

Adoption Tees Valley

Bi-Annual Report

1.4.22-30.9.22



“Adoption Tees Valley supported us every step of the way throughout the process, and continues to support our family, now and in the future.”

Transform a child's life...

Adoption Tees Valley

Bi-Annual Report 2022-23

Period- 1.4.22-30.9.22

1. Introduction

This report will provide performance information on adoption activity for the period of 1.4.22-30.9.22. Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) is the Regional Adoption Agency for the 5 Local Authorities of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton.

The report will focus on an overview of performance for the first half year of 2022-23. The full year progress in all areas of the Adoption Agency was last reported in the Annual Report for 2021-22, and will be reported on again, in the full year Annual Report for this current year- 2022-23. The ATV Board has agreed that a more concise report will be presented for the bi-annual report, which will detail key performance information in relation to adoption activity, with comparisons with national performance over the same period.

The performance data is that which has been reported to the ASGLB by all 5 Local Authorities, and by Adoption Tees Valley, and is now published information. Where a different time period is reported on, this will be noted.

2. 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 during this period was Sue Butcher, DCS at Middlesbrough Children's Services. Sue has left her role, and new chair will be appointed in early 2023.

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. 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.

3. Adoption Activity and Performance

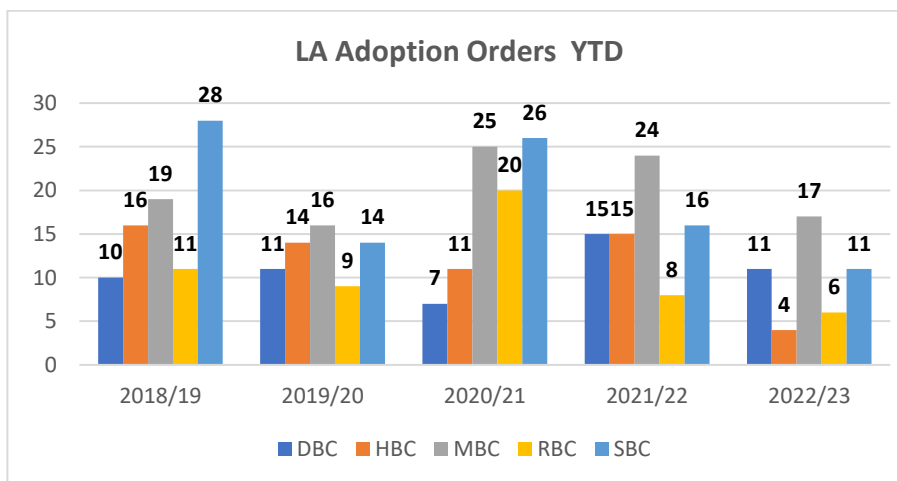
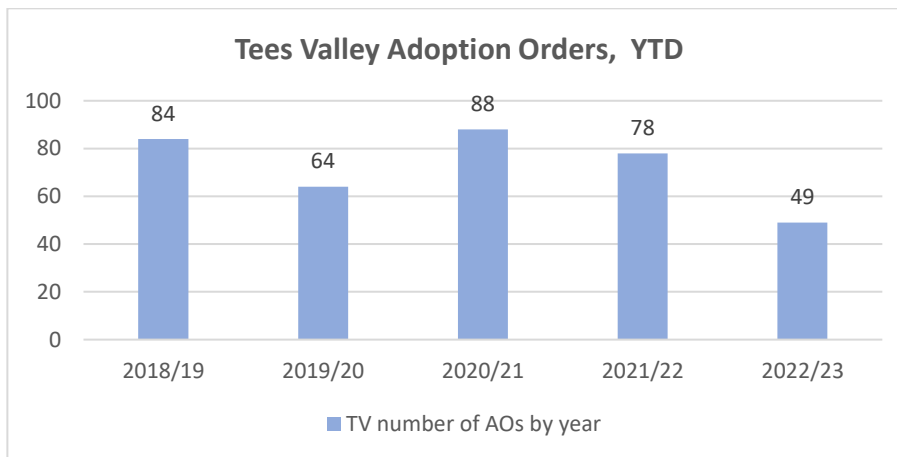
Adoption placement activity will be presented in graphical format for Tees Valley as a whole, and for each local Authority in the partnership, also in graphical format.

A short comparison against England published data will be noted.

A more detailed overview of the activity and performance for each local Authority will be offered in section 4. This is to enable each individual Local Authority to scrutinise its own adoption activity, and performance.

3.1 Overview of Adoption Tees Valley: Child's Journey, and Timescales

Adoption Orders Granted



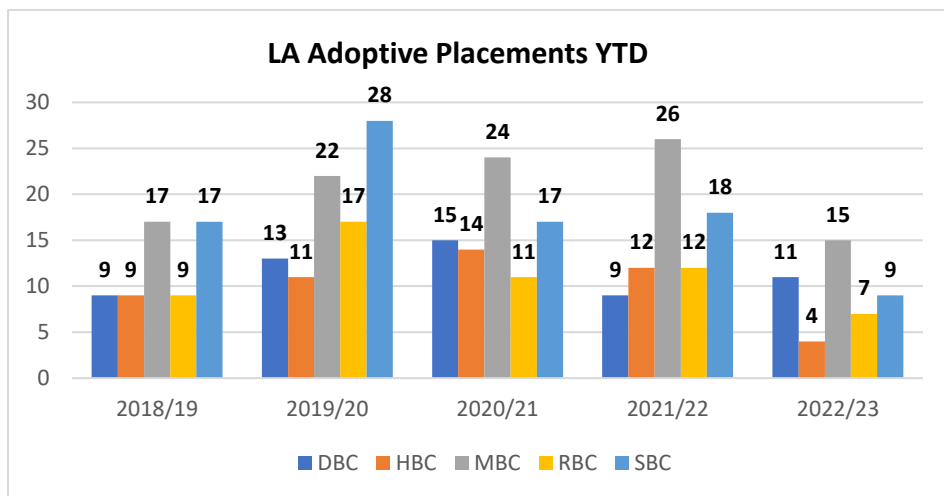
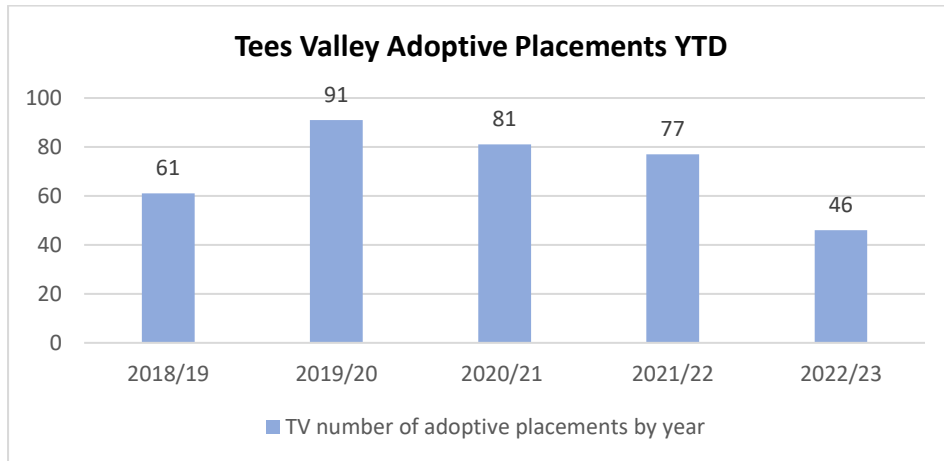
Overall rate of adoption orders granted is higher than was the case in the previous year.

49 adoptions granted in the year to date, compared with 78 in the full previous year.

At the same point in 2021-22 there had been 46 adoptions.

The Somerset ruling had an impact on adoption hearings in the final quarter (Q4) of 2021-22, and in Q1 of 2022-23. Some were held up by the Courts awaiting the outcome of the final ruling. Children are now being adopted, who were waiting.

Children Placed for Adoption

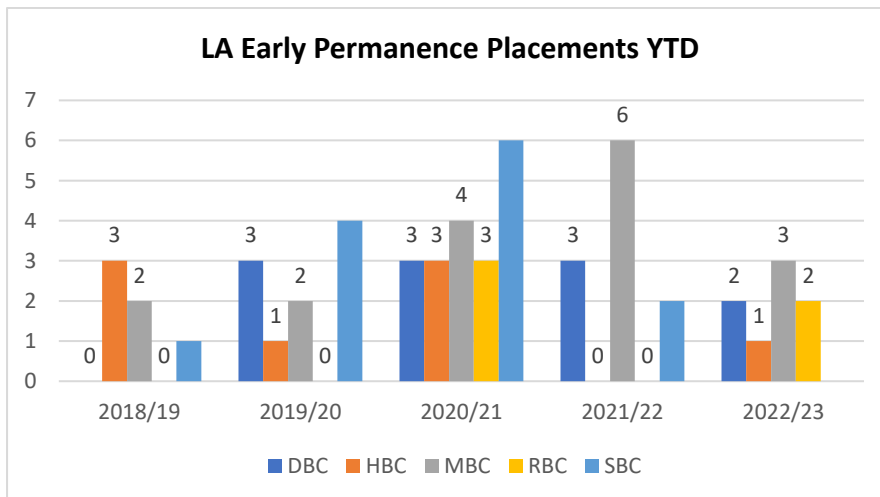
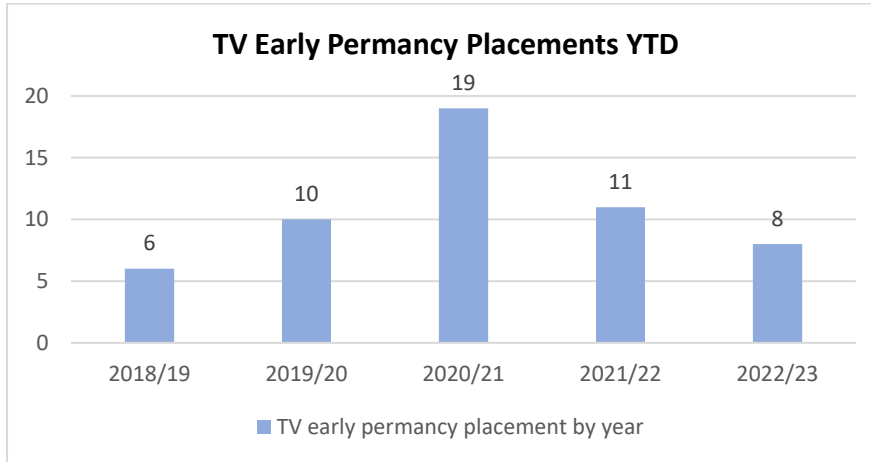


The number of children placed with adoptive parents is at a higher rate than previous year.

However, compared with the same point, end of Q2, last year, there are fewer placements, with 46 children, placed compared with 56 at the same point in 2021-22.

Somerset ruling will no longer be impacting on the numbers of children placed, as all children who had delay, or were placed on an early permanence basis, have now been matched and placed.

Early Permanence Placements



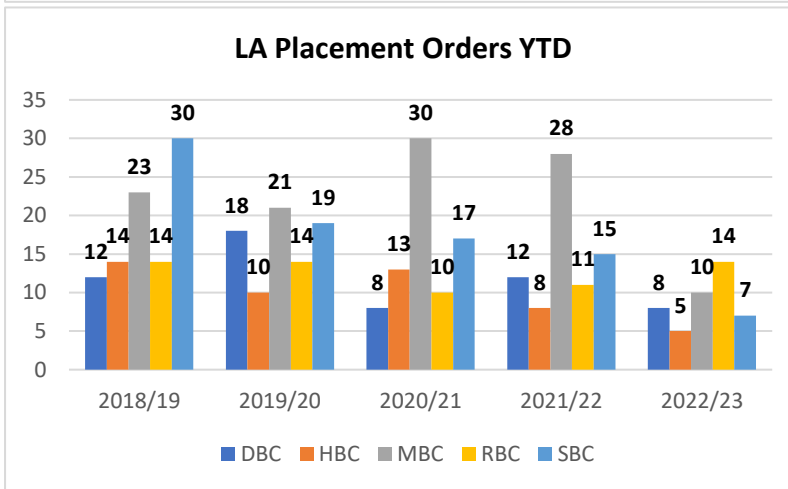
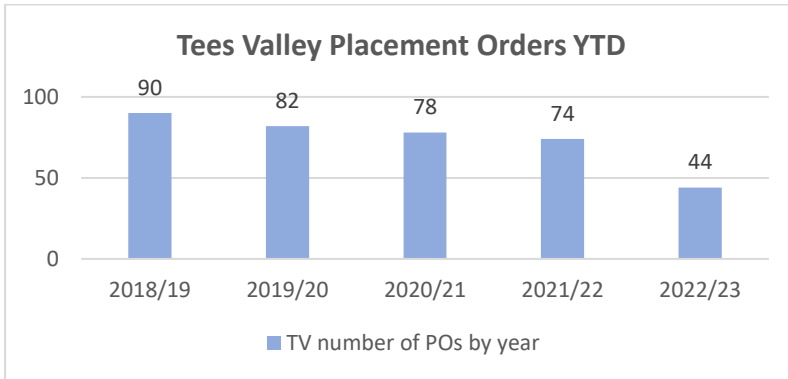
The numbers of children being placed via early permanence has increased compared with the same period in 2021-22. There are 8 children, compared with 5 at the end of Q2 in the previous year.

Early permanence is a key strategic priority for this region, and ATV is aiming for an increase in the numbers of children who can move in with foster carers, also approved to adopt, who can offer this placement, which will reduce moves for children.

There is strategic work being undertaken in the region, and nationally to increase the number of early permanence placements.

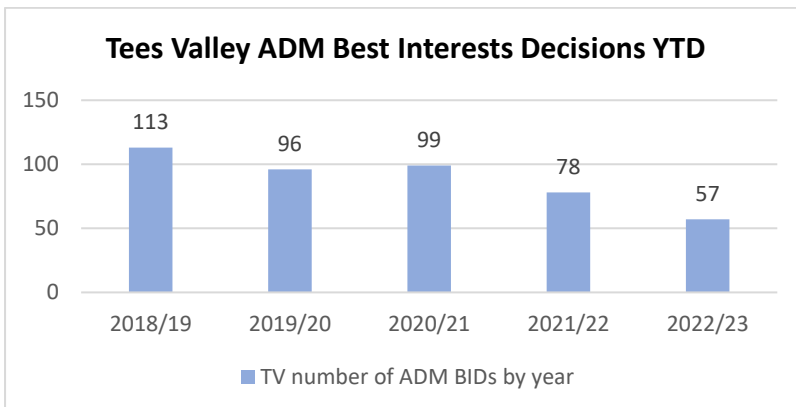
- Pan regional early permanence sufficiency project
- Pan regional Concurrent Placements project
- National EP conferences in February 2023- aimed at senior local Authority care planning managers, and LA lead solicitors
- ATV led workshops for social workers, IRO's, and team mangers in January 2023.

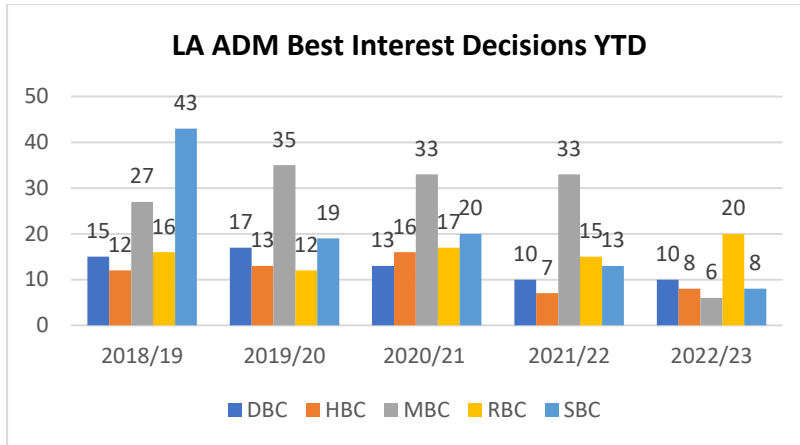
Placement Orders and Agency Decisions that Adoption is the child's plan



Placement Orders are at a higher rate than the last year, and at a higher rate than compared with the same period in the last year.

Placement Orders in the last quarter of 2021-22 were delayed due to Somerset ruling, but have now all been progressed.





Agency Decisions that adoption is the child's plan (often referred to as the best interests' decision -BID) are increased on the previous year, with 57 compared with 39 in the previous year at the same point, and 78 for the full year in previous year.

This is a significant rise on the previous year's activity, especially as one LA, Middlesbrough has an unusually low number for the half year period. The rise in rate of ADM BID is indicative of a greater number of children being progressed through to permanence via adoption. Looked after numbers across the Tees Valley have not risen significantly in this period, or in the last year, and the rise must be explained by more children progressing to permanence through adoption.

Analysis of adoption activity- Tees Valley overall

Adoption Orders are higher than at the same point in previous year and are at a higher rate compared with full year 2021-22. This may be related to the impact of the Somerset ruling. It is known that a number of children were waiting for adoption orders in Q4 2021-22 but were delayed due to the Courts temporarily ceasing adoption hearings. Also known is that Q2 2022-23 has been an active period of adoption hearings with 39 adoption orders granted for Teesside children, many of these being children delayed for adoption order, although not delayed in moving in with their adoptive families.

Adoption placements have dropped slightly compared with the same period in 2021-22 but are at a higher rate than the overall placement activity in the last full year. Again, the impact of Somerset in the final quarter, Q4, cannot be discounted. There were a number of children held back from being formally matched and placed for adoption, with more activity in Q1 and Q2 of 2022-23.

Early Permanence (EP) appears to be picking up again from a lower level in the last year. ATV had progressed an active strategy for early permanence through 2020-21 and the impact of this was to increase the awareness and planning for EP across the Tees Valley area. A difficult case led to some lack of confidence in the use of EP, during the previous year, 2021-22. There has been further action on learning, reflection and development with national developments driving Tees Valley regional practice development. There is now an upturn in EP again, with confidence that carers are being better prepared for this role, more focus on the fostering element of the role, and better dedicated support to EP carers. This placement type remains a priority focus area for ATV and partner Local Authorities moving forward. Early

permanence reduces moves for children, and also relieves pressure on fostering placements in the Local Authority. It is beneficial to children's best outcomes and is strategically and financially beneficial to pressurised fostering services.

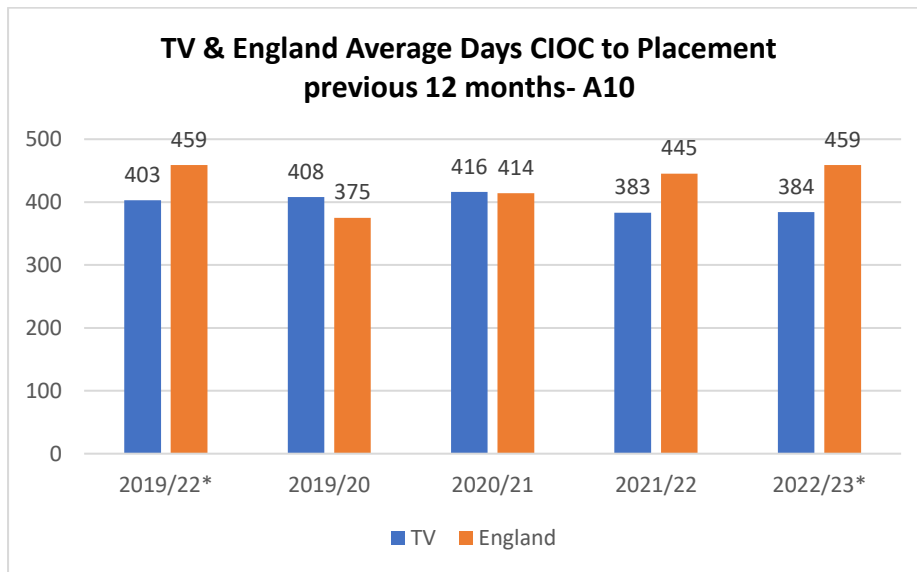
Agency Decisions that adoption is the Local Authority plan (ADM BID) and Placement Orders (PO's) are indicative of the adoption activity for children who are currently coming through care proceedings and receiving final outcome of a Court authorised plan for adoption. The number of children with an Agency Decision for adoption is significantly increased. Some children were delayed- particularly in one Local Authority, due to Somerset. However, overall, plans for adoption are rising at this time.

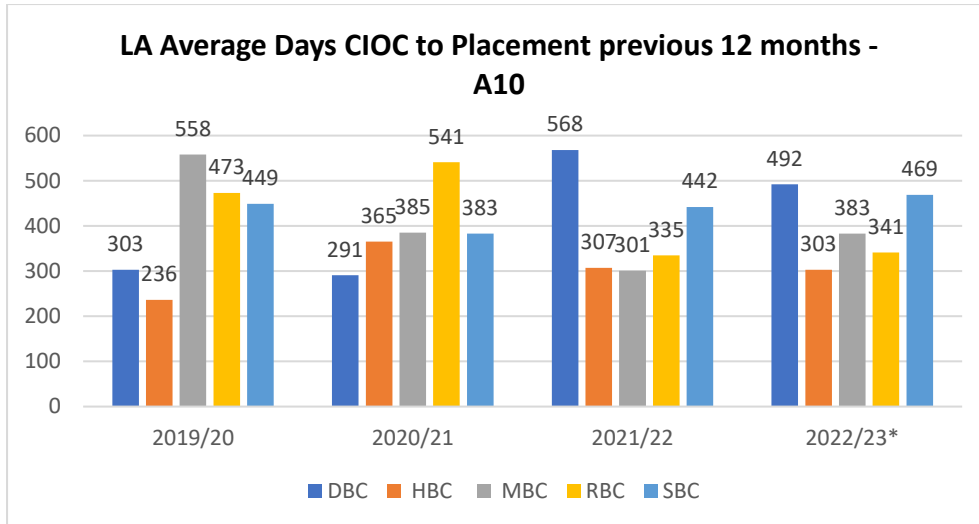
Placement Orders are also higher than the same period in the previous year.

Timeliness of Adoption for Children

Timescale data presented for the adoption scorecard indicators are based on children adopted in the previous 12 months.

Became a child in our care (CIOC) to moving in with an adoption family (Scorecard A10)



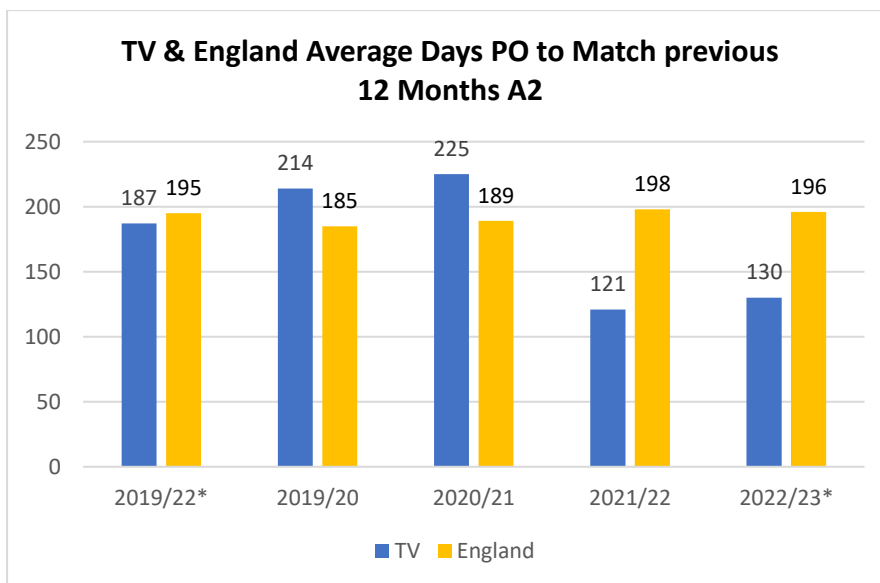


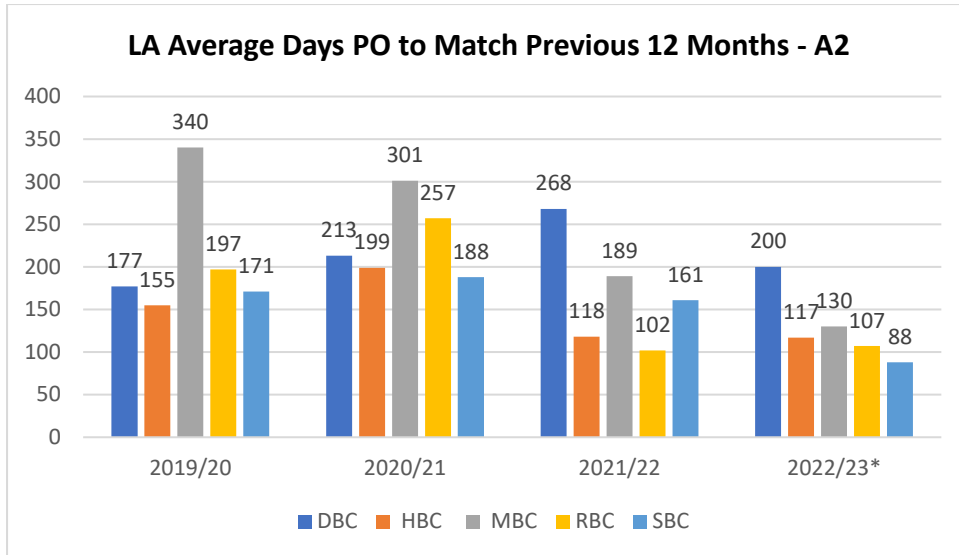
Overall, timeliness for children in Tees Valley moving into an adoptive family are comparing well against national average. Two Local Authorities have longer timescales.

The target time set for a child starting care, to moving in with their adoptive family is 426 days.

Overall average for ATV is 384 days for the children adopted in the previous 12 months. This is 42 days better than the Government target and 75 days better than all England current average number of days.

Placement Order to Match (Scorecard A2)

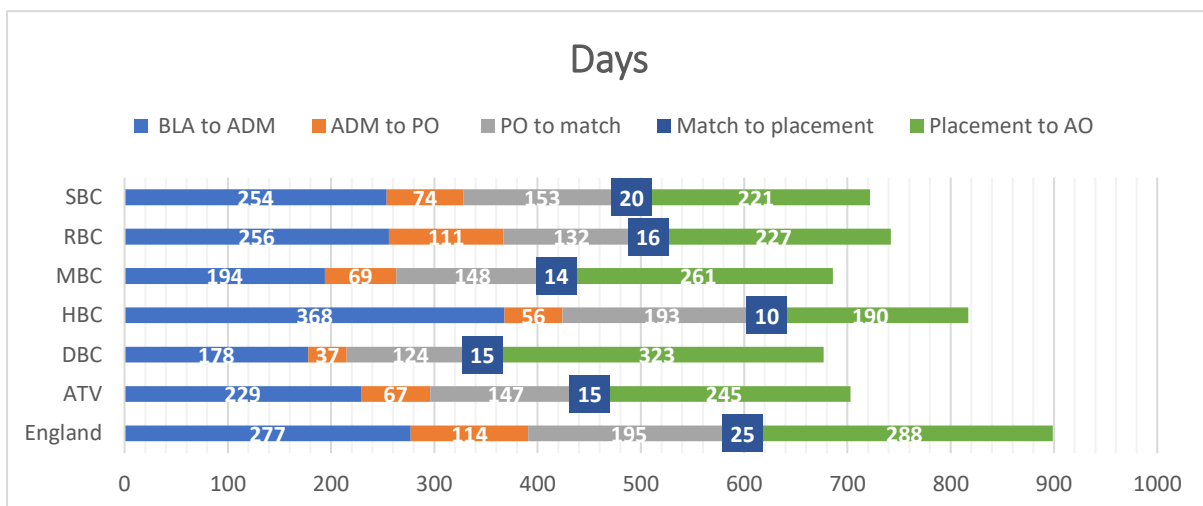




Placement order to match timescales for Tees valley overall have improved significantly in the last 18 months. This is reflective of the maturing of the RAA, and now embedded processes and practice for early identification of a family and matching of children. The average timescale has slightly increased in ATV from 121 days in the period 2021-22, to 130 days for the 12 month period ending 30.9.22.

The Government target is 121 days. ATV is slightly over this target currently, however is performing significantly better than England average of 196 days, being 66 days lower than the national average.

The Child's Journey – children who have completed key phases of the child's journey- last 12 months



This chart shows the comparative whole journey timescales for children who have achieved key phases of the child's journey in the last 12 months. These children may not have been adopted, but are children who have

completed that phase, in the last 12 month period. It is a current picture of timeliness and timescales for children going through the adoption journey.

Match to placement typically a short timescale and is shown in dark blue.

All Tees Valley local Authorities have an average lower than the England average, for the complete Child's Journey to Adoption Order, in the same period, and ATV as a whole has a shorter timescale.

Why are timescales improving for children in Tees Valley?

- Good processes for referring children to ATV who may have an adoption plan, at the early stages of care planning
- Good processes for partnership working and information sharing between ATV and the LA's – from the point of referral
- Early permanence considerations for more children
- Tight overview of families who may be a suitable link from internal resources, and early information sharing and linking activity
- Good and timely work between the LA child's social worker, and ATV family finder, to make decisions on whether a family is suitable
- Tight timescale and process for seeking an external family, where no internal family is available
- Good links with regional VAA's to create sufficiency
- Willingness to book additional panels for matching
- Some "Legacy" children with very long timescales are no longer within the reporting period of data count.

Factors which may hinder good timeliness for children moving in with adoptive parents:

- Delays in referring children
- Delays in issuing proceedings once a child is in our care.
- Not providing adequate information in a timely way on which to family find for the child
- Not keeping ATV up to date with changes in plans
- Lack of clarity on assessment of needs, and what type of family is being sought- for example, whether siblings are to be placed together.
- Changes in the plan, which are outside of the control of the LA, for example, a return to birth parent on a care order, then return into care, with plan of adoption.
- Changes of social worker in either LA or ATV.

4. Individual Local Authority performance data- numbers of children at key milestones, and timeliness

4.1 Darlington

	Q2 2022-23 (YTD)	Full year 2021-22	Q2 2021-22
AO's	11	15	10
Placements for Adoption	11	9	5
Early Permanence	2	3	1
PO	8	12	6
ADM	10	10	5
A10	492	568	500
A2	200	268	276

Overall, there more children who have adoption plans. There are 10 children in the first half of 2022-23 which is the same number for the full year 2021-22. Darlington had progressed all children who had a potential delay due to Somerset through their ADM best interest's decision by the end of 2021-22 and no children were waiting for the ADM, at the end of that year.

There is a higher rate of children placed for adoption, and more adoption orders than at the same stage in the previous year.

Adoption activity is increasing in Darlington, with more children progressing at all stages of the journey.

Darlington has 21% of children who ceased to be CIOC leaving care via adoption, year to date 22-23. This is a high rate, and a positive figure, compared with a national average of 10%. The last full year, 21-22, for Darlington was 15%.

Timescales for moving in with an adoptive family are higher for Darlington than any other Tees Valley Local Authority and than the England average. This is based on children adopted in the previous 12 months, which is 16 children for Darlington. The average timescale is impacted by 3 children with extended timescales. The children subject to this data have been analysed with the LA, to understand the factors.

4.2 Hartlepool

	Q2 2022-23 (YTD)	Full year 2021-22	Q2 2021-22
AO's	4	15	6
Placements for Adoption	4	12	15
Early Permanence	1	0	0
PO	5	8	5
ADM	8	7	6
A10	303	307	282
A2	117	118	87

Overall, there are fewer children being placed for adoption, and fewer children adopted than at the same time last year. Numbers are lower in Hartlepool, and small changes impact on overall percentage figures quite dramatically.

ADM decisions that adoption is the child's plan slowed considerably in the second half of 2021-22, with just one new ADM decision in the second half of the year although Hartlepool was not significantly impacted by the Somerset ruling. Therefore, for there to be 8 new ADM's in the first half of 2022-23 is a significant increase in rate of adoption plans again.

There has been 1 early permanence placement, compared with 0 in the previous year.

Timescales for children moving in with adoptive families remain consistently good in Hartlepool. Government target for A10 is 426, against which Hartlepool performs well at 303 days. The government target for PO to match is 121 days and Hartlepool is better than this target, at 117 days currently.

To note is that timescales for current children going through the journey (not yet adopted) are higher than other regional LA's and are impacted by one child's timescales.

Hartlepool has 14% of all CIOC leaving care via adoption, year to date, which is a positive percentage against a national average of 10%. The last full year figure for Hartlepool, 21-22, was 11%.

4.3 Middlesbrough

	Q2 2022-23 (YTD)	Full year 2021-22	Q2 2021-22
AO's	17	24	15
Placements for Adoption	15	26	16
Early Permanence	3	6	3
PO	10	28	14
ADM	6	33	17
A10	383	301	342
A2	130	189	236

Adoption Orders are at a similar rate as the previous year, as are placements for children moving in with adoptive parents.

Placement orders are slightly down on the previous year, however, ADM best interests' decisions are at a very low rate, compared with usual activity, and the previous year. It is known that there are a high number of children progressing to and awaiting ADM.

Middlesbrough is the Local Authority most impacted by the Somerset ruling. Many children's plans were held up during the latter period of 21-22, and into 22-23, with ADM's being suspended, and some children being held back from moving into placement. Middlesbrough has also been impacted by delays in Medical Advisor appointments, which is a further factor affecting progress for children. There has been a lot of activity between senior managers to address the progress for children, to enable the right plan to be presented to Court within the Court timetable for Final hearings.

Middlesbrough continues to make use of early permanence and is the Local Authority with highest use of EP in the region.

Timescales for children have improved significantly over the last 12 months. The government target for CIOC moving in with adopters is 426 days and Middlesbrough is currently performing at an average of 383 days, which is 43 days below the Government target.

Current PO to Match timescales have reduced considerably, now being 130 days, against a government target of 121 days, however having reduced from 236 days at the same period in the previous year.

16% of all Middlesbrough children who left care, in 2022-23 were adopted, which is a positive figure, against a national average of 10%.

The last full year, 2021-22, figure for Middlesbrough was 9%

4.4 Redcar and Cleveland

	Q2 2022-23 (YTD)	Full year 2021-22	Q2 2021-22
AO's	6	8	4
Placements for Adoption	7	12	9
Early Permanence	2	0	0
PO	14	11	7
ADM	20	15	5
A10	341	335	328
A2	107	102	95

Redcar and Cleveland's rate of adoptions has increased on the previous year. Numbers of children moving into adoptive families has increased slightly on previous year, although there are fewer at the same period of time than last year. It is positive to see more use of early permanence by the Local Authority. It is clear that there has been a marked increase this year in children with an ADM decision that adoption is the Local Authority plan with 20 ADM's in the year to date, compared with 5 in the previous year, at the same time, and 15 for the full year 2021-22. There are 14 children with a Placement Order, compared with 7 in the previous year at the same time, and 11 for the full year.

Children's timescales in Redcar and Cleveland remain good, with the start of becoming a CIOC to moving in with adopters (A10) being 341 days, against a government target of 426 days.

The PO to match timescale (A2) is 107 days which is under the government target of 121 days.

Redcar has a 10% rate for children leaving care via an adoption order, year to date in 2022-23, with a rate of 6% in the last full year- 21-22. The national average is 10%.

4.5 Stockton

	Q2 2022-23 (YTD)	Full year 2021-22	Q2 2021-22
AO's	11	16	11
Placements for Adoption	9	18	14
Early Permanence	0	2	1
PO	7	15	9
ADM	8	13	6
A10	469	442	548
A2	88	161	210

Stockton's rate of Adoption orders remains stable, compared with the previous year. Placements of children for adoption is at 9, year to date, with 18 children having been placed in the full year 21-22. There have been 0 Early Permanence placements in the year.

Activity for children coming through the early stages of the adoption journey remain relatively stable with 7 PO's year to date, and 8 ADM decisions that adoption is the Local Authority plan for the child, compared with 13 in the full year 21-22.

Timeliness for children from becoming a CIOC to moving in with their adoptive family is higher at 469 days, than the government target of 426 days. The timescale for Stockton has improved on the same point in the last year, by 79 days, however, remains over 40 days above government target. The timescales are based on 16 children adopted in the previous year. Of these children 5 had significant timescales associated with care planning and court factors. Once the PO was granted, the children progressed quickly, as is seen by a lower average than government target timescale, of 88 days, which is positive for Stockton. It should be noted that the average figure of 469 days masks exceptionally good timescales for 4 of the children who moved into their adoptive family within 100 days of commencing care.

Stockton has a rate of 13% for children leaving care via adoption, for the year to date 22-23, against a national average of 10%. The last full year figure for Stockton was 9%.

5. Adoption Tees Valley- Adopter Recruitment, Assessment and Approvals

5.1 Adopters in Process of Recruitment, Assessment, Approval

For the first half of the year, ATV had the following numbers of adopters through to each stage of the process:

	Total 2021-22	Q1 2022-23	Q2 2022-23	Total 2022-23 YTD
Approved	46	14	13	27
Starting Stage 1	46	13	15	28
Starting Stage 2 (Fast Track)	13	2	6	8
Starting Stage 2 (Excluding Fast Track)	39	6	17	23
Marketing Enquiries	287	86	85	171
% Enquiries Converted to ROI	23%	19%	24%	21%
Snapshot of the "adopter pipeline"	End Q4	End Q1	End Q2	
Waiting to be matched	29	30	26	
Not yet approved, numbers in assessment	39	37	42	

Approvals are at a higher rate than at the same point in 2021-22. This is positive however, the rate of approval remains lower than the planned for 70 new adoptive families within the year, which is ATV target.

One factor is the numbers who have come forward but have now left the process they were not ready to adopt, or their circumstances meant they would not be suitable. ATV saw a rise in numbers withdrawing or leaving the process, in the second period of lockdown, and this is a finding seen across some of the regional fostering services also.

ATV has undertaken some work to improve enquiries, conversion from enquiry to approval, approvals, and numbers within the process.

- Improved digital marketing campaigns and overall profiling
- ATV have recently dedicated time and internal resource to monitor all enquirers who are not yet ready to progress. Follow up is planned, and this practice is beginning to bring benefits, with more families coming back into the process, having decided to wait, than was previously the case.
- 2 new SW posts are now filled as of December 2022. Vacancies, coupled with staff absence has impacted on delivery.

The numbers of prospective adopters starting stage 1, and stage 2 has increased on the numbers in the previous year, and the numbers in the assessment process has also increased with 42 prospective adopters in assessment at the end of September 2022, compared with 39 at the end of March 2022.

5.2 Adoption Placements with ATV Adopters/External Adopters

The agency of adopters for ATV placements made is as follows:

Placements with Adopters	Total 2021-22	Q1 2022-23	Q2 2022-23	Total 2022-23 YTD
ATV adopters	58	16	15	31
EXT LA/RAA adopters	7	1	0	1
EXT VAA adopters	12	4	10	14
Non TV children placed with ATV adopters	0	0	0	0

Of the 46 children placed in the period, 31 have been placed with ATV adopters, and 15 with external families, most of whom are VAA approved adopters.

The data presented shows 26 families approved and waiting to be matched at the end of the period, which is a lower number than the previous year end (30). It should be noted that a high number of the families waiting to be matched will be linked and progressing to match, or will be EP carers with a placement, or will be foster carers who are not yet formally matched with the child. A figure of 26 families waiting does not reflect the reality of available “pool” of adopters.

At the end of the period, there were 11 children with a Placement Order who did not have an identified prospective adopter family.

This number is a higher than usual number for ATV, and includes a sibling group of 4, a sibling group of 3, a sibling group of 2, and 2 single children.

This cohort of children are in the main children with more needs, and although ATV has approved adopters, there is not a “fit” with the needs of the children waiting.

ATV continues at this point to have a sufficiency demand, which is being addressed through:

- Dedicated focus on adopter recruitment, preparation, and approvals.
- Work with regional VAA's to meet sufficiency.

6. Summary Actions arising from performance analysis

1. Each Local Authority will maintain a focus on adoption activity, timely assessment and monitor the progress of the child's care plan. Early referral to ATV enables timely family finding. Similarly, prompt notification that a plan will not be adoption enables best use of ATV family finding time, and of families available.

2. Medical Advisor capacity, especially in South Tees, should continue to be a point of monitoring, and focus.
3. Early Permanence practice continues to be a priority in the region. LA's are encouraged to work with ATV and pan regional projects to promote EP.
4. ATV to continue to focus on marketing, enquirer focus, and conversion of enquirers to Registration of Interest.
5. ATV recruitment campaigns and preparation of adopters to continue to be targeted at the needs of ATV children, encouraging more sibling adopters, more EP carers, and more families for older children.

V. Davidson Boyd 3.1.22