



Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report 2021-22



“Adopting Sam is the best thing we’ve ever done. He has changed our lives. The house is alive, and life is full of so much fun now. We feel blessed everyday”

Transform a child's life...

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Glossary

ADM- agency decision maker /Agency Decision

PO- Placement Order

RAA- Regional Adoption Agency

VAA- Voluntary Adoption Agency

AO- Adoption Order

ASF- Adoption Support Fund

VSH- Virtual School Head

1. Introduction

This is the Annual Report of Adoption Tees Valley, which is the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), for the 5 Local Authority Councils of Darlington; Hartlepool; Middlesbrough; Redcar and Cleveland; and Stockton.

This Annual Report covers the period of 1.4.21 - 31.3.2022.

2. Executive Summary

ATV has continued with slightly lower levels of adoption activity overall within this year, with numbers of children being placed with adoptive parents reducing from 82 in the previous year to 78 in this year. Some Local Authorities have increased numbers of children placed, and adopted, others have reduced. Middlesbrough has seen a continuing rise in the numbers of children placed for adoption. Stockton and Redcar and Cleveland have also had a slight increase compared with the previous year, while Hartlepool and Darlington have seen numbers decrease.

The regional picture is reflected nationally, with fewer children with an adoption plan, and PO, during this year.

The timeliness of moving in with adoptive parents has improved significantly in this year. Adoption Tees Valley has improved on its own timeliness since last year and is better than England average by a considerable margin. ATV has reduced the average time between entering care and moving in with adoptive parents by 27 days – now 383 days, and is 43 days better than the government target, of 426 days. ATV also sits at 62 days better than the England average for this year.

The timeliness of finding a family and matching with adoptive parents has also improved, with ATV having reduced this average timescale by 64 days, to 174 days. Although ATV remains outside of government target timescale, of 121 days, the England average has been 198 days in this year, against which ATV is performing well.

All this means that for many children in this region, we are finding families and helping children to achieve their permanence via adoption more quickly. There are always exceptions, however, for most children there is significant improvement.

Local Authority Decisions that adoption is their “best interests” plan for the child have reduced from 99 to 78, and Placement Orders granted have also reduced from 78 to 74.

A significant legal ruling, the Somerset judgement, has impacted on adoption activity, which is analysed in section 4 below. We know that 14 children were delayed in being matched and placed due to this ruling: the actual number

due to be placed would have exceeded the previous year's placements numbers and been equal to the previous 5 year high.

More children have been placed with ATV approved adopters in this year, and fewer with external Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA's). 25% of all placements have been external compared with 36 % in the previous year. Of the 19 children placed with external VAA's, almost half have been placed within this region. We continue to seek to find families in, or close to the Tees Valley region. We know this has long term benefits for identity, and for providing timely access to adoption support, from the professional network who know the child.

The number of adoption support assessments have almost doubled this year, from 55 to 106, with a further 94 second and third time assessments, to access therapeutic support from the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). The numbers of children receiving education support from the ATV education support worker has increased to 77.

Adopter approvals are reduced on previous year, from 62 to 46. This is a concerning picture, and further analysis is offered in the section below.

We are proud that our service has been awarded the Coram BAAF Early Permanence Quality Mark in this year, in recognition of meeting the standards and criteria for this award. The feedback was that the ATV submission was a strong bid, and our strategic and operational work was recognised.

ATV was a pilot RAA for the new Adoption Support Audit, being evaluated against criteria in the national Blueprint for Adoption Support. The feedback was positive, with our Education Support service being highlighted as an exemplary strength.

ATV recognises and values the huge contribution that staff across the whole team make to children's lives, and the experiences of adoptive families. Thanks, and recognition go to all of the team members for their work. Also, to the social care workforce across Tees Valley who have worked together on strengthening the service to adopted children, their adoptive families, and birth families.

3. Governance

The RAA is governed by a Board, which comprises the 5 Directors for Children's Services of the 5 Local Authorities within the partnership. There are 2 non-Executive Directors, who were recruited to the Board in 2020, and who are adoptive parents who have adopted through ATV.

The Service Manager for ATV attends all Board meetings and presents information to enable oversight of the performance of the RAA, strategic

direction and operational practice. The Board has a role in being assured of the quality of adoption work in Adoption Tees Valley, and receives information on quality, outcomes, and proposed improvements.

Board meetings are held quarterly. Strategy, performance, finance, and overall delivery of the adoption service are considered at each Board meeting.

The Chair of the Board is Sue Butcher, DCS at Middlesbrough Children's Services, and it is now agreed Chair tenure will be for 2 years.

In each of the 5 LA's there is an Adoption Lead Officer who is responsible for ensuring that the RAA is delivering effective and high quality adoption services for the children in its area. The Adoption Lead Officer is registered with Ofsted. Adoption Leads meet with the Service Manager and Team Managers of ATV monthly.

The Lead Elected Members of the Council with responsibility for Children's Services, for each Local Authority area meet bi-annually with the Board and Service Manager, to oversee the work of ATV, and be kept informed of key developments.

4. Somerset Ruling

The Somerset Ruling has been a significant legal ruling in relation to adoption cases, which took place in November 2021, and had a significant impact on adoption activity nationally, and locally.

A summary of the issue, as presented by Coram BAAF is outlined below.

On 24 November the High Court handed down a judgement in *Somerset County Council v NHS Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group & Anor* [2021] EWHC 3004(Fam) dealing with the lawfulness of placement orders made in ten separate cases. The court found that the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) had not made the decision that the child should be placed for adoption in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations (AAR) 2005.

It appears that in these cases in Somerset, and possibly in many others, the Agency Medical Adviser had not completed the Child's Permanence Report as required by Regs 15 & 17 of the AAR 2005. She had not given advice on whether the child needed to have a medical examination and had not written a summary of the state of the child's health. In practical terms this omission had very little effect on the making of the ADM's decision, as she had full medical information from the initial health assessment of the child and any medical reports filed during court proceedings. In each case the medical adviser provided a full medical report before the child was matched to prospective adopters, and the local authority believed that this was an effective use of the limited medical advisor's time that they had available.

The Court however found that the breach of the Regulations was so fundamental that it could render the application for a placement order invalid. The ADM did not have a medical qualification to enable her to interpret the medical reports provided and the initial health assessments did not include a comprehensive assessment of the child's future medical needs. The Court therefore considered each of the cases in detail. In each case, the judge was satisfied that the medical adviser would not have requested a further medical examination and would not have expressed a medical opinion that would have undermined the decision that the child should be placed for adoption.

The reach, and impact of the Somerset ruling has had a profound effect nationally and regionally on adoption activity within this year and has led to a significant re-examination of the medical advice provided to Agency Decision Makers (ADM) in coming to their decision that adoption is the Local Authority plan for the child. Specifically, whether the requirements of Adoption Agencies Regulation 15 and 17 (2005) were met in each case. Each of the 5 Local Authorities within the ATV Regional Adoption Agency has reviewed the ADM decisions made and considered whether a revised ADM was required. This issue came to light prior to the end of 2021, however, the final ruling by the most senior Family Division Judge, Sir Andrew McFarlane, was not made until April 2022, providing absolute clarity on how Local Authorities were to act, in relation to any breaches of Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005). An interim ruling was made in February 2022, giving some direction to Local Authorities, and each Local Authority made its own decision as to the legal interpretation and course of action in relation to these cases.

In summary, the key matters of breach of compliance were:

- Medical Advisor summary not provided for the CPR, in respect of regulation 15, and Regulation 17 (AAR 2005). These are in relation to the Agency Medical Advisor decision as to whether an examination of the child, any further reports and examinations are necessary, and a summary on the state of the child's health, provided to the ADM, in the CPR, for the purposes of making the agency decision that adoption will be the child's plan.
- The appointment of the Medical Advisor: The Judge in Somerset raised questions around the appointment of the Medical Advisor, and it was highlighted that Medical Advisors needed to be appointed in their role, although regulations make no specific requirements as to how, and what matters must be followed in appointing them.

ATV worked closely with each Local Authority and sought legal advice for the RAA in relation to the national legal ruling, and local Teesside Courts actions and directions. In total, 67 children were reviewed pre- placement, to clarify the compliance of the ADM, with respect to the Medical Advisor summary, provided in the Child's permanence Report. Local Authorities each followed their own legal advice as to the degree to which they would wait for final ruling, or proceed to revise the ADM, where any breach of compliance was identified. Where the LA did not feel it could proceed until the final Judgement, a case-by-case decision was made in respect of each child, as to how to proceed.

14 children had matches with adoptive parents delayed, awaiting final judgement on how to proceed.

A further cohort of 60 children delayed were those already placed with adoptive parents, but not yet adopted. The Teesside Courts suspended all adoption hearings, awaiting the final president Ruling, to be directed on how to proceed. The likely numbers of children adopted in this year would have been significantly higher than the 78 orders that were granted and are reported.

The impact of the Somerset Judgement was delay for children in either moving in with adoptive parents, or in being adopted from care. Many adoption hearings are taking place in July 2022 when it is hoped that all children will have been adopted, who would have been earlier.

For some children, the LA was able to proceed to place the child through early permanence, thus enabling the child to be placed with their prospective adopters with less delay.

For some children, they were delayed by weeks and months, in being matched with their prospective adopters, and ATV remains in "catch up" for children who have required matching, once the LA ADM has agreed the placement, confirming compliance.

In recovering from the significant workload generated by the Somerset Judgement, it should be noted that in ATV all children have had an adoption medical, carried out by an experienced, and qualified paediatrician, who is a Medical Advisor. In most cases the adoption medical has been conducted prior to the ADM decision, however, the required summary has not always been in place, in the correct format. Adopters have always had the full medical information prior to being matched with a child, and the right family has been selected for children, based on their capacity to meet all needs, including the health needs of the child, as set out in the adoption medical. Additionally, the agency takes seriously the NMS 13.6, whereby prospective adopters are given the opportunity to meet with the medical advisor, prior to matching panel, in order to fully understand the health needs of the child, and future care implications arising from their health needs.

It has been important to review and revise procedures and practice in light of the Somerset Judgement. In Tees Valley, there have been multiple forums, and a number of cross-agency workstreams, to review and revise procedure and practice.

Actions:

- All LA's have reviewed their procedures, and processes for the making of the Agency Decision, to ensure compliance with AAR (2005) and specifically Regulations 15 and 17.
- All LA's have formally appointed their Medical Advisor.

- A procedure and process flow chart for Medical Advice, prior to ADM has been drafted and consulted on. This is in place, to guide on requirements for ADM decision making.
- A regional ADM workshop has been held in the NE region, facilitated by Coram BAAF, to assist ADM's with understanding the regulations and case law in relation to ADM role for adoption.
- Each LA has strengthened its position with respect to the Agency Advisor to the ADM.
- Multi agency meeting has taken place with medical advisors, to review requirements, and to consult on matters which impact on achieving the medical advice, in a timely way.
- A multi-agency/multi professional meeting has taken place with the CCG to address capacity issues for Medical Advisors in the Teesside region. Work is underway, to map out a shared process pathway, to account for timescales, and regulatory requirements to meet the health input requirements for adoption, and capacity issues for medical advisors.

5. National Adoption Development -Regional Context

The Government issued the National Adoption Strategy in 2021 [Adoption strategy: achieving excellence everywhere - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94422/adoption_strategy_achieving_excellence_everywhere.pdf), which sets out an overarching strategic vision for adoption, aiming for a consistent England wide offer to children, and families by way of adoption services and support. The RAA Leaders forum is highlighted as the central group for change and development in thematic elements of the strategy. Through the strategic vision, focus is brought to areas of recruitment of adopters; effective timely matching for children; early permanence; adoption support.

ATV, and the ATV Board have maintained strategic and operational focus on the key areas that are outlined in the strategy.

The ATV Strategic Priorities were developed in the context of the national strategy, and were set out in the Biannual report, 2021.

Within this year, the DfE has invested significant funding into the RAA leaders forum, mapped against key workstream areas.

ATV has worked collaboratively with pan regional RAA's- Adopt North East, and Adopt Coast to Coast, and with regional Voluntary Adoption Agencies to bid for funding for an Early Permanence (EP) Sufficiency Project, which is now underway. The aim of this project is to increase access to, and sufficiency of EP placements for children, through more sharing of prospective adopters who can offer EP, and developments to improve support to EP carers, and birth families.

At the time of writing, further bids are underway for national funding, which have been made within the following financial year, and will be reported on more fully within following reports.

See Adoption Support- section 8 for more national developments in Adoption Support.

6. Adoption Activity

6.1 Marketing Campaigns

There have been key lines of marketing approach this year, supported by 3 campaigns, focussing on attracting more prospective adopters to ATV.

To promote needs, ATV set out 3 clear campaigns in 2021-22:

- **National Adoption Week** (October 21) this campaign focussed on telling the story of adoption through voices less heard such as adopted people, social workers and birth parents. Adoption Tees Valley utilised the national campaign assets alongside regionally generated materials such as blogs, press releases and radio, the campaign featured in the Evening Gazette, Northern Echo and on BBC Tees Radio.
- **“Priority” children campaign** (November 22) Adoption Tees Valley ran a campaign aimed at recruiting more adopters for priority children, in particular sibling groups and those with additional needs. The campaign featured two films with a same sex couple who adopted siblings, one through early permanence and another couple who adopted a child with additional needs having already had a biological child. The campaign was well received and picked up by ITV News, local radio and press.
- **Early permanence campaign** (March 22) -ATV ran a campaign to raise awareness of early permanence, the campaign featured a series of blogs from an adoptive family of 3 children, the adopters was featured in local press and radio Zetland/BBC Tees.

The ATV website (www.adoptionteesvalley.org.uk) is the largest source of enquiries, and enquirers can request a call back, seeking an initial conversation with one of our team to discuss their interest.

This year ATV introduced a new blog area of the website to be able to promote key messages and stories within the adoption area. The RAA also launched an Instagram social media channel. Social media channels remain some of the most successful in the adoption arena with the highest follower numbers.

Enquiries were down compared to 2020-2021. There have been 2 key technical issues which have impacted on the online marketing, and it is felt

both issues impacted on the agency online market position and led to a loss of enquiries. These issues have now been addressed. The marketplace also remains extremely competitive with RAA's and VAA's advertising in the Tees Valley.

Number of ATV recruitment campaigns year to date	3
Number of enquiries arising from campaigns year to date	131
Number of all Adopter enquiries year to date (all methods)	287
Number of ATV enquiries converted to ROI	61
% of ATV enquiries converted to ROI	22%
Number of adoptive families attending information events	123
Social media followers	11,724
Website visits	16,819

6.2 Recruitment and Assessment of Adopters

	Total 2020-21	Q1-Q2 2021-22	Q3-Q4 2021-22	Total 2021-22
Initial Visits to prospective Adopters	92	36	35	71 down 22%
Stage 1 Starts	63	24	22	46 down 26%
Stage 2 Starts	62	25	27	52 down 16%
Adopter Approvals	62	24	22	46 down 25%
Numbers in assessment at the end of the period	40	34	39	Down 2.5%
Numbers waiting to be matched at end of period	36	21	29	N/A
Timescale S1 (Govt target 60 days)	93	97	106	Up 12% England average- whole year period 121 days
Timescale S2	127	134	146	Up 14%

(Govt target 121 days)				England average- whole year period 146 days
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Although marketing overall has been strengthened, recruitment activity has seen a decline over the last year, compared with the previous year. The impact on enquiry levels is noted above.

Further analysis highlights a number of key factors but is mostly associated with the impact of the pandemic as it has progressed, coupled with economic factors for people wanting to adopt.

The service initially saw an increase in numbers of people interested in, and wanting to adopt a child, during year 1 of the pandemic.

ATV has had a decrease by 26% of people wanting to commence an assessment in this year, and a 25% decrease in numbers of adopters approved.

Nationally, the figure is a decrease on previous year of 4%, however, a lesser drop than in the Teesside region.

Adopters in assessment at the end of the year, compared with the previous year has remained very similar (39, c/w 40). Taking account of 40 already in assessment at the end of the previous year, it is evident that a number of adopters have not concluded the assessment process and have dropped out. The service saw a higher number than expected of adopters either withdrawing, or not progressing to stage 2 for several reasons. The service remains committed to generating families for children who are suitable and ready to adopt, and reflection of applicants during the pandemic is that a higher number of people started the process but did not conclude.

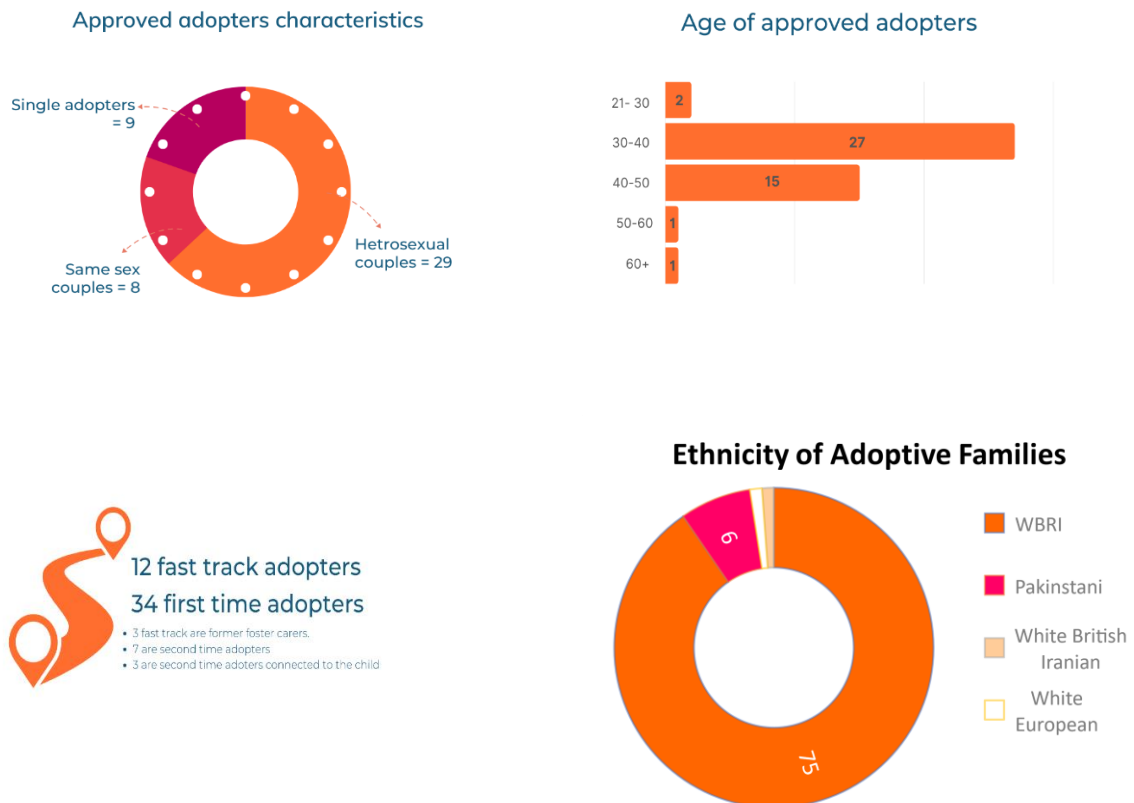
There was a reduction in numbers of adopters waiting to be matched with children during this year, with more progressing to match. Of the approved adopters waiting many have been readily available, and matched with Tees Valley children, resulting in a reduced pressure on the external agency budget at the end of this financial year.

Timescales for stage 1 and stage 2 assessments have been longer than is aimed for, and longer than government targets. However, the ATV timescales are better than England average. There have been 3 cases which have skewed timescale average figures, for reasons understood by the service, which include circumstances of an adopter family, and transfer of cases due to staff sickness in ATV.

Difficulties in obtaining adult health reports from GP's have impacted on the timescales for assessment, in a significant number of cases, pushing some approvals into the following year. A small number of GP practices have

been very difficult to work together with, around achieving the adult adopter medical. The service has used the Safeguarding GP to raise the profile and impact awareness for delays in adopter medicals, however, this issue remains problematic.

Demographics of adopters approved



Of fast-track adopters - 3 are former foster carers of the child, 7 are second time adopters, 3 are second time adopters who are connected to the child, having adopted an older sibling.

Key successes:

- Improved recruitment activity towards the latter part of the year.
- More ATV adopters being matched with children, reducing pressure on ATV budget.

Key Challenges

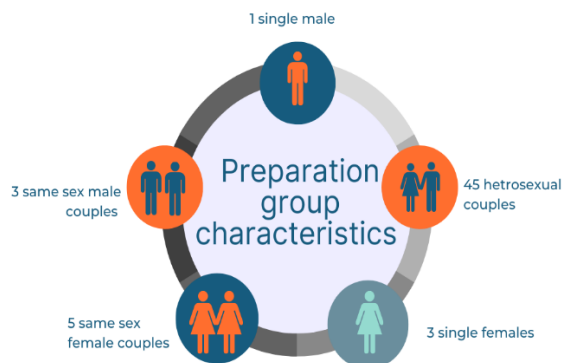
- Adopter approval numbers have reduced this year, and more are required to meet Tees Valley children's needs.
- Work with GP practices has been challenging.
- Timescales for assessment have therefore been impacted.

- Achieving adopters for the range of children and needs of children has been challenging.
- There has been a reduction in EP carers approved in this year.
- More adopters of different ethnicities required

6.3 Preparation to Adopt Training

7 Preparation to Adopt Training courses were delivered, each comprising 4 days.

A total of 57 family units attended preparation training.



The content of the course is regularly reviewed to reflect new research and learning from practice. Adopter feedback is sought after each course and is used to inform any changes to the content or to the experience for applicants.

Early Permanence preparation training

In addition to the standard preparation to Adopt Training, a total of 3 additional Early Permanence (EP) training programmes were run.

The service originally commenced EP training over a half day period with applicants. However, following review of practice, and preparation for prospective adopters, it was decided to develop ATV practice in line with the Coram BAAF programme. Two of ATV social workers have now undertaken the Coram BAAF "Train the Trainers" programme, and the 2 day course is now the standard training offer for ATV Early Permanence Carers.

12 families have undertaken the EP training course within this year.

Friends and Family Training

Friends and Family Training is a new development in the year 2021-22 and is a short addition to the Preparation to Adopt programme, delivered by one of

the ATV social workers. The aim of the course is to support the network of adoptive parents, through giving them an introduction to the needs of children and parenting concepts delivered to the adoptive parents.

A total of 9 courses were delivered in the year and a total of 120 friends and family of adoptive parents attended

Some feedback from attendees:

I feel much more aware of the process the adopters are going through and how I might support them through this. I am confident that this is going to be a positive experience and I'm really looking forward to welcoming a child into our family. I feel that I have increased my awareness of the issues and barriers that children who are adopted may face and how to support the adopter in parenting.

I wasn't aware that there would be, where possible contact with the birth parents. Which when explained that it was helpful for the needs of the child being place made perfect sense.

It has really enabled me to see the process that the adopters/friends will be going through and the difficult things that they will face, helping me to be more aware of the support that they will need through the journey that they are embarking on.

6.4 Children Referred

	Q1&Q2	Q3 &Q4	Full Year	
Early Notifications 2019-20	88	76	164	
Early Notifications 2020-21	98	97	195	19% increase
Early Notifications 2021-22	77	102	179	8 % decrease on previous year

6.5 Referrals by Local Authority

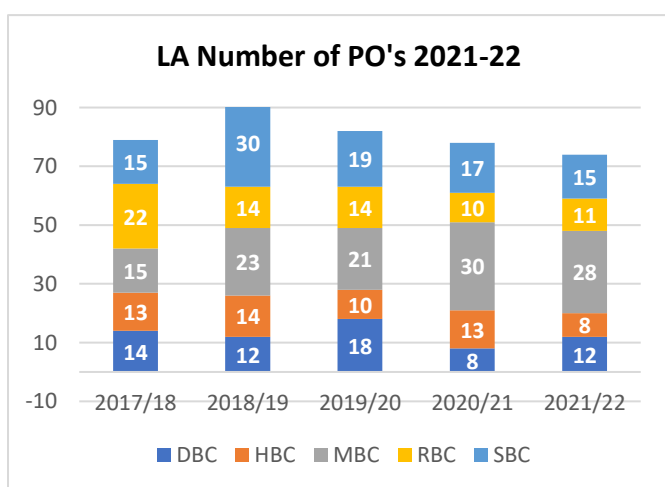
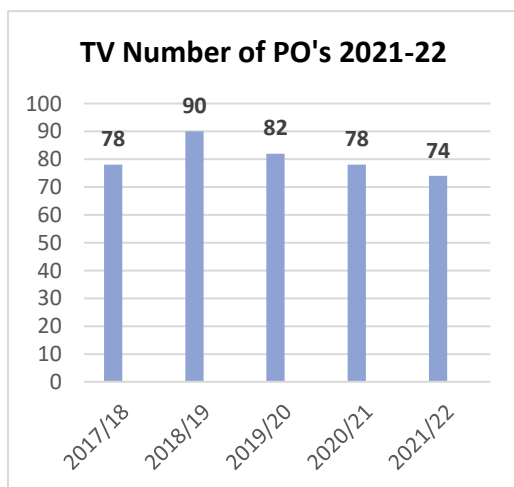
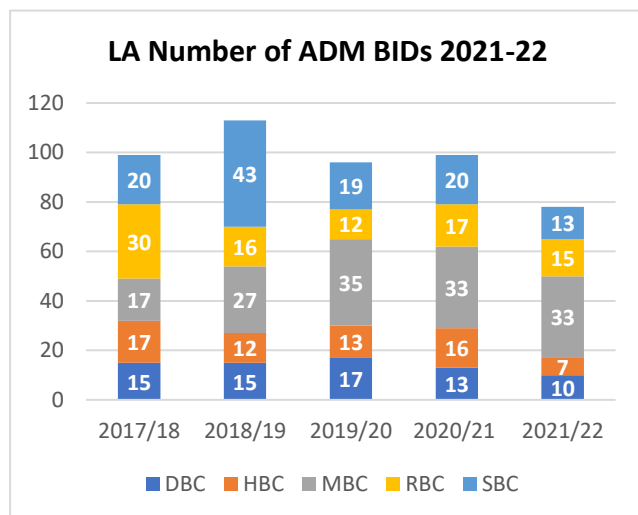
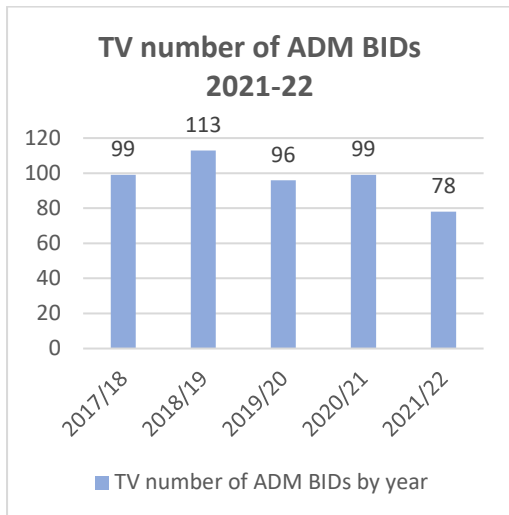
Year	DBC	HBC	MBC	R&CBC	SBC	TV
2020-21	26	28	58	31	52	195
2021-22	27	15	61	37	39	179

A notable increase in referrals from Redcar and Cleveland, and a small increase from Middlesbrough, while Hartlepool and Stockton saw a drop in referrals, within the reporting period. Darlington remain at similar levels.

Approximately 60 % of children referred go on to have an adoption plan. The Service monitors the children referred to enable active family finding from the earliest possible point in time.

6.6 Agency Decisions that Adoption is the child's plan (ADM) and Placement Orders (PO)

	ADM ATV	ADM National		PO ATV	PO National	
2020-21	99	3840		78	3027	
2021-22	78	3316		74	2846	
Inc/Dec	-21 %	-14%		-5%	-6%	

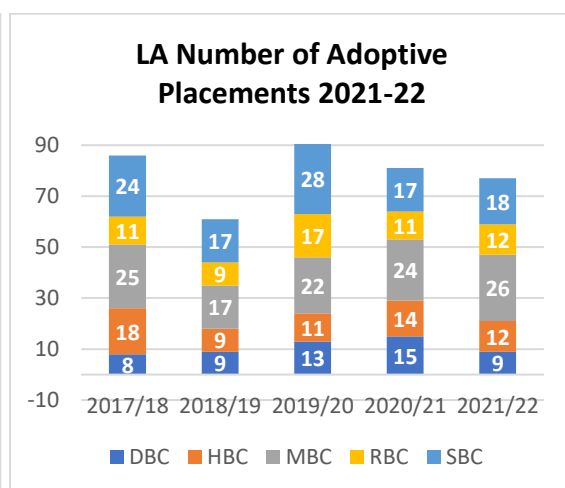
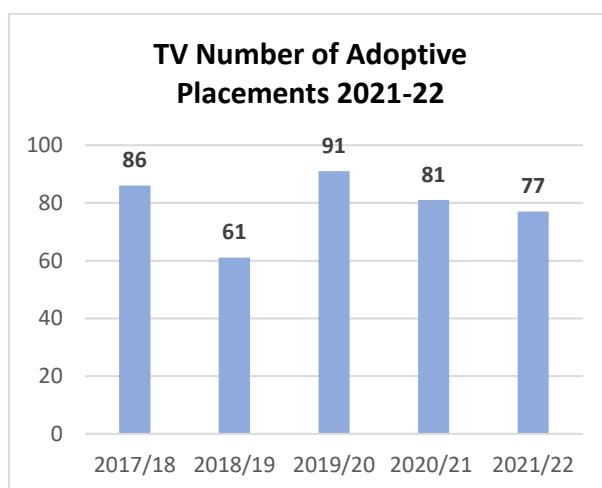


Agency Decisions that adoption is the child's plan, and Placement Orders granted, decreased both nationally, and regionally, compared with the

previous year. The Somerset ruling is a factor which had some impact in the final quarter of the year, with Courts granting fewer PO's while the outcome of the ruling was awaited. ADMs were also impacted as the Local Authority decision makers were required to be fully confident on compliance of health information, for the ADM decision. Even accounting for this temporary delay, there is some reduction in adoption activity, which may be accounted for by an overall reduction in children looked after, and greater numbers progressing to placement within family, via SGO.

6.7 Children Matched and Placed

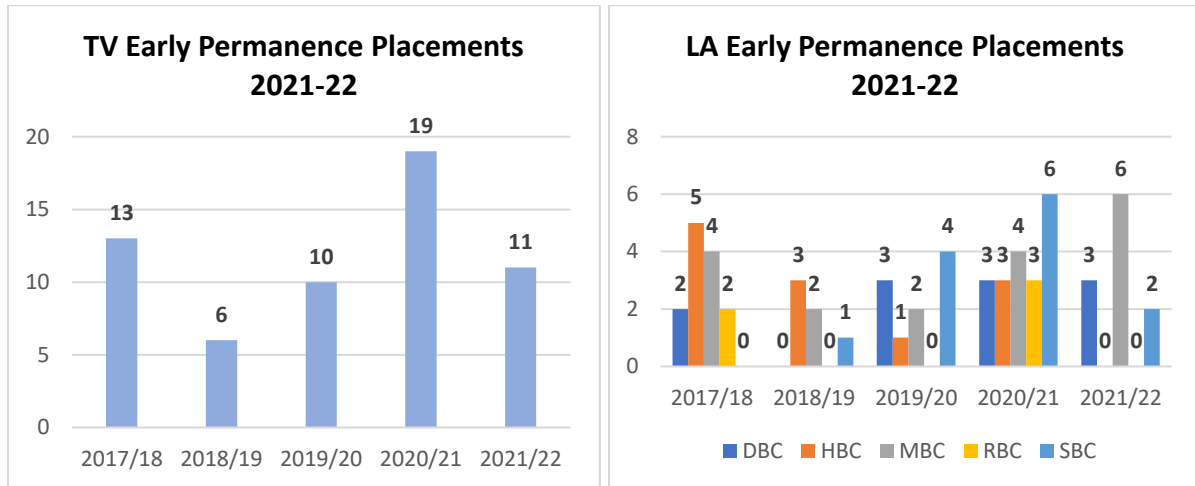
	Totals 2020-21	2021-22 Q1 and Q2	2021-22 Q2 and Q3	2021-22 Totals
ATV children placed with ATV adopters	52	44	14	58
ATV Children placed with external adopters	30	12	7	19
External children placed with ATV adopters	2	0	0	0
Total ATV children placed	82	57	20	77
Total placements	84	57	20	77



Placements of children for adoption are reduced by 7% within this year. This figure is impacted by the Somerset ruling, with a number of children being delayed into placement, pending the final Somerset ruling.

A positive factor is that there were 10 less external placements in the year, with 58 children placed with ATV adopters, compared with 52 in the previous year.

6.8 Early Permanence



Early permanence has been an area of continued national and regional development. The service manager chairs the national Early Permanence Working Group, which is a strategic forum taking forward national development, across the RAA and VAA sector, building on the best practice, and utilising research and data analysis to seek greater consistency in the offer across England.

Nationally, there is a greater exploration of Early Permanence, Fostering for Adoption (FFA) and Concurrent Planning Placements (CPP) . Practice behind EP, including work with care planning social work teams, and fostering services is underway.

ATV has begun to experience cases where a child placed for EP has been reunified with parents following full assessments and Court determination of the final plan. Through these cases, ATV has learned that more support is needed for EP carers generally, and most especially where a child they have been caring for may be re-unified. The service was able to access some very timely help from the South West region, to implement an EP support group, however, this area will require strengthening moving forward.

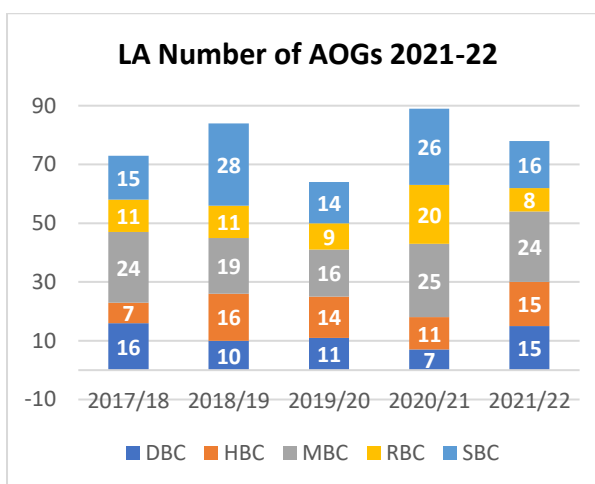
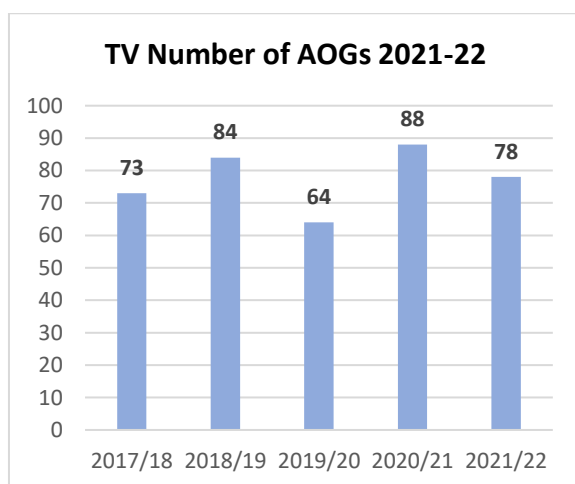
The regional EP Sufficiency project is tasked with addressing EP support to carers across the region.

One impact of children re-unifying is that the service has had a drop in adopters wishing to undertake EP and the managers of the service have needed to address some of these impacts- taking a step back, before revising plans to progress the Early Permanence Strategy Phase 2. The service has strengthened and reviewed its own practice, in line with learning, and practice guidance from other areas.

- The Preparation and support to EP carers has been strengthened
- The service is clearer about the fostering task, and outcome possibility of reunification from the outset with all carers
- The Team manager for Recruitment now has a monthly forum with Fostering Managers
- The service is delivering positive messages about birth parents, and positives of children being able to live with birth parents, as a core message from Information Evenings onwards
- More adopters are able to contribute to EP preparation, as we deliver more of these placements.
- An adopter led support group is available to EP carers.
- A leaflet for birth parents is available on the website.
- The service is planning more work with Workforce development teams across the region, to embed EP as a learning module for social workers.

6.9 Adoption Orders Granted

	DBC	HBC	MBC	R & CBC	SBC	Total
2020-21	7	10	25	20	26	88
2021-22	15	15	24	8	16	78



Adoption Orders were lower, with a high number being delayed due to Courts not granting the final order, until the outcome of the Somerset ruling. Adoption orders were down by 11% on the previous year. There was notable variation in the levels of adoption activity in each of the Local Authorities. Of note is that Redcar and Cleveland saw a significant decrease in numbers of Adoption Orders granted, from 20 to 8. Stockton also saw a decrease from 26 to 16 over the 2 years. Darlington and Hartlepool saw significant increase in numbers of children adopted from the previous year, with both having 15 children adopted. Middlesbrough dropped by one.

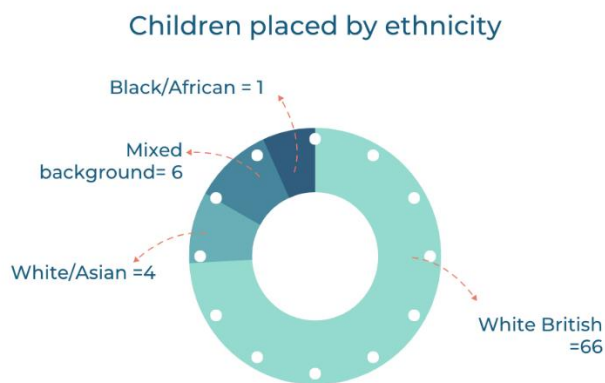
6.10 Characteristics of children

Age at the time of moving in with the adoptive family

0-12 months	1-2 yrs.	2-3 yrs.	3-4 yrs.	4-5 yrs.	5+ yrs.
46	12	8	5	4	2
60%	15%	10%	7%	5%	3%

The majority of children who moved in with their adoptive family in this period were under 12 months, and 75% were under 3 years.

Ethnicity of Children Placed



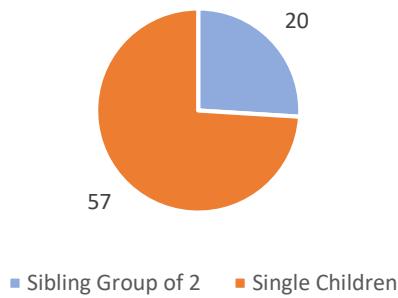
86 % of children who have moved into their adoptive family are of white British backgrounds. Of children with minority ethnic heritage, there is a range of backgrounds, with no predominant minority ethnic group for children requiring adoption.

Of the 11 children who were of minority ethnic background, 7 were placed with prospective adoptive parents of similar/same ethnicity, while the remaining 4 children were placed with white British adoptive parents. Where possible, the RAA will seek to match with adopters of a similar racial and ethnic background to the child, taking account that some children have mixed ethnicity, with one white parent. Matching takes account of how white parents will promote the needs of a black child, including opportunity for social family and community links with black children and families, and ways in which adopters will actively seek to help the child with their identity.

This is an area for continued focus, see Panel Chair summary.

Siblings/Additional needs

Children Placed



In this year, 57 children (74%) were placed as single children, and a further 20 children (26%) were placed in a sibling group of 2. There were no larger siblings groups placed within this year.

Gender

38 children placed were male, and 39 were female

Children placed by gender



6.11 Children waiting with a PO, not placed as of 31.3.22

38 children had a PO and were not yet placed on that date.

35 of these children had a clear link, and were proceeding to match, with some children proceeding to match with their foster carers, who wished to adopt them.

2 children were awaiting a revocation of the PO, due to change in circumstances.

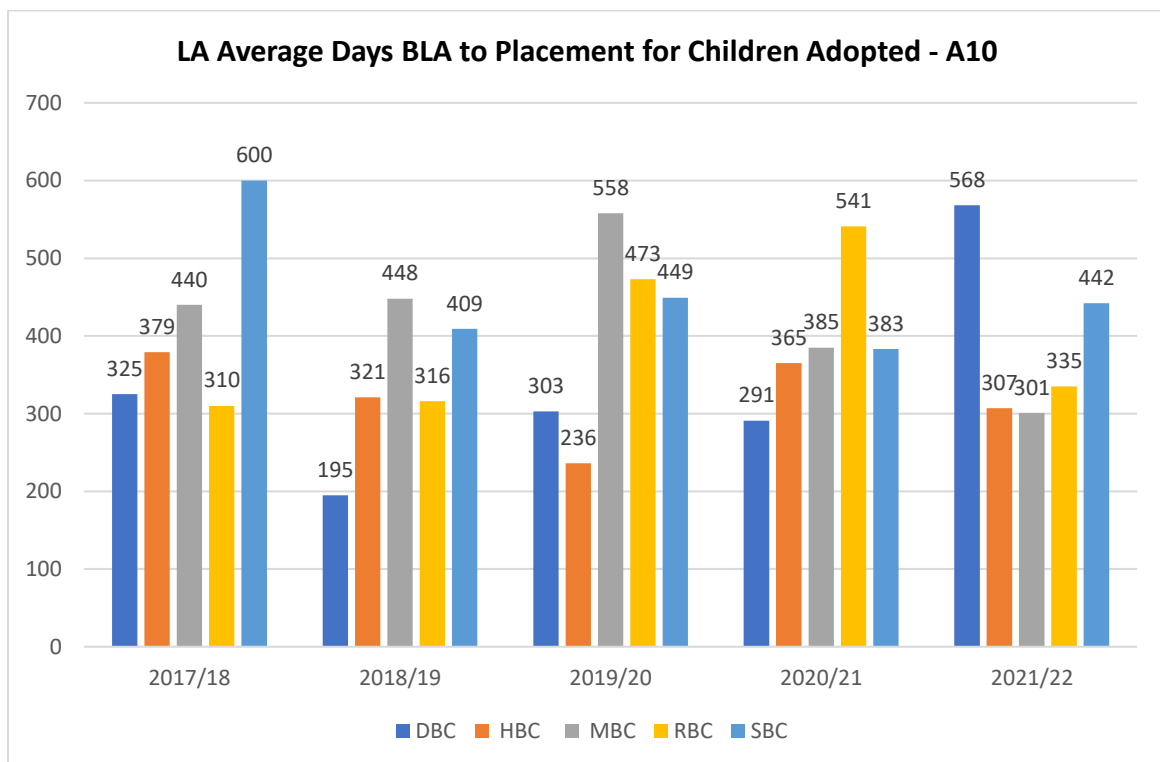
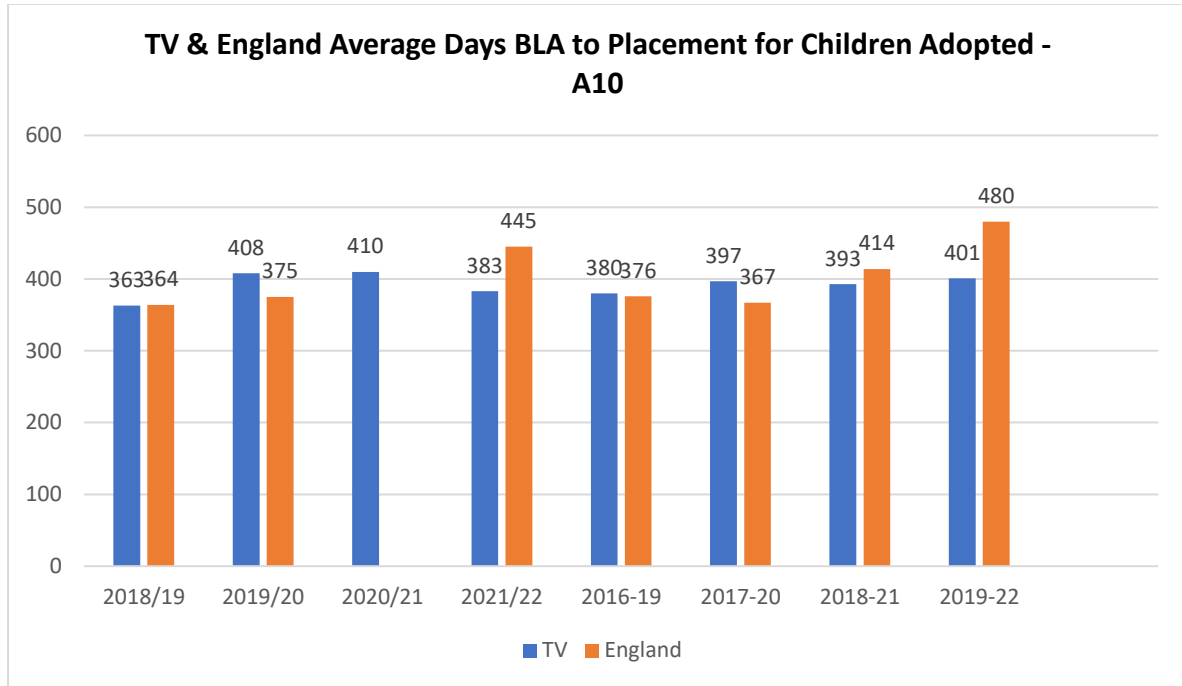
1 child was unlinked.

ATV has steadily improved the outcomes for children, once the PO is granted, through earlier family finding, and linking work. It is a huge success to be working with a very small number of children, for whom a family has not been identified by the time the PO is granted.

6.12 Children's timescales for adoption

Children's timescales are calculated for children adopted in that year. The total figure for adopted children is 78, broken down by local Authority, as in section 6.9 above.

Became looked after to moving in with adoptive parents (A10) (days)



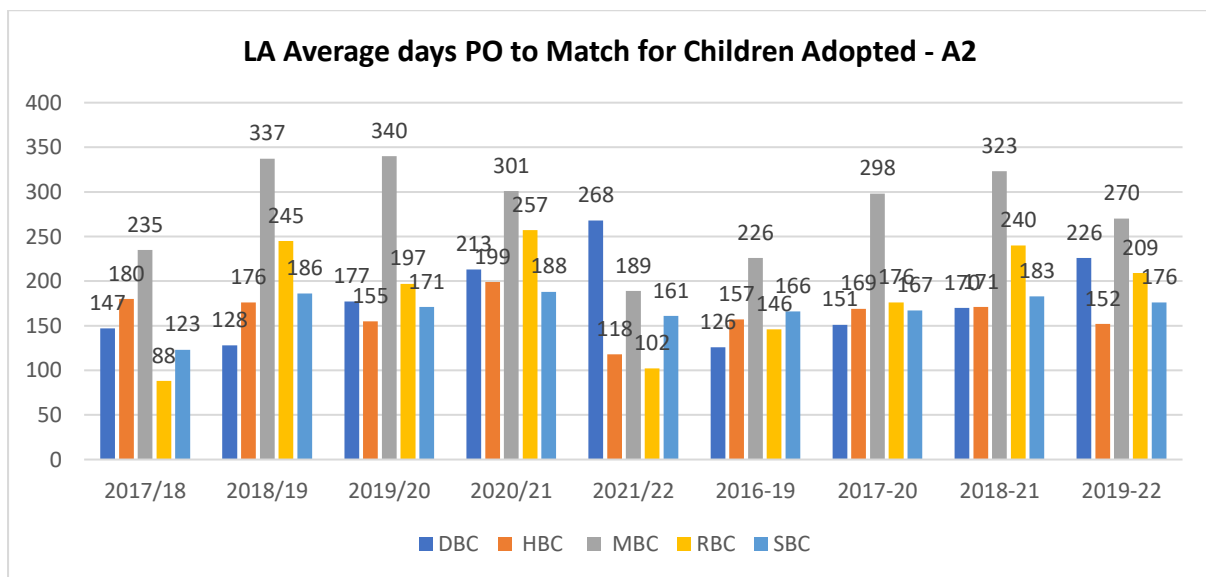
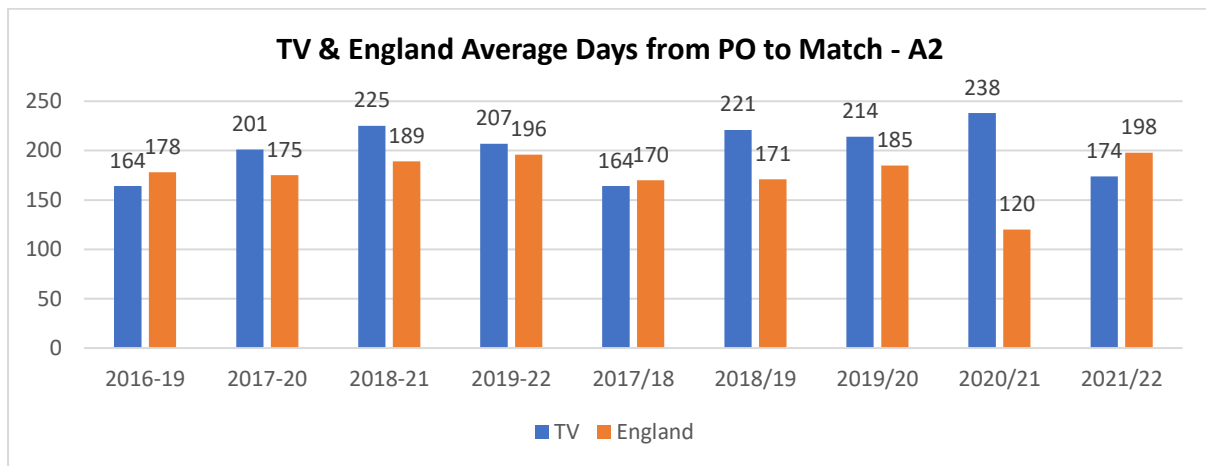
Timeliness for children to find and move in with their adoptive family has significantly improved this year, and ATV is performing well ahead of the

national average in this year. ATV has reduced the average timescale by 27 days and is 62 days under the England average. The government target timescale is 426 days, so ATV is currently well ahead of this.

This is reflective of strengthened work embedding early notifications and early family finding for children. It is recognised that this year there are fewer children with complex needs who have been adopted, with a smaller number overall of siblings and children over age 5, which will also impact on timeliness.

Considering each Local Authority, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland have all seen improvement and a reduction in this timescale within the year, while Darlington and Stockton have had on average longer waiting times. In each Local Authority, the circumstances of the child are understood, with siblings forming the children for whom timescales have been longer, sometimes related to legal proceedings.

Placement Order to Match (A2) (days)



The timeliness of matching a child with adopters following court authorisation to place (Placement Order) has also improved significantly this year, with ATV average reducing from 238 days to 174 days- a reduction of 64 days. England average in this year was 198 days: ATV has operated at 24 days below England average. Looking at the individual Local Authorities, only Darlington has had a higher day count, while all other LA's have a reduced PO to match timescale, and Redcar and Cleveland, Middlesbrough and Hartlepool showing significantly reduced timescales in this year. This is a significant improvement for ATV, and partners and is indicative of embedding the Information sharing protocol, and work to family find and plan matching at earlier stages. It is also indicative of fewer children in the "Priority" group, in this current year, as outlined in section 6.10 Characteristics of Children placed. Government target timescales are 121 days, and ATV and partners will continue to work on earlier permanence for children, through earlier family finding.

6.13 Disruptions

There has been 1 disrupted placement this year, prior to the making of an adoption order. A disruption meeting was held with key stakeholders for learning, across the Agency, and Local Authority, and to inform the child's future plan, and needs. ATV has held an all staff learning event, taking account of this disruption, and previous disruptions, from previous years.

7. Adoption Panel

ATV has welcomed Karen Simmons, as a new Independent Panel Chair in this year. Karen started with the service following the retirement of Sue Holton, one of the initial Independent Chairs. Karen is an experienced care planning senior manager, having previously worked as Assistant Director in a NE Local Authority. She brings a wealth of relevant adoption knowledge, and knowledge of Local Authorities, and regionalisation of adoption.

An Adoption panel Chair report has been produced by one of the Independent Chairs, in consultation with the other Independent Chair, and with Vice Chair, as required by Adoption National Minimum Standards (2014) 17.2.

The full report is made available to the Board at ATV; the Managers and staff of the service; panel members.

This report is for second period of the year 1.10.21-31.3.22

Data reported within the panel chairs report is detailed within the information above and will not be repeated.

The chair reports as follows:

There are 27 Central List members, with 5 new members in this period, and 1 member resignation. All new central list members have had induction into the role of panel, and their contribution, and to the Agency.

- Over this reporting period, the Agency undertook a consultation exercise with key stakeholders to review the potential for face-to-face Panels to resume. Following further deliberation, the Agency has elected to continue with Virtual Panels and will review this position in September 2022.

While it is recognised that face to face Panels may provide Panel members with the opportunity to consolidate working relationships and for applicants to have direct contact with Panel, this is agreed to be outweighed by benefits of Virtual Panels. The advantages of Virtual Panels are seen to be the accessibility of Virtual Panels for applicants and prospective adopters who may be at some distance to the Agency, and to placing social workers. Panels have also benefitted from the presence of Medical Advisers, whose regular attendance has been supported by the use of Virtual Panels.

There has been no interruption to Panel business due to technical or internet access issues. The quality of discussion between Panel members and attendees is not reported to have been impeded through virtual Panels. To mitigate risks to Panel business, applicants are prepared by ATV social workers to use Teams before Panel. Panel prepare and agree questions for applicants which are shared with them in advance of Panel.

Panel business runs smoothly with all relevant paperwork provided in advance. Panel minutes are available promptly for Panel members' oversight. The process of authorising the Panel minutes has now been amended so that the final Panel minutes is always signed off by the Panel Chair.

- The quality of CPRs is seen to be inconsistent, ranging from very good examples to poor. One particularly good example of a CPR has been identified which was comprehensive in its content and used clear accessible language which was considered to be helpful in later life for the child to make sense of their journey.

Where CPRs were seen to be of good quality, there was a clear explanation of the child's journey, consideration of birth parents' circumstances and those of siblings and an understanding of the child's experience of being cared for. There were strong examples of where the child 'came to life' from the page with a good description of them as individual children.

- The quality of APRs and matching documentation was generally seen as being of good quality with a clear articulation of the steps taken by all stakeholders when a match is under consideration and a clear rationale consistently provided to support a match. The evidence in the APRs confirmed that the matching process works well with the involvement of the

Agency's Medical Adviser, use of a Chemistry Visit and planning through Matching and Selection meetings. The oversight of a link social worker from ATV is seen as being critical to ensure the smooth running of matching arrangements and the quality of matching documentation for external matches.

The use of the Adoption Support Plan in its new format has been well received and provides a clear view to Panel about support to be made available to children and prospective adoptive families at the point of matching. The view of the Panel Chairs is that APRs would benefit from specific evidence of an assessment of the child's needs in their prospective adoptive family so that it is clear how the Adoption Support Plan is to meet these.

Panel feedback was that APRs be explicit particularly in transcultural and transracial matches about how the identify and cultural needs of the adopted child are to be promoted.

There appears to be a blanket approach regarding the frequency of Letterbox contact with it often being set at twice per year regardless of the likelihood of this being successful. Further consideration is required in APRs on an individual case basis about the reasons behind proposals regarding Letterbox contact.

In terms of Early Permanence, the best examples include the matching and decision-making documents to provide clarity regarding the initial matching considerations relating to the Early Permanence arrangement. It is proposed that all matches where there has been an Early Permanence arrangement include the decision-making documents which agreed the initial placement.

- Prospective Adopters Reports are generally received by Panel as being of a high quality with a sound assessment of prospective adopters' strengths and vulnerabilities.

Strong examples of those seen were where evidence in the PAR was explicitly triangulated with third party information particularly personal referees. The only area for improvement identified was for consistency in terms of style with reports being a standard set that reports are succinct and avoid repetition from one section to another.

Thematic strengths and areas for improvement for ATV Panel Business and Management of Panel

Strengths

- Panel is well organised with Panel paperwork made available to Panel members in a timely way
- The Panel benefits from child focused Panel members from a wide range of backgrounds.
- Panels are quorate with no delays to Panel business
- The quality of assessment and decision making for children has been positive over this last reporting period.

- There are good examples of early permanence and sustained efforts to match children to meet their diverse needs including appropriate use of external matches
- The Panel have appreciated the knowledge and expertise the team manager group have brought to Panel when acting as Panel Advisers. It is anticipated that a dedicated Panel Adviser role will bring consistency to the quality assurance of documents to Panel and Panel's own quality assurance function.

Areas for Development

- Regular quarterly meetings between the Panel Chairs and ATV's ADM to strengthen communication and their respective quality assurance roles
- Although the Agency has continued to successfully recruit to the Central List, further recruitment is planned to achieve a diverse Panel membership including members who are care experienced
- Strengthening the Quality Assurance role of Panel through a specific Quality Assurance item on the agenda of each Panel meeting
- Joint training between Panel members and ATV to develop joint understanding of Panel's quality assurance function.
- Observation of Panel by Local Authority ADMs to provide assurance.

8. Adoption Support

Adoption support is a key strategic priority, both nationally through the National Adoption Strategy, and locally, through the agreed ATV board strategic priorities.

Adoption Tees Valley continues to operate the 3 Tier model of Adoption Support

Tier 1 is universal support which includes:

- a post adoption support plan for all new children placed, as recommended by the Adoption UK Adoption Barometer report (2020)
- One year post order adoption support from the named social worker
- paid for access to the Adopter Hub (PACT UK) for all new prospective adopters, through matching and placement, until the Adoption order is granted.
- Engagement events such as support groups, and activity days
- Monthly ATV newsletter
- Access to the closed facebook group for ATV adoptive parents, and prospective adopters, with up to date local information around activities, benefits and information on adoption
- Facilitation of all indirect contact via letterbox arrangements

Tier 2 Targeted support, relevant to the level of need:

- Therapeutic Parenting courses, as detailed below

- Access to Education support from the ATV Education Support Worker
- Support for Letter box contact where requested
- Some direct facilitation of contact between adopted children and birth family members

Tier 3 Support accessed through an adoption support assessment completed by a qualified and experienced adoption support social worker, addressing higher levels of need:

- Assessment for therapeutic intervention, accessed through the ASF
- Allocation of a social worker, either as a single qualified worker for the family, or as part of a multi-disciplinary team, working across multiple agencies (e.g. LA/CAMHS)
- Adoption allowances, which are paid by the relevant local Authority

8.1 Adoption Support Audit

In February 2022 ATV was invited to be a pilot RAA for a new Adoption Support Audit, geared at helping the national system co-ordinate a consistent and unified framework for evaluating adoption support, examining strengths of the ATV RAA offer, and those areas for development.

ATV Service Manager, Adoption Support team, and the ATV Board welcomed the opportunity to be involved in this audit, as it offers an independent assessment and evaluation of the ATV offer, against the "Blueprint for Adoption Support".

Overall, feedback has been positive with many areas of strength identified. In particular, the ATV Education Support offer, delivered by a skilled and experienced educationalist, funded by the collective of 5 Virtual Schools (VS) in Tees Valley, was identified as exemplary. The Auditor felt this element of the ATV offer demonstrated an innovative use of the VS funding for previously looked after children, and through the interview with the Education Support Worker, and evidence provided, the impact of Education Support was able to be positively evaluated.

An area of development is for more strategic partnership working with health. This has been debated at the ATV Board following discussion on the audit findings, and there are now plans underway for a Strategic Board to oversee multi-disciplinary work between Children's Services and Strategic Health, in relation to Children in Our Care, and Adopted Children.

An action plan has been developed following the Audit, which is being progressed through ATV, with partner Local Authorities, and in dialogue with services contributing to an adoption support offer.

Future National Strategic Developments in Adoption Support

- The national RAA system is currently working with the ASF to develop a nationally agreed outcomes framework for adoption support. A pilot is underway, testing out models of outcome measures. It is intended that the benefits to the child and family of any funded therapeutic input will be able to be evaluated, which will impact on evaluation of quality and impact of service delivery by providers.
- The ASF has been confirmed for the next 3 years, and a new method for agreeing funding has been implemented, with all work being invoiced in arrears.
- The Department for Education has confirmed funding via the Spending Review for future delivery of a programme of Centres for Excellence, which are multi-disciplinary teams centred around RAA's, delivering a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary connected adoption support offer for children and families. The 2 pilot Centres for Excellence, in One Adoption West Yorkshire, and Adoption Counts were positively evaluated in the e cory's third evaluation of RAA's. It is anticipated that funding criteria will be rolled out in Autumn 2022, and ATV will seek to maximise opportunities to work in partnership to promote multi-disciplinary working.

8.2 Developments in Adoption Support ATV

Reported at the last annual report was a decline in numbers of assessments completed, and a slight reduction in drawn down funds from the ASF, to provide therapeutic support to adopted children, those placed for adoption, and their families.

A further challenge for the service was the long waiting lists for access to an adoption support assessment, which could be several months.

Development over this period:

- Waiting lists have been addressed through a review and re-structure of the adoption support assessment process. A new 2-hour adoption support assessment is booked and completed via telephone, by one of the adoption support social workers, following any enquiry, or duty referral. These assessments are booked with the adoptive parent, and provide an adoption support assessment within 10 days, which enables gathering of the required information on which to submit an application to the ASF, and consideration of any tier 1 or tier 2 provision which can be offered, to the family without delay. Allocation to a

social worker remains a challenge, in some cases, however, the new process is enabling the Adoption Support Manager to assess all new cases and prioritise accordingly.

- Development of direct work with children and young people has been subject to re-focus over this year. In December 2021 the ATV Board agreed an increase in resource for dedicated adoption support workers (none social work qualified). The service has been able to build on some project work undertaken during 2020-21 with a group of young people, and a film was made around their experiences in education during 2021. The service has now appointed 2 further full-time adoption support workers and has been able to dedicate the equivalent of 0.5 FTE post to direct work with children. The project is managed by one of the Assistant Team Managers, Di Cox.
- The service has continued to build on the delivery of therapeutic parenting groups, and tier 1 groups which are available to all adopters. The service has partnered with the Sage Gateshead, to bring the “Loud and Clear” music project to ATV, with weekly music sessions taking place for pre-school children and their parents.

8.3 Adoption Support -Referrals and Assessments

	2020-21	2021-22	
Number of adoption support referrals	83	106	
Access to Files requests/completed	36	40	
Adoption Support Assessments completed	55	106 +94 repeated assessments	(Repeat assessments not reported previous year)
Successful application to ASF	166	200	
Unsuccessful application to ASF	0	0	
Value of applications to ASF	£637,551 + £70,965 Covid	£718,302	
Education Support Cases during year	59	77	

Number of Post Box Contract Agreements	279	956 *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methodology for measures have changed within the year. Now reported- new letterbox contracts set up.
Birth parent Support Referrals		42	
Children returned to Local Authority care Following Adoption order granted		6 (all older children/teenagers)	Information has not been reported previously.

New adoption support assessments have almost doubled on the previous year, and the data now includes those children and families where a second or third assessment has been undertaken, for further funding application to the ASF.

The picture is that many children require a further period of therapy, and this means that ATV remain involved, overseeing review of the therapeutic input, and any further social work support, or involvement that is required.

The service has addressed challenges around delays in families being able to access an adoption support assessment, through an initial assessment, which meet statutory requirements. This early assessment enables consideration of services which can be offered more quickly. Crucially, this allows the application for therapy to be made to the ASF at an earlier stage.

On 31.3.22 there were 20 families awaiting allocation for an adoption support assessment, however, at the time of writing this has reduced to 0 families waiting, which is a significant achievement for the Adoption Support Service, and of course for families. Allocation to a social worker, where required may take longer, however, initial involvement, and an offer of some additional support is enabled more quickly.

Challenges remain in relation to access to wider supports which are not available within ATV, and which are accessed through the Local Authority in which the family live, or from health and third sector providers.

During the year there were 28 children also open to local Authorities, either in Child in need or Child protection teams. A further 15 children were open to CAMHS services, or have been during this year.

The service is working towards a more integrated approach to adoption support, to prevent family breakdown, and the long term impact on children and young people, and their families, where needs are not met, and support is not provided in a timely way.

In this year, although just one child had a disruption prior to adoption order, there were 6 older young people whose adoption placement broke down, and who returned to the care of the Local Authority. These children are being reviewed, to analyse factors which impacted on their breakdown, which will inform future multi-agency work.

Adopter Hub

The service has continued the contract with the Adopter Hub, which is an on line resource and support service delivered by PACT UK. The service originally commissioned this service through covid funding in 2020-21. The Adopter Hub has now been integrated into preparation and support of adopters, with specialist and up to date webinars and information on a range of relevant topics for adoption and caring for adopted children. The service commissions 200 licenses, and adopters paid membership commences from the start of stage 1 and is ended at a time when there is a need to enable more new applicants to register.

Newsletter and ATV Facebook

The service provides a monthly newsletter for adopters, which was positively fed back on in the survey of adoptive parents, 2021.

The service has a closed facebook site for adoptive parents registered with ATV, which is a further source of disseminating information, resources, information about events, and general adoption updates.

8.4 Therapeutic Providers- Commissioned services

ATV has operated a providers List, for therapeutic input since 2019. The commissioning strategy is to achieve better outcomes and quality of intervention, through a procurement and commissioning process.

The Framework was opened up again for additional Providers in 2021, and a further 3 providers were awarded Preferred provider status.

The framework is now due for a full re-tender, and this process has commenced.

8.5 Therapeutic parenting and Supporting the Sensory needs of children

These are targeted towards families who may need additional support to assist with attachment and emotional needs, including behaviours which bring challenge to parenting, and for the child.

Providers on the Framework have been invited to deliver group therapeutic parenting training.

The following group sessions have been delivered, funded via ASF:

- Nurturing Attachments – a 3 day programme, following the Kim Golding DDP model delivered by the Kim Golding Foundation. This was attended by 3 families.
- Future Stars Sensory integration – a 10 week programme for parents and children, to support sensory development and integration. A total of 5 families attended.
- Non Violent Resistance Training for parents who have experienced violence or threats from children placed. This is a 10 week programme, aimed at helping parents to share, reflect and learn around the communication needs of their child, and support to reduce the dynamic of violence. The programme is delivered by a trained therapeutic leader, who is also an adoptive parent. This programme has run twice in ATV in this period, providing help to 19 families.

8.6 Education Support

As detailed above, Education Support service is seen as a significant strength of the Adoption Support offer at ATV.

77 families have received a service from the Education Support Worker, many of whom also are “open” to the Adoption Support team for tier 3 services.

Leanne Albesson, Education Support Worker highlights:

Education support has been very much about raising awareness of the needs of the adopted children and highlighting the impact of early trauma, which adopted children have experienced in many cases.

There have been 8 cases where the children successfully changed education provision to one which has a greater understanding and can meet their needs, and families feel supported.

There were 9 cases where after support intervention, the children were added to the Special Educational Needs register and received additional support.

There were 2 cases of the child “school refusing” which has now changed due to the school have more support for the children in terms of higher needs funding. 9 of the children received EHCP’s to secure support. Of these 9, 1 of the children was not previously on the SEN register and spent the majority of the day out of the classroom. School now have a better understanding of the child, and their support needs, associated with adoption and early life experiences.

Additionally, the Education Support Worker has undertaken training related to adopted children and their needs for designated teachers in one local

Authority; training in trauma and attachment across 3 schools, and has contributed to the production of the ATV Young people's film on education experiences. She has also supported the peer review process in one Local Authority- Redcar and Cleveland.

In 2021 the Education Support Worker post was confirmed as a permanent post within ADT, with agreement from the 5 VS Heads and the ATV Board, in order to secure continuity of the service.

9. Non-Agency Adoptions

Enquiries for Step Parent Adoptions	50
Assessments Completed	6 (plus 4 withdrawn)
Adoptions Granted	6
Assessments awaiting allocation	60

One social worker is allocated to undertake step parent adoption assessment work. This is the maximum current resource that ATV can reasonably allocate, given the assessment, family finding and adoption support work for Children in Our Care, and adopted children that is required.

The demand for step parent assessments is increasing, and presents a troubling dilemma for ATV and for the ATV Board, as this essentially private family law work competes for the stretched resources of LA's. Currently, ATV is unable to allocate any more than 1 worker to these non-agency adoptions, as there is demand for recruitment, assessment, placement and support work for children on our care, requiring adoption.

Children in Step Parent families are largely children who are already secure, stable, live with and have relationships with their parents and carers. The child and family wish is to confirm this via Court Order, however, demand issues are present in this region.

10. Staffing

ATV had the following organisational structure, within the year:

Service Manager	1 FTE	Marketing Officer	0.5 FTE
Team Manager – Recruitment and Assessment	1 FTE	Qualified SW's undertaking assessments, family finding, matching and placing children, preparation training	10.9 FTE
Team Manager – Adoption Support	1 FTE	Qualified social workers undertaking adoption support, and lead on Letter Box	5.15 FTE

Assistant Team Manager- Family Finding; Permanence Champion; Adoption Support	2 FTE	Qualified social worker role undertaking stepparent adoptions	1 FTE
Business Manager	1 FTE	Senior Business Support Business Support Apprentice BS	1 FTE 1.8 FTE 1.0 FTE
		Adoption Support workers Letter box Co-Ordinator Education Support Worker	1.4 FTE 0.8 FTE 0.95 FTE

Staffing budget is £1,334,892 per annum.

As part of the ATV Review, analysis and comparison was made with 14 RAA's, who had published financial information.

The average staffing costs per unit cost of adoption across all 14 RAA's was £21,738 while ATV average staffing cost was £18,569, with a variance of £3169 under the average staffing cost, per unit cost of adoption.

A business case was made to Board in October 2021 for an additional 2 FTE social workers; 0.6 FTE Panel Manager and Advisor; 1.4 Adoption support workers (unqualified). Increase in social workers is to invest in more internal assessments, and in Panel Manager it is to improve quality of Panel function, and to ensure all regulatory aspects are met.

The ATV Board agreed these posts in January 2022, and recruitment has commenced to fill the posts. At the time of writing not all posts are filled, although recruitment has taken place.

Staff Engagement

Staff have had a survey as part of the overall review of ATV within this year.

The reviewer felt the responses were very positive, and included comments such as:

- "I have always felt so passionate about being involved in creating the best possible outcomes for vulnerable children. I feel like everyone at ATV shares this passion and uses their high levels of knowledge, skills and experience to find loving families for vulnerable children across the Tees Valley, who are unable to live with their birth family for whatever reason"
- "Nice atmosphere to work in - both staff and managers - all helpful and welcoming. Feel that making a difference to children's lives opportunity and feel listened to regarding developments and improvements"

- “Seeing the difference, we make to children and families alike is worth the at times extremely hard work that goes into each and every case. From where we started to where we are now feels like a lifetime away and I’m excited to see where we go in the next 3 years”.
- “I have really supportive managers, I’m trusted to get on with my work, I feel valued”.

When asked the question “What do you think Adoption Tees Valley could improve on?”, one staff member said

- “I feel like I’m stuck in a ‘structure’ with no scope for progression”.

Several staff referred to the need for more staffing resource due to high workloads and the need to improve timeliness, post-adoption requests and referrals, life story books and letterbox services. The survey feedback taken alongside analysis of value for money, and unit cost of adoption, should inform a review of capacity to manage volume of work in ATV.

Within the survey, 94 % of staff said they felt they had the opportunity to develop innovative and creative practice.

Staff Training

Staff have the opportunity to select a variety of training opportunities which are on offer from the host Council, Stockton, or from one of the other LA’s. Training is regularly offered from the Tees Safeguarding Hub and also from the RAA and CVAA programme.

All staff have now been advised to maintain their training via the Stockton individualised learning portal.

2 Assistant Team Managers have started the Stockton Council Level 5 Management Qualification, via an apprenticeship, and 1 Senior Business Support Officer is undertaking the Level 3 Supervisor Apprenticeship.

Additionally, ATV have contributed to Middlesbrough Redcar and Cleveland and Darlington training programmes on adoption, including for IRO’s.

Staff Absence

Staff absence due to sickness in this year is 259 days, which is 7.7 days per staff member.

Staff absence has largely been in relation to a small number of staff with periods of absence over 3 months in this year. There has been some impact of covid related absence, although within this year this has not led to a significant loss of any member of staff. Staffing absence has had impact on the overall resource within ATV, and additional temporary staffing has been put in place to provide some cover, but the service has run at a lower level of staffing overall.

Staff Turnover

During this year 3 members of staff have left the service, one who has been on maternity leave, and 2 have retired.

11. 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.

- The Review of ATV was a wide reaching review, to assess progress of the RAA against the agreed objectives that were set out at the implementation of the RAA. The report was completed in this year, and was presented to Board, with a development plan.
- The adoption support service was a pilot for an independent audit of adoption support. A report was produced and presented to Board. Strengths are reported in the main body of this report.
- Tracking systems to enable regular monitoring of children and adopter progress; timeliness, and outcomes. Tracking highlights barriers to be addressed, for example, delays in GP reports have been addressed with the assistance of the Safeguarding GP. Tracking highlights cases to be escalated within the LA where there is risk of drift and delay.
- Tracking of children enables focussed discussions with Adoption Lead officers quarterly, or as required, to ensure that individual children's plans are progressed in a timely way, and that thematic practice issues within Local Authorities are addressed. A performance, assurance and challenge meeting (PAC) has been held with the Adoption Lead for each LA, quarterly following ASGLB and ATV Scorecard data returns. The output is the LA Adoption Lead report to their respective LA Performance Monitoring Forums.
- Permanence Champions for each Local Authority ensure that children's referrals and plans are understood, and progressed to adoption where applicable, in a timely way.
- ATV attends one Local Authority (Middlesbrough) Permanence Monitoring Group, monthly, and the Gateway panel monthly, to assist with the improvement journey for that LA, and with quality and timeliness of practice for children.
- The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is generated quarterly detailing key performance data, user feedback and satisfaction measures; complaints/compliments; finance. This is presented to the Board quarterly, which has a role in questioning, challenge and being satisfied as to the effectiveness of the service.
- The Adoption Panel has a quality monitoring role in the Service around business presented to it, for consideration and advice. As detailed in

section 7, there are plans to develop training for LA's, as part of strategic workforce development planning.

- The Adoption Panel Chairs meet with the Service Manager and 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.
- Staff performance is monitored via supervision, which is monthly for all staff.
- A case practice audit tool has been developed. Case practice audits were undertaken, across a sample of case records, with managers independent of that case, and the worker. These was collated into a thematic audit report for board to consider.
- Most staff, and all managers have had an annual appraisal.
- Most central List members and Panel Chairs have an annual appraisal. Panel chairs now request that the agency collates themes from appraisal for the annual report. Panel training has been delivered to panel members arising from feedback from panel appraisals.
- 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 via a survey.
- 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.

12. Finance

Adoption Tees Valley is joint funded as a shared service under the Education and Adoption Act (2016) and is a joint funded on a shared basis, with the allocations of funding per LA as detailed below.

2021/22 Financial Year End Position

At the end of the 2021/22 financial year, Adoption Tees Valley overspent by £25,000, which has been funded from the ATV reserve. This leaves only a very small balance in reserves of £1,200

Expenditure Heading	Budget 2021/22	Actual Outturn	Variance year end
Employees	1,331,000	1,434,000	103,000
Running Costs	287,000	275,000	(12,000)

Support Service Costs	113,000	114,000	1,000
Interagency Fees	500,000	677,000	177,000
Income	(2,231,000)	(2,475,000)	(244,000)
Total	0	25,000	(24,000)

Interagency Fees

Interagency fees are payable for those children matched with adopters who are not recruited by ATV. The budget for interagency fees is £500,000 and was overspent by £177,000. This led to additional contributions from each Local Authority, as follows:

	Budgeted Contribution to Interagency Fees	Actual for 2021/22	Additional Contribution for 21/22
ATV Interagency 2021/22	500,000	677,000	177,000
Darlington - 20.2%	101,000	137,000	36,000
Hartlepool - 14%	70,000	95,000	25,000
Middlesbrough - 27.2%	136,000	184,000	48,000
Redcar & Cleveland - 14%	70,000	95,000	25,000
Stockton - 24.6%	123,000	166,000	43,000

Key areas of overspend:

- Staffing- temporary cover for maternity leave, and staff to cover sickness absences.
- Additional costs due to 12 month post placements costs, where child placed with VAA's. This is due to adoption orders being held up.

New Funding Formula from 1.4.22

As part of the ATV review the funding formula for running costs- the core cost budget, and for interagency fees was reviewed, to take account of the actual split of business in the 1st 3 years of operation. The review considered some aspects of an activity based costing model, and actual business undertaken on behalf of each Local Authority in the first 3 years.

A new funding formula has been recommended, and signed off, by the Board, and by Directors of Finance in all 5 LA's.

The future split from 1.4.22 will be as follows:

	DBC	HBC	MBC	R&CBC	SBC
Core running costs (2018-2022)	16.2	13.5	31.8	16.7	21.8
Core running costs 2022 onwards	14.6%	14.9%	28.1%	15.5%	26.9%
Interagency fees (2018-2022)	20.2%	14%	27.2%	14%	24.6%
Interagency Fees 2022 onwards	14.6%	14.9%	28.1%	15.5%	26.9%
Support costs (2018-22)	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%
Support costs 2022 onwards	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%

13. Development Plan for ATV

Area for Development	Plans – at Oct 2021	Progress	Next steps
Strengthening voice and involvement of adopted children in ATV	Appointment to a dedicated YP worker, to support inclusion and involvement	Equivalent of 0.5 FTE adoption SW allocated to children's work. Groups commencing Sept 22, with some additional work over summer 2022.	Project led by an ATV manager, to increase children and young people involvement in ATV commenced. Plans for new Guide to Adoption and group work, for different ages.
Strengthening preparation and assessment of adopters, to support more adopters taking	Strengthening assessment to support pathway will continue	Challenges remain around adopters for Priority children. New tailored	Pilot for tailored assessment will be reviewed internally, and continued if effective.

more children with additional needs		assessment process in pilot. Adopter Hub is targeted at helping prospective adopters continue to develop.	Modules for adding more "add on" training pre and post approval.
Strengthening sufficiency of adopters, through increased marketing	Invest to save business case for more assessment capacity to recruit internal adopters	Challenges in adopter recruitment this year. Staffing increased by 2 FTE SW's, not yet fully in post.	New allocation of SW to oversee enquiry process, to ensure no gaps, and to improve timeliness. Wider marketing strategy.
Taking early permanence strategy to the next stage – phase 2	Support regional EP co-ordinator role and continue to progress EP development with regional partners.	Regional EP co-ordinator in post. Phase 2 EP strategy underway, based on learning from Phase 1.	Continue to work with pan regional EP sufficiency project. Support the Concurrency Project. Build on adopter support for EP carers. Phase 2 training to regional LA's in EP.
Strengthen partnership working, including with early help, to strengthen support to adopters when they need it.	Adoption Support audit. Revised work with Early help partners.	Plans still underway. New region wide strategic health board has been scoped, and due to commence.	Plans being proposed to ATV Board for strengthened adoption support, in line with national model, and ATV adoption support audit.
Continuing to address life story book model.	Support CSW's where needed to complete LS books.	LSB's are now embedded as the responsibility of the CSW.	
Continuing to address timescales for adoption support assessments	The adoption support audit will assist with reviewing service	Restructure of the way in which ASA's are completed- to reduce waiting	Continue to embed the model and strengthen the early offer.

	delivery and offer.	times and provide early access to ATV supports. Currently, none waiting.	Focus on return to care cases for impact evaluation.
Taking forward Panel improvements to maintain a streamlined approach to panel, and quality CPR's	Recruit to Panel Manager post	Panel Manager/Advisor now in post. Action Plan is in place for Panel work.	Further development of integrated QA of panel activity, and involvement of LA ADM's Panel training to reflect needs and gaps.
Continue to develop a focus on children's diversity needs, and welcoming/increasing prospective adopters from ethnic minority backgrounds	Identified through ATV Review	Allocation of a senior SW and Recruitment Manager to this area of work	Community development as part of recruitment More evidence of consideration of diversity needs of children, in CPR's and in matching, including early permanence Panel member diversity to be strengthened.

Vicky Davidson Boyd

Service Manager

Adoption Tees Valley 22.7.22

