provided a similar service previously to Darlington Children's Services, and so were approached to take on this service for the whole of the Tees Valley, through ATV.

The contract was reviewed, and quickly agreed, through Stockton Procurement Team working together with ATV, and Adoption Matters.

A new contract was put in place in early April, and ATV have worked together with Adoption Matters, to establish and extend the previous services offered to birth relatives and adult adoptees in this region.

The services include:

- Direct Support to birth parents whose children are going through, or have been adopted.
- Access to the adoption files for adult adoptees
- Access to appropriate records by birth relatives, according to legislative permissions

The contract took a little time to establish, which was very much to be expected. New leaflets were produced, and the information about how to access the service needed to be set up with Adoption Matters. Referral and procedures for requesting the service also needed to be developed over the initial weeks of the new contract.

ATV have been very appreciative of the work that Adoption Matters have undertaken, and good working relationships have been built between ATV and those delivering the service in Adoption Matters.

Referrals have been as follows:

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total Hours
0	22	34	15	322

Adoption Matters have delivered training to ATV staff, on Access to Records, which is a specialist area of work, and legislation, for adopted people and their birth relatives.

A review of the Contract has been undertaken and ATV have consulted with birth parents and other key stakeholders to determine optimal new contractual requirements. As a result, of review and consultation, a new contract will be tendered in September, 2020, for Birth Parent Support, and Access to Records.

Post Box

Post box (sometimes also called letter box) is the arrangement for indirect contact between adopted children and their birth families. Letters/cards are exchanged through Adoption Tees Valley, who act as a means of ensuring that the new address of the child is kept confidential, and that post box arrangements take place, as planned through the care plan, prior to the placement of the child. Although this seems a small element of the service delivery, it is incredibly important for the wellbeing of children and their birth parents/families. Birth families rely on this indirect contact, to allow them to know how their child is doing, and to know they are safe and well. For children, their developmental needs will change through childhood and into adulthood. These letter box arrangements can be a means for children to understand more about their birth family, as they grow up.

The birth mothers who regularly contribute to preparation training all tell the prospective adopters how important these exchanges are, and how much they value them in their lives.

ATV have now brought all Post box/letter box arrangements in house, and have recruited a Post Box Co-ordinator, who works 3 days per week, and manages these arrangements.

Over the last year, approximately 1,620 post box transactions have taken place.

Life Story Books

Adoption Tees Valley is tasked with creating the Life Story Book for each child who is placed for adoption. This work is usually allocated to one of the Adoption Support Workers.

Life Story Books are a unique and individually created book for the child, which tells the story of their birth, their history, family members, and their journey to adoption, in their new family.

This work is significant, and takes some time to complete, especially as the worker undertaking it must liaise with a number of individuals to get all of the right information.

As ATV has placed more children, the waiting list for Life Story Book grew, and the agency has struggled to manage the volume and demand.

ATV have worked with colleagues within the 5 Local Authorities to seek a resolution to the backlog of Life Story Books, which by Regulation are required to be made available to the adoptive family by the second review following placement. This timescale has not been met in many cases, and this challenge needed addressing. Some of the social workers for the child, in the LA have undertaken this piece of work for a child they have placed, and this has meant that a number of LS books have been completed.

Internal processes have been amended to make sure that at the earliest adoption planning meeting life story content is discussed, and the social worker is made aware of the need to provide the information in a timely way to ATV, and to gather more photographs, information and documentation, from relevant family and carers.

The Board of Directors approved an additional temporary worker, to assist with backlog, in February 2020. Unfortunately, the post was not filled, and Covid 19 meant that other work required attention, and focus for change and safety management.

The post has been re-advertised, and it is hoped to address the backlog, and future volume.

It's important to ensure that the book is sensitive and quality document, carefully tailored to each child, and that it tells the story in a constructive, and enabling way for the child for the future.

At the year end, the position is as follows:

Number of new LSB's requested in year	94
Number Completed	45
Number in progress	17
Number not yet allocated	32

The volume of life story book work remains a capacity issue for the service, and is an areas for service development in 2020-21.

13. Staffing

1 x Service Manager	18.2 FTE Social Workers, (inc 1 FTE temp)	1 x Business Manager
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2 x Team Managers	3.5 Adoption Support Workers	3.1 x FTE Business Support Workers
2 x Assistant Team managers	0.9 x Education Support Worker	0.5 x Marketing and Recruitment Worker
	0.6 x Post Box Co-Ordinator	

Staffing has been a challenge with the increased numbers of children referred to the service.

The service has dedicated 3 full time equivalent staff to adoption support, which has been a significantly growing area of work, since the RAA went live.

One full time social worker has been allocated to step parent assessments.

During this year a review of the staffing structure has been undertaken, to consider an “invest to save” approach, to recruiting more adoptive families.

The service reviewed core business and has set out an approach to better use adoption support worker grade staff, for front line duty work, and support to stage 1 assessments. The Board agreed a further 2 full time adoption support workers, to enable a different model of workload, and with the aim of generating more in house adopters. These are included in the 3.5 posts above.

An education support worker post has been created, as detailed above.

A post Box Co-ordinator post has been created, to allow ATV to manage the internal post box work.

14. Quality Assurance

National Minimum Standard 25.

The following mechanisms are in place 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 quarterly performance, assurance and challenge meeting (PAC) has been held with the senior adoption lead for each LA. All children for each LA have been tracked and monitored, and agreement about direction, or decisions signposted where applicable. Performance, and issues for improvement are discussed, specific to each LA.
- ASGLB is generated quarterly, and scorecard data is reviewed for evaluation of performance, and any areas for improvement, or focus.

- Monthly management meetings are focussing on the key performance information required, and how this will be generated from Charms, and/or other sources.
- The quarterly performance balanced scorecard is presented to the ATV Board, which has a role in questioning, challenge and being satisfied of the effectiveness of the service.
- The Adoption Panel operates a quality monitoring mechanism for assessments/matches presented, which is monitored by the Panel Advisors and Chairs, for improvement.
- Quality of CPR's is now included in minutes of panel, for QA monitoring by each LA.
- The Adoption Panel Chairs provide a report bi-annually to the Service Manager, which will be presented to the Adoption Leads, Panel, and to the team, for learning and improvement where required.
- Staff performance is monitored via supervision, which is monthly for all staff.
- A case practice audit tool is in place, and cases are audited for quality assurance.
- Staff will have an annual appraisal, and Personal Development Planning will be aligned to appraisal and review.
- Central List members and Panel Chairs have had an annual appraisal.
- Team meetings take place monthly, and are used to convey policy and practice information, involve staff in developments and any quality improvements that are required.
- Adopter feedback has been sought most recently via a Consultation Survey, in April 2020, specifically to seek feedback on what supports adopters want during Covid. User feedback has been used to inform what services are commissioned.
- 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.

15. Service Plans for 2020-21

- Recovery plans have been developed, and will require regular review. The first priority is to ensure that the Tees Valley adoption service adapts and continues to operate, to allow children to achieve permanence via adoption. The service will work with developing RAA guidance and the 5 Local Authorities to ensure practice is safe, and child centred, while minimising the opportunity for spread of coronavirus.

- Recover and refocus on life story work, and backlog. Seek solutions that better meet the needs for ensuring completion of life story books within the child's timescale.
- Focus on early permanence, and continuing to develop awareness and practice in EP, across Tees Valley.
- Recruit around 80 new adoptive families, within the year. This is an ambitious target, but we need to achieve a greater pool of internal adopters, for more financial efficiency, and better locally supported placements for children.
- Continue to build on the adoption support 3 Tier model, to develop excellence in the service offered to adopters and children.