

**Date:** Friday 11 August 2023 at 10.00 am

**Venue:** Jim Cooke Conference Suite, Stockton Central Library, Stockton on Tees,  
TS18 1TU

**Cllr Lisa Evans (Chair)**  
**Cllr Carol Clark (Vice-Chair)**

Cllr Pauline Beall  
Cllr Mick Moore  
Cllr Sally Ann Watson

Cllr Alex Griffiths  
Cllr Hilary Vickers

## **AGENDA**

- 1 Apologies for Absence**
- 2 Declarations of Interest**
- 3 Minutes**  
  
To approve the minutes of the last meeting held on 16 June 2023 (Pages 7 - 12)
- 4 Corporate Parenting Board – Annual Report 2022/23** (Pages 13 - 38)
- 5 Ofsted Themes In House Residential Provision** (Pages 39 - 44)
- 6 Brief Performance Report for Stockton's Children's Homes Outcomes** (Pages 45 - 48)
- 7 Annual Report of the Fostering Panel 2022/23** (Pages 49 - 58)
- 8 Adoption Tees Valley Update** (Pages 59 - 100)
- 9 Forward Plan** (Pages 101 - 102)

**Members of the Public - Rights to Attend Meeting**

With the exception of any item identified above as containing exempt or confidential information under the Local Government Act 1972 Section 100A(4), members of the public are entitled to attend this meeting and/or have access to the agenda papers.

Persons wishing to obtain any further information on this meeting, including the opportunities available for any member of the public to speak at the meeting; or for details of access to the meeting for disabled people, please

Contact: Michael Henderson on email [michael.henderson@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:michael.henderson@stockton.gov.uk)

**KEY - Declarable interests are:-**

- Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI's)
- Other Registerable Interests (ORI's)
- Non Registerable Interests (NRI's)

**Members – Declaration of Interest Guidance**



**Table 1 - Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

Subject	Description
<b>Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation</b>	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain
<b>Sponsorship</b>	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the council) made to the councillor during the previous 12-month period for expenses incurred by him/her in carrying out his/her duties as a councillor, or towards his/her election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
<b>Contracts</b>	Any contract made between the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (or a firm in which such person is a partner, or an incorporated body of which such person is a director* or a body that such person has a beneficial interest in the securities of*) and the council — (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
<b>Land and property</b>	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the council. 'Land' excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not give the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners (alone or jointly with another) a right to occupy or to receive income.
<b>Licences</b>	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer.
<b>Corporate tenancies</b>	Any tenancy where (to the councillor's knowledge)— (a) the landlord is the council; and (b) the tenant is a body that the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners is a partner of or a director* of or has a beneficial interest in the securities* of.
<b>Securities</b>	Any beneficial interest in securities* of a body where— (a) that body (to the councillor's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the council; and (b) either— (i) the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the councillor, or his/ her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners have a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

\* 'director' includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society.

\* 'securities' means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

## Table 2 – Other Registerable Interest

You must register as an Other Registrable Interest:

- a) any unpaid directorships
- b) any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority
- c) any body
  - (i) exercising functions of a public nature
  - (ii) directed to charitable purposes or
  - (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management

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## Corporate Parenting Board

A meeting of Corporate Parenting Board was held on Friday, 16th June 2023.

**Present:** Cllr Lisa Evans (Chair), Cllr Carol Clark (Vice-Chair), Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Marcus Vickers (Sub Cllr David Reynard), Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Sally Ann Watson

**Officers:** Debbie Farrow, Martin Gray, Adele Moore, Mandie Rowlands, David Willingham, Janet Wilson

**Also in attendance:**

**Apologies:** Cllr David Reynard

### 1 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### 2 **Minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

### 3 **Virtual School Update**

The Board considered educational data, published by the Department of Education, in relation to the Children in Our Care(CIOC). Trends for 2018 to the most recently published data in 2021 were shown within the main report, and where appropriate comparisons were shown for Stockton the North East, Statistical Neighbours and England.

The report also informed members about the current work of the Virtual School including new initiatives and updates from the Annual Report presented in December 2022

- Members were given case study updates as follows:

- Case 1

A child who had been separated from family and siblings was struggling in primary school. The child struggled a lot on intervention, however following attendance at virtual school the child was progressing and went on to transition well into year 7. After facing lots of change and uncertainty with a few bumps in the road, the child and most of the child's siblings returned home. There was an initial dip in attendance at school, however following support from the school and parent's, attendance had now improved, and all was going well at school and home.

- Case 2

A secondary school child who had moved out of the area into a smaller secondary school than they had previously attended, had been permanently excluded. The exclusion had been challenged by the authority however the exclusion was upheld. The child then began virtual school tuition. The child was currently attending the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), however following half term

the child was struggling to attend. Had the child been younger a health care plan would have been put in place. The Virtual School/Head Teacher team were fully aware of the child's needs, and would continue to work with the child, the child's needs were at the forefront of everyone.

- Case 3

A child came into care one week prior to commencing year 11 from a different school. Attendance at the child's previous school was poor and there was no transition plan in place at the new school. The child was spotted by an ex-member of staff who worked at the school and who was head of the English Department. The child was given additional tuition and improved by two grades. Unfortunately following an incident at school, the child was suspended. The child then commenced online tuition and with the extra tuition given, revision timetables and practice exams the child was achieving a level 6 GCSE in English. The child had also been accepted at Stockton Riverside College.

Officers highlighted that CIOC were very able, however due to circumstances and experiences they were not achieving their full potential. The team continued to work closely with schools to get the best outcomes for CIOC. In terms of outcomes for CIOC, Stockton was doing really well statistically against National and Northeast figures.

- In terms of KS1 CIOC, educational outcomes had dropped since 2019 and was lower than the National CIOC figure. It was noted however that the cohort for 2022 only contained eleven students therefore the difference between the Stockton and National figure was equivalent to only 1.4 students.

Stockton's CIOC KS2 had made significantly better progress than the North East and National CIOC in 2022 for maths, reading and writing.

KS4 Progress 8 area comparison showed Stockton CIOC making much better progress than both CIOC in the North East and Nationally.

In addition, members were informed of the current work of the Virtual School including new initiatives and updates from the Annual Report, which had been presented in December.

### Discussion

- Members noted that there was a varied approach to how schools in the Borough dealt with the suspension / exclusion of CIOC at school, and whether there were exceptions made for CIOC to try and keep them at school as much as possible. The approach was varied across the borough and much depended on past experiences the child may have suffered and the circumstances surrounding the reason a child may be considered for suspension / expulsion. A lot of schools dealt with it extremely well and some may require further assistance. The main message was that schools needed to persevere as a lot of CIOC found it hard to accept positive outcomes.

- Members acknowledged how positive the Team were, working in this area and proud about the work the staff at Stockton Council did with CIOC.



- Brief discussion was had around future activities and the better ways in which corporate parents could engage with CIOC to make a difference.

RESOLVED that the update and discussion be noted/actioned, as appropriate.

#### **4 Monitoring arrangements of external registered Children's Homes - Reporting Period 1 April 22 - 31 March 2023**

Monitoring arrangements of external registered children's Homes - reporting period 1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023

The Board considered a report that provided an overview of the monitoring process in regard to external residential children's homes, where children in our care lived. It also provided information with regard to the quality of care provided from those homes. The report covered the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Information provided included:

- reason for, and numbers of, external provision
- reasons for the increase in residential placements over the last year
- a data summary relating to the use of external placements
- the approach to the monitoring and auditing of external provision
- a data summary relating to the quality of provision
- Issues, concerns, and action plans

The Authority was the top performing authority in England for placing children within a 20-mile radius of their homes.

There were 57 external placements currently. 2 placements had been moved outside of the area due to risk and 5 young people needed access to specialist care which was only available outside of the area, and in the last year there was one instance where secure accommodation was required for six months, after which, the young person transitioned to a secure unit.

The Board heard that if Officers should have concerns / safeguarding issues regarding placements, or if Ofsted ratings had reduced then staff would monitor the situation by visiting the homes, speaking to staff and children as well as other Local Authorities to ensure the homes were compliant. Overall, however Ofsted gradings had improved significantly and for the 3% of homes that were graded inadequate, those children had been moved to different homes. There were a small number of new homes that had yet to be graded and those homes in Scotland were overseen by the Care Inspectorate.

Children in care placement meetings were conducted fortnightly with the aim to bring external placements back to the area or offer in house provision.

## **5 Cared for children, care experienced young people and corporate parenting - refreshing our approach**

The Board were presented with a report that provided an update on the refreshed approach around supporting children and young people in care, those that were leaving care and the Council's approach to corporate parenting. It gave updates on activities undertaken to refresh the strategy for cared for and care experienced children and young people, incorporating the specific challenges identified in the ILACS inspection. The refreshed strategy and accompanying action plan would be presented at the next corporate parenting board meeting for agreement.

Main topics discussed were as follows:

- The recent ILACS inspection had identified several areas for improvement, specifically around care leavers and care leaver offers which should be promoted with pathway plans and required including in the strategy as an additional priority. The 2 specific additional elements of the proposed strategy were 'Care Experienced Young People Priority' and 'Being a Good Corporate Parent Priority'
- It was highlighted that service directorates within the Council needed to ensure the needs of children and young people in care were prioritised when decisions were being made, for example:
  - 1) legal representation
  - 2) in any capital or physical investment programmes such children's homes
  - 3) in any HR policy development

In term of Members being good corporate parents, officers were wanting to simplify the ask and task, making members more accountable and responsible, talking up the achievements of the CIOC, to be supportive and welcoming and be present to attend training and events as well as giving their time and presence. All of the proposals contained within the report would be taken forward through training.

For individual staff being good corporate parents, there was a scheme 'No Limits' which officers could participate in which was ready to launch in July 2023. There were currently 5 volunteers trained who would roll out the scheme further. There would be 2 main elements to the scheme which would give staff the opportunity to contribute either through giving time and or money.

The Board went on to briefly discuss the next steps including how to get more elected Members involved as well as opportunities to get the public involved and to help the public gain a better understanding of the CIOC and the homes they lived in with a view to dispelling some of the negative myths perceived by some residents.

Mandatory corporate parenting training had been held for all Members and there were mop up sessions scheduled for Members who had not been able to attend.

RESOLVED that:

1. comments on the updates and activity to date be noted
2. the Board agree a final version of the report be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board at its meeting scheduled for 11 August 2023

## **6 Forward Plan**

The Board noted its forward plan.

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## Corporate Parenting Board – Annual Report 2022/23

Report for Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) August 2023

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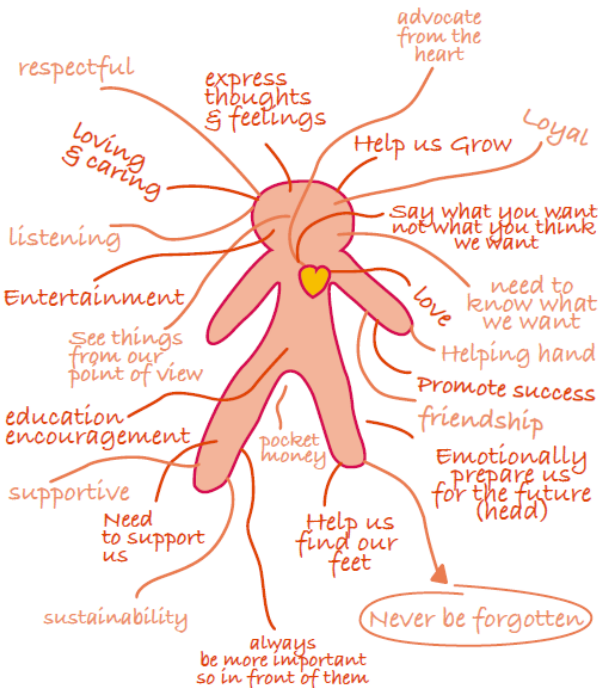
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## Perfect Corporate Parent      The Corporate Parenting Pledge

The Perfect Corporate Parent was developed by members of the 'Let's Take Action' Group, representing children in our care. They felt that a corporate parent should be there for them in a time of need, care for them and love them.



Our pledge to all children and young people in care in Stockton-on-Tees is that:

<b>PRIVATE LIFE</b>	"We will make sure that you are treated as an individual, and you will have a care plan to reflect this"
<b>FAMILY CONTACT</b>	"We will help you to maintain important relationships with your family, whenever it is possible and safe to do so"
<b>CHOICE</b>	"We want to help you to make healthy and safe choices. We will work alongside you to prepare you to move into independent living, when you are ready"
<b>POCKET MONEY &amp; MY TIME</b>	"We will help you to enjoy your life. We will support you to enjoy leisure activities including music, the arts, hobbies, sports, and to join young people's organisations"
<b>FRIENDS</b>	"We will encourage you to make friends, keep in touch with old friends, and build on your relationships"
<b>BEING HEALTHY</b>	"We will ensure services are in places to support your emotional wellbeing. You will also get access to advice, to help you lead a healthy lifestyle"
<b>TO BE A LIFELONG CHAMPION</b>	"We want to help you make a positive contribution to your community, and to be prepared for a stable and secure adult life"
<b>EDUCATION</b>	"At your school you will have a designated teacher to make sure you get the help you need; we will encourage & support you to study at college or university"
<b>YOUR FUTURE</b>	"We will provide you with a Personal Advisor to support you from the age of 16 through to 25"
<b>SUPPORT</b>	"We will do our best to help you break down barriers encountered when dealing with other agencies. We will work together with the services you need including housing benefits & employment"

# Foreword

As the new chair of Stockton on Tees Corporate Parenting Board I am pleased to introduce the 2022-23 Annual Report.

I firstly want to pay tribute to the previous Chair, Cllr Barbara Inman, who has chaired the Board since it was set up in 2019. Barbara's passion and commitment to ensuring children in our care and care leavers get the best possible support has shone through, and I want to build on the firm foundations she has established.

I come into this role with my own beliefs and ideas for change. I believe we could and should be doing more to hear the voices of children in our care, and to take action as a result, and I also believe councillors on the board and across the Council could be doing more to ensure we fulfil our corporate parenting objectives.

The Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services also made some recommendations for change in how we work, suggesting we needed to improve and make our care leavers offer more accessible; improve recruitment of foster carers; create more opportunities for engagement and consider how we can support greater consistency for personal adviser support for care leavers

So as we look back over the past 12 months, I also want to continue to look forward. There is much underway and much to do. The new strategy is in development and will come to the Board for sign off late this year. This provides the basis for what, as Chair, I believe we need to be doing not only to respond to the recommendations in an Ofsted report, but much more importantly, to really fulfil our objectives to ensure that children in care and care leavers get the best possible support and help we can provide, and that we enable them to live happy, healthy and successful lives in the future.

There is no more important role that we play.

## Councillor Lisa Evans

# What is Corporate Parenting in Stockton-on-Tees?

**The Corporate Parenting Board is an advisory body which provides leadership and a governance structure for corporate parenting in order to drive forward positive outcomes for children in our care and care leavers. It oversees our Children in Care and Care Leavers Action Plan and promotes our pledges. It also provides challenge and scrutiny to ensure that the best outcomes are achieved for children in our care and care leavers.**

## **The Corporate Parenting Board has the following aims, objectives and vision:**

- To be the best corporate parents we can be, working together to provide children in our care and care leavers with happy and healthy childhoods, helping them reach and exceed their full potential and aspirations and supporting them into successful adulthood.
- The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is to enquire and understand, set ambition and to champion and challenge our collective care of children in our care and care leavers. This is an assurance role that sits alongside multi agency operational work and organisational scrutiny. It is informed by our experts, our practitioners, children and young people and carers.

The commitments we pledge to help us realise our aims, objectives and vision:

- To make sure that the whole council and relevant partner agencies commit to excellent standards of corporate parenting.
- To seek improved long-term outcomes for children in care and their families – for their happiness, well-being, educational success and future prospects.
- To promote stability for all children in care.
- To ensure that the voice of children in care and care leavers is heard and influences both the services and the policies that we deliver.
- To scrutinise, monitor and oversee key performance indicators in relation to health, education and well-being.
- To ensure that all relevant strategies, plans and resources identify and are explicit about the contribution that they make to targets agreed for improvement.
- To consider the outcomes of inspections and regulatory visits on provision for children in care and care leavers.
- To receive regular reports on provisions for leaving care, housing and training for care leavers.
- To monitor the work of our adoption and fostering services.
- To support work experience schemes.
- To celebrate the achievements of children in our care, care leavers and their carers.
- Undertake a programme of visits and listen to feedback from Board Members to ensure that provision is appropriate and effective.
- Ensure that children in our care and care leavers are offered access to advocacy.



We have always taken the view that Corporate Parenting is best achieved across the extended family – working with our partners. However, there are specific duties on the Council which we must fulfil.

The Children and Social Work Act (2017) defined for the first time in law the responsibility of corporate parents to ensure, as far as possible, secure, nurturing and positive experiences for Children in Care and Care leavers. This requires the Council to have regard to a set of Corporate Parenting principles when exercising its functions in relation to looked after children and care leavers (former relevant children):

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of children and young people.
- To encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people.
- To help children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the Local Authority and its relevant partners.
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for children and young people.
- For children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Under the Children Act (2004), Local Authorities have a duty to promote cooperation between ‘relevant partners’, including the Police, the NHS and Education providers, while those partners have a duty to cooperate, in turn, with the Local Authority. Guidance in the act highlights that Corporate Parenting is a ‘task that must be shared by the whole Local Authority and partner agencies’.

We are determined to ensure that the needs of our children in care and care leavers are given the highest priority and that they are valued and cared about, not only by those who look after them on a daily basis, but also by those who make decisions politically, corporately and operationally.

### **This means...**

- That we will work to deliver the priorities in our Children in our Care and Care Leavers Action Plan, and that we will be open and honest about progress.
- That we want to do more than deliver what we have to. We recognise the many individual and organisational ways in which we can achieve more than the service or thematic roles stipulate as defined in our priorities.
- Elected Members of the Council will be clear about their roles, and the actions they can take to be good Corporate Parents
- That senior officers in the Council will go above and beyond their roles to achieve the best for children in our care and care Leavers, using their personal authority and resources to achieve this.
- That all of our partners in the Borough will take their Corporate Parenting role seriously, and will commit to do the best they can, as part of an extended family
- That all officers of the Council are clear about what they can do to contribute.

### The Corporate Parenting Board met 6 times in 2022/2023:

Meeting	Topics
April 2022	Adoption Tees Valley Mockingbird approach to foster care Update on the Strategic Group
June 2022	Virtual school update Out of area placements analysis Update on Strategic Group
August 2022	Placements and accommodation update Fostering panel End of year performance Update on Strategic Group
October 2022	Adoption Tees Valley Accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds and care leavers
December 2022	Virtual school update Annual report for 2021/22 Strategic Group update
February 2023	Adoption Tees Valley Mid-year performance Strategy No limits scheme

### Children in our Care Strategic Group (CIOCSG)

The CIOCSG is accountable to the Stockton on Tees Corporate Parenting Board. Throughout the last year the group has continued to meet regularly with bespoke pieces of work identified for further exploration. The CIOCSG is a stakeholder group, overseeing the priorities of the children in our care and care leavers action plan.

# Involving our children and young people

In the past year, Let's Take Action (LTA) Group members have taken part in a range of interviews as Took part in the following interviews as panel members:

- Service Lead – Children and Families
- Assistant Director – Social Care
- Director – Children's Services
- Apprentice Social Workers

"I felt valued and like my opinion mattered. It made me feel good about myself".

"It's good that we get a say in these important decisions".

The LTA have been involved in many ways this year:

- LTA have worked with Service Lead to develop the care leavers pack, this is now work in progress with marketing.
- LTA have updated their own presentation and are keen to go into schools in September to promote the group to designation CIOC leads.
- LTA are working with marketing on a new webpage and designing marketing material to leave with schools.
- LTA have redesigned the No Limits logo, changing the strapline to be meaningful to them 'Supporting me to move onwards and upwards'
- LTA have co-produced a set of videos to be used as part of the marketing strategy to launch the No Limits scheme in SBC.
- Some LTA members have met with Mike Greene and fed back some thoughts about the vision for the town centre.
- One member of LTA is part of the regional workstreams and influencing regional decisions.

But...

- The number of young people taking part has reduced in recent months due to some changes in circumstances for some young people and the impact of exams.
- There is no dedicated space to run the sessions, which currently take place in the Family Hub
- Young people have fed back that we need to redefine Our Pledge.

# Our Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy

It was agreed with the Corporate Parenting Board members in 2021 that our Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy (2018-2021) would not be immediately updated and that the Children in our Care and Care Leavers Action Plan would be the strategic document for the period 2021-23, to set out our vision and actions for how the Council and partners will support cared for and care experienced children and young people.

At a time when all children and young people face huge personal, social, and economical challenges we know that children in our care and care leavers can face significant additional obstacles as they grow up and move towards independence and adult life. We also know from experience that with the right support, encouragement, love and nurturing, children who have come through our care system can make an invaluable and unique contribution to all aspects of society, our culture, our economy and our communities.

It is our responsibility as Corporate Parents to create the conditions for these children and young people to thrive and excel in their lives.

We are in the process of developing our new strategy for the period 2023-2027 with several discussions held at the Board on process and content.

## What have we done in 2022/23?

The Corporate Parenting Board have continued to support our vision for children in our care and care leavers to create a home and community environment that provides every child and young person with a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to meet their full potential. Our aim continues to be to support children to remain within their birth families where it is safe to do so, look after them for as short a time as possible, move them only when it is in their best interests to do so and to support them within their local community.

The five key priorities from our Children in Care and Care Leavers Action Plan have helped focus and steer our work throughout the last year:

## **Priority 1 - We will always be informed by the views, voices and opinions of children in our care and care experienced children and young people.**

- Our 'Lets Take Action' group are now involved in the development of a co-production participation Strategy with a much stronger move towards engagement and collaboration.
- Existing contracts and documents have been reviewed to ensure that the voice of the child is captured and incorporated into contracting routes.
- A practice week was held in October 2022 which included feedback from children and young people.
- Children in our care and care leavers are part of a group working on the redesign of our complaints documents.
- Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) now meet with all children in our care outside of their formal statutory reviews to capture their voice, hear their views and take forward ideas to inform service delivery.
- Training is provided for all staff in relation to capturing the child's voice with Community Care Inform offering additional training which includes support around life story work.
- We have recently extended our contract with NYAS to ensure that every child in our care and care Leaver has access to an advocate who can act/speak on their behalf.

## **Priority 2 - Improve Outcomes and Life chances, with focus on:**

### **Education and Training**

- Scrutiny review was undertaken in this area and identified a range of opportunities to improve our relative position.
- A named Virtual School member has been appointed to lead on the extended duties of the Virtual School with a data plan designed to support tracking of outcomes.
- Rolling out attachment aware / trauma informed practice
- Good practice hubs now identified to share high quality practice.
- Compassionate Stockton Trauma informed programmes network held, with a working group set up to provide direction.
- Two Family Thrive Programmes for Stockton carers have been delivered.
- Various training programmes have been developed to support care leavers to access further education.
- Increased preparation around interview techniques for care leavers is being offered via HR.
- Additional resources have been identified with Senior Progressions Workers and a Welfare Officer now in post to support increased numbers of care leavers to take advantage of opportunities post 16.
- A working group has been set up to work on managing the transition PEP to Pathway plan to ensure support is seamless.

- Challenge to schools is provided by the Virtual School were a permanent exclusion of a child in our care is likely.
- Improved analysis of exclusion data is now available to ensure that those children in our care highlighted as being a potential for exclusion are identified earlier and planned interventions are offered as early as possible.
- Analysis of data is now available to better understand the links, themes and patterns between children in our care who are missing from education and who are also missing from home or care.

## Health

- In order to improve the health of children in our care and care leavers, a review of our existing contracts has been undertaken to improve services.
- Training has been rolled out to Education and Social Care staff to improve understanding and quality of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs).
- Children in our care and care leavers (where age appropriate) now engage with evidence based, preventative sexual health education.
- Integrated Care Board (formally CCG) have reviewed their current contract with a renewed focus on learning from health assessments so services can target patterns. All review health assessments are now undertaken by Harrogate and District Foundation Trust.
- New dental health pathways have been launched. All those children in our care and care leavers who have been unable to access dental care through their usual practice can now access through a nominated practice.
- New Immunisation pathways have been introduced. Any child in our care or care leaver who's review health assessment is out of date will be visited at home/placement to ensure regular oversight and any health needs are identified and responded to.
- In relation to cultural experiences, we have further developed our 'More Stuff like this Please' model with our lead cultural partner ARC. A number of children in our care and care leavers were part of a group overseeing this development.

## Priority 3 - Seek to keep families together and close to their communities.

- We secured funding from DfE to support the development of two new children's homes, and properties have been identified for both.
- The Joint Venture (Spark of Genius) is seeking properties for two further homes.
- The Mockingbird model is being implemented development with the first cohort going live in July 2023.
- We are taking part on the regional fostering pathfinder programme, funded by DfE as part of the Stabled Homes strategy. This campaign goes live in September.
- In respect of early permanence planning a 'Babies at risk of being born into care' support package and practice guidance have now been developed.
- We have increased our offer around Special Guardianship Orders so that these carers receive the same support as a Foster Carer does.

- Work is ongoing to design/redesign and procure new therapeutic provision for Children in Care or on the Edge of Care. A design programme for therapeutic approaches is being undertaken to raise awareness/increase knowledge of staff around appropriate models of working.
- Our new Contextual Safeguarding approach has now been implemented, working alongside our new Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) team to identify and support those children at risk of exploitation and extra familiar harm.

#### **Priority 4 - Develop and communicate our vision, embed our approach and intent:**

- The Children in our Care Investment group has been developed to support work to monitor and review places; develop new provision; expand fostering; support reunification; prevention and joint funding of placements with the Integrated Care Board and from High Needs Funding.
- A lead person has now been identified and appointed to drive forward our residential children's homes programme, to increase internal provision – in both residential and foster care, provide greater monitoring and tracking of high-cost placements and ensure the programme meets need and demand.
- Contracts have now been reviewed in relation to the 'Independent Visitors' scheme. A Handbook and training have now been developed.

#### **Priority 5 - Improve outcomes for care experienced young people (Care Leavers) by focusing on:**

- Our Care Leavers Offer has now been refreshed, though there are some challenges with its visibility (as it was not hosted on the main SBC website), and this will be a priority for 2023/24.
- Work is ongoing around identifying appropriate accommodation for care leavers – this includes supported accommodation, staying close arrangements and semi/independent living opportunities.
- Additional resources have been identified in order to create new 'Keeping in Touch' workers so that the whereabouts of care leavers is better understood ensuring that they are safe, and that their needs are being met.
- All of our wider therapeutic services have now been aligned with additional resources being identified in order to appoint a psychologist to ensure that care leavers have improved access to health services and therapies.
- Awareness raising and training around pathway plans for care leavers has been rolled out to staff to improve quality.

## What has been the impact?

- The number of children in care has been broadly stable for the past 4 years, though has increased slightly this year. The growth has been largely due to an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- Our processes and systems developed to welcome Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) has been recognised and subsequently shared with the Northeast Migration Partnership (NEMP) as an area of good practice.
- Our OFSTED ILACS inspection in February and March 2023 – found many areas of good practice but graded is as requiring improvement to be good for children in care and for care leavers, With key areas for improvement identified as:
  - *Greater capacity in foster care*
  - *Develop the participation offer further.*
  - *Better plans and challenge form Independent Reviewing officers*
- We have received positive feedback from the courts, including senior Judges, on the improved quality and robustness of our care plans.
- We have secured more proportionate legal orders for some Children and Young People as a direct result of the improved offer around Special Guardianship Orders. This has prevented some children from becoming the subject of Interim Care Orders or Care Orders solely for financial reasons.
- We have been very successful in maintaining a high proportion of children with kinship carers – 25% of children in care are placed with kinship carers – nearly double the national rate.
- Audits undertaken in relation to unborn babies where proceedings had been initiated upon birth evidenced improved practice: The risks were clearly identified and understood, and proceedings could not have been prevented.
- Our PAUSE project has used innovative and creative approaches to engage and maintain high quality relationships with women who have experienced repeated removals of children from their care. 4 women are currently working with the programme, the maximum number of places available.
- A scrutiny review into Education, Employment and Training (EET) for care leavers has evidenced improvements in the rate in which care leavers are in EET and has identified further actions to improve our practice. Our performance in this area has improved, to be around the regional average.
- There are 20% of children attending Children in Our Care review meetings, but a much larger percentage (over 80%) are having their views heard through written submissions or via advocates.
- We are seeing an increase in the completion of SDQs which has supported a better understanding of a child's and carers needs.



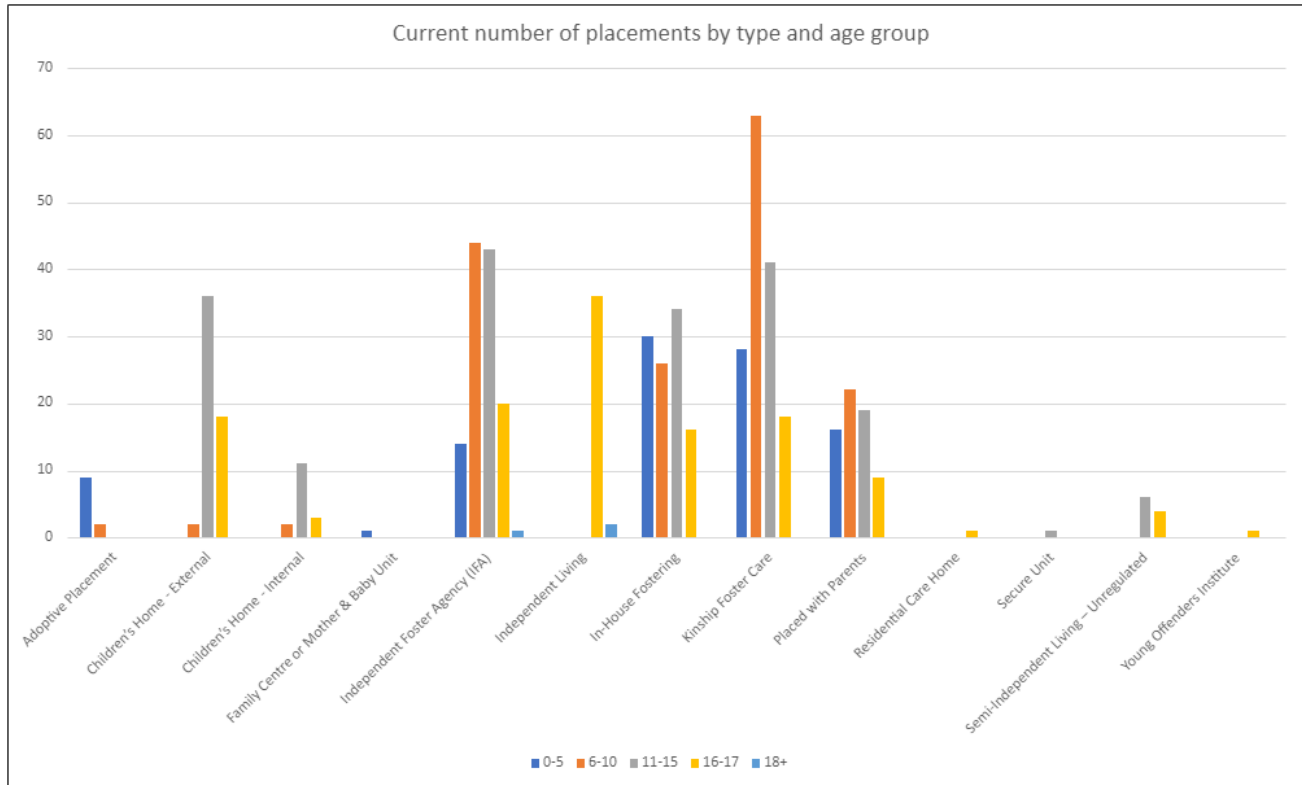
# What are we going to do next?

- We will develop a new strategy for sign off at the Corporate Parenting Board in 2023. This will be based on 7 key priorities: Stability; resilience; education employment and training; good health; heard; care leavers and being a good corporate parent.
- As part of the 'being heard' priority we will develop a new approach to participation, building on our initial work with the Let's take Action Group, and enabling more children in care and care leavers to have a voice and to be asked for their views on a regular basis.
- We will further improve Life Story work.
- We will strengthen the Council's commitment to Corporate Parenting
  - Reshaping the Corporate Parenting Board to include more engagement.
  - Refresher training for members
  - Requirements for services to commit to support.
- We will launch the 'No Limits' scheme to enable Council Members and officers to give their time, make a financial contribution to support children in our care and care leavers or contribute to giving schemes such as the book at Christmas.
- We will complete a new Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy which will better address children and family needs whilst reducing costs over the coming years.
- We will open two new children's homes to support our work on sufficiency planning.
- We will work with the Northeast Fostering pathfinder on a new approach to recruitment of foster carers and their assessment as part of our plans to increase the number of in house foster carers and to extend the Mockingbird model
- We will seek to keep children close to their communities and where it is safe to do so look after them for as short a time as possible, building on our performance as the best performing local authority for proximity of placements.
- We will ensure that recent improvements in the quality-of-care plans including an improved focus on permanence, is sustained.
- We will develop more options for supported accommodation for young people 16-25.
- We will further explore the funding and incentives to enable young people to better access and sustain Employment, Education and Training opportunities.
- We will ensure that children in care and care leavers are receiving timely and effective health assessments, and that there is targeted action on health issues as a result.
- We will further develop our 'More Stuff Like This Please' model with our lead cultural partner – ARC.
- We will open a new youth space in Stockton town centre which will provide a base for LTA which will play a big role in its design.
- We will refresh all packs for cared for and care experience young people.
- We will establish a care Leavers Board, chaired by the Chief Executive

# How well are we performing – Data annex

## Current placement type by age group

Chart 1



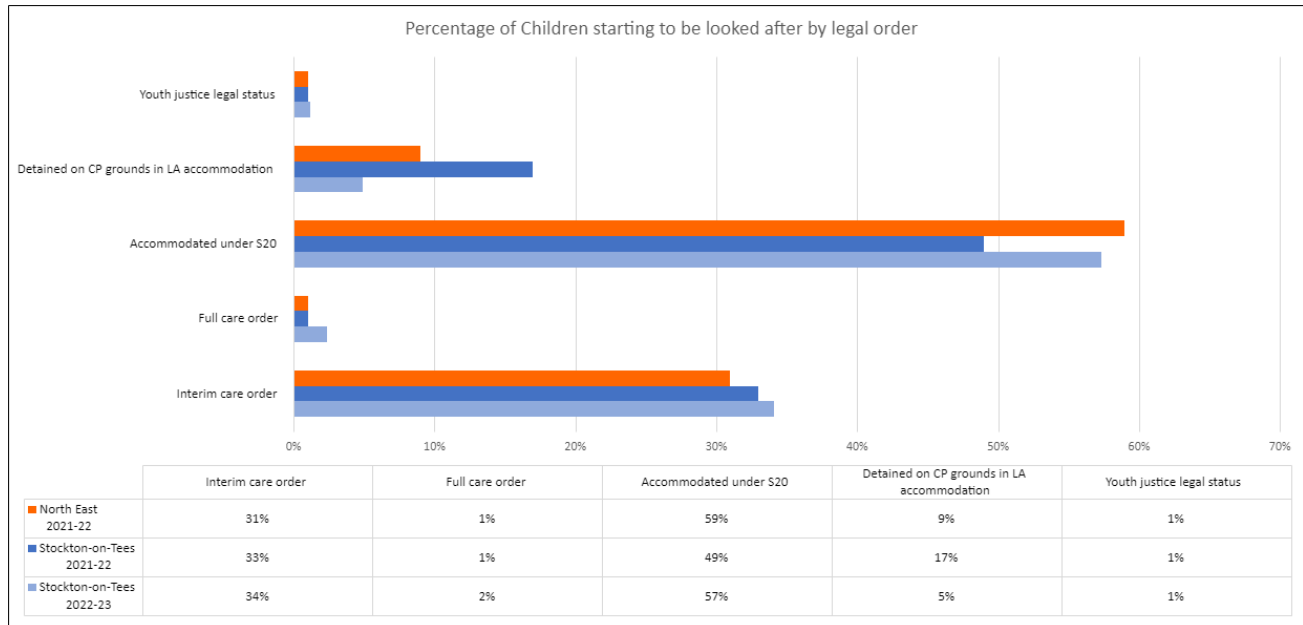
SOURCE: SSRS CIOC at a Date reports Q4 2022/23

Chart 1 above shows that at year end 2022/23:

- In terms of types of placements, in total, 93% of all children in our care are in kinship foster care (25.9%), then independent foster agencies (IFA) (21.1%), then in-house fostering (18.3%), then placed with parents (11.4%), then children's home – external (9.7%) and then independent living (6.6%). The other 7% of all children in our care are in a further seven different types of placements.
- In terms of the ages of children in our care, most aged 0 – 5 years are placed in in-house fostering or kinship fostering; most aged 6 – 10 are placed in kinship foster care or with an independent foster agency (IFA); most aged 11 – 15 are placed with an independent foster agency (IFA) or kinship foster care; most aged 16 – 17 are placed in independent living; and, most aged 18+ are placed in independent living.

## Percentage of children starting to be looked after by legal order.

## Chart 2



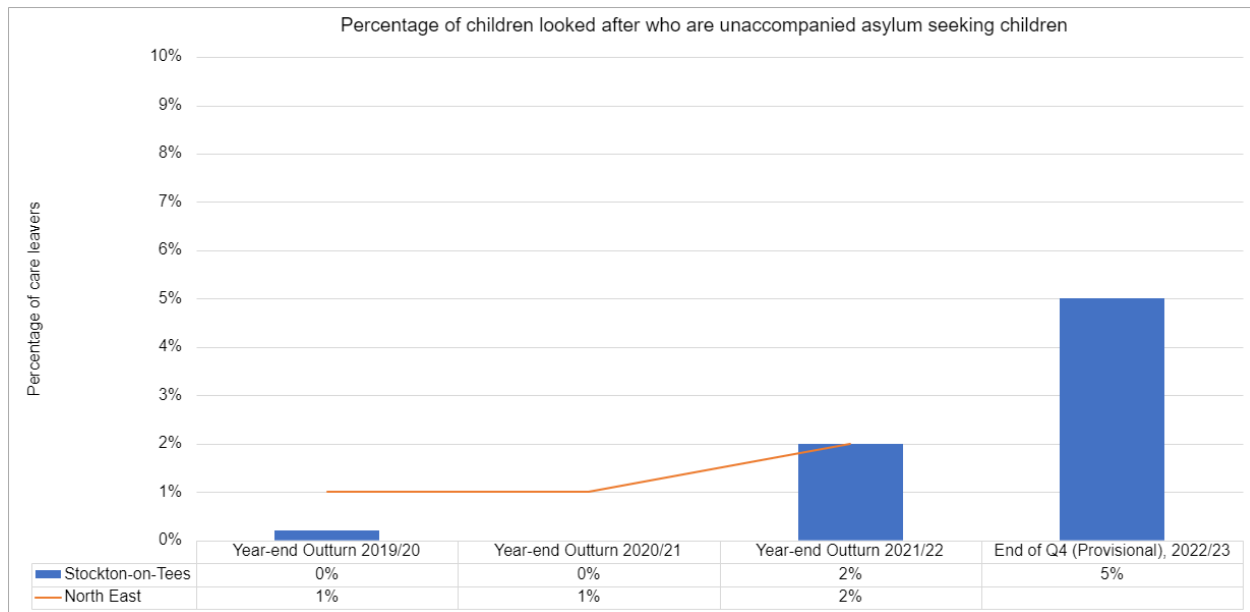
SOURCE: 903 DfE Submission report 2022/23, SDA 903 published data 2021/22

Chart 2 above shows that at year end 2022/23, in our borough:

- Most children started to be looked after because of a S20 (57%), then an Interim care Order (34%), then detained on CP grounds in LA accommodation (5%), then a Full Care Order (2%) and finally a Youth Justice Legal Status (1%). The same pattern is also reflected in our activity across 2021/22 and across the North East overall in 2021/22 (most recent data).
- More children started to be looked after due to a S20 than was the case in 2021/22, but this proportion is smaller than across the North East based on most recent data.
- More children started to be looked after due to an interim care order than was the case in 2021/22 and this proportion is greater than across the North East based on most recent data
- Fewer children started to be looked after being detained on CP grounds in LA accommodation than was the case in 2021/22 and this proportion is smaller than across the North East based on most recent data
- More children started to be looked after due to a full care order than was the case in 2021/22 and this proportion is larger than across the North East based on most recent data
- The same proportion of children started to be looked after due to youth justice legal status as was the case in 2021/22 and this proportion is the same as across the North East overall based on most recent data

## Percentage of children looked after who are unaccompanied asylum seeker children.

**Chart 3**

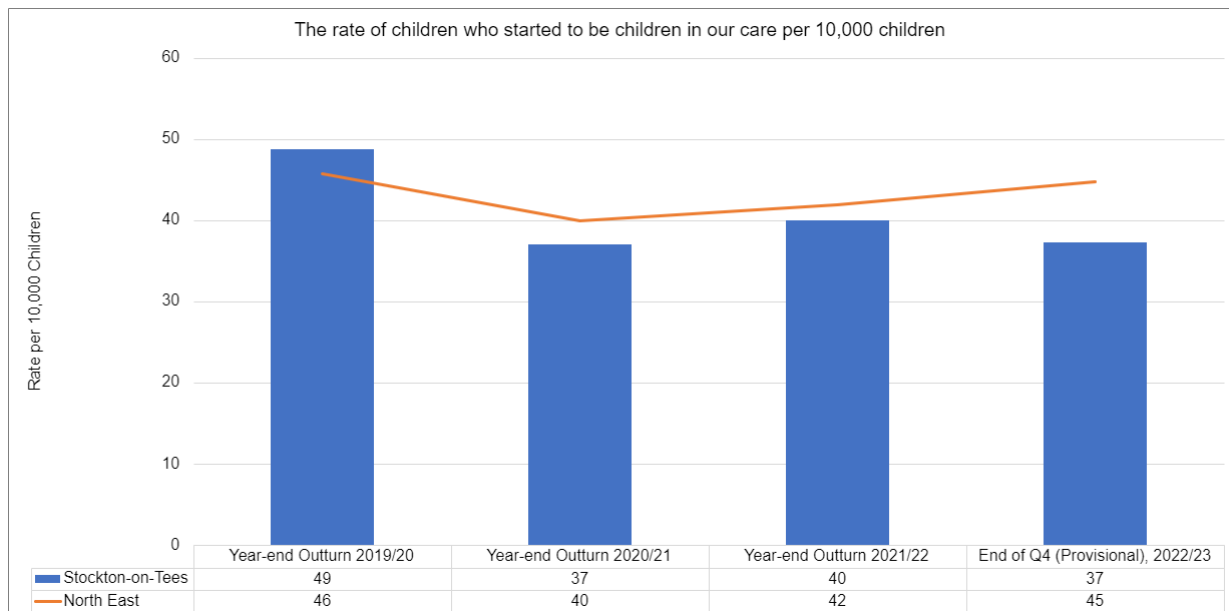


SOURCE: 903 DfE Submission report 2022/23 (provisional), SSSA 903 published data 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22

Chart 3 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we had more children looked after who are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children than we have in any of the last three years. Our numbers in this respect are also much larger than for the North East overall in 2021/22 (most recent data).

## Children starting to be children in our care per 10,000 children.

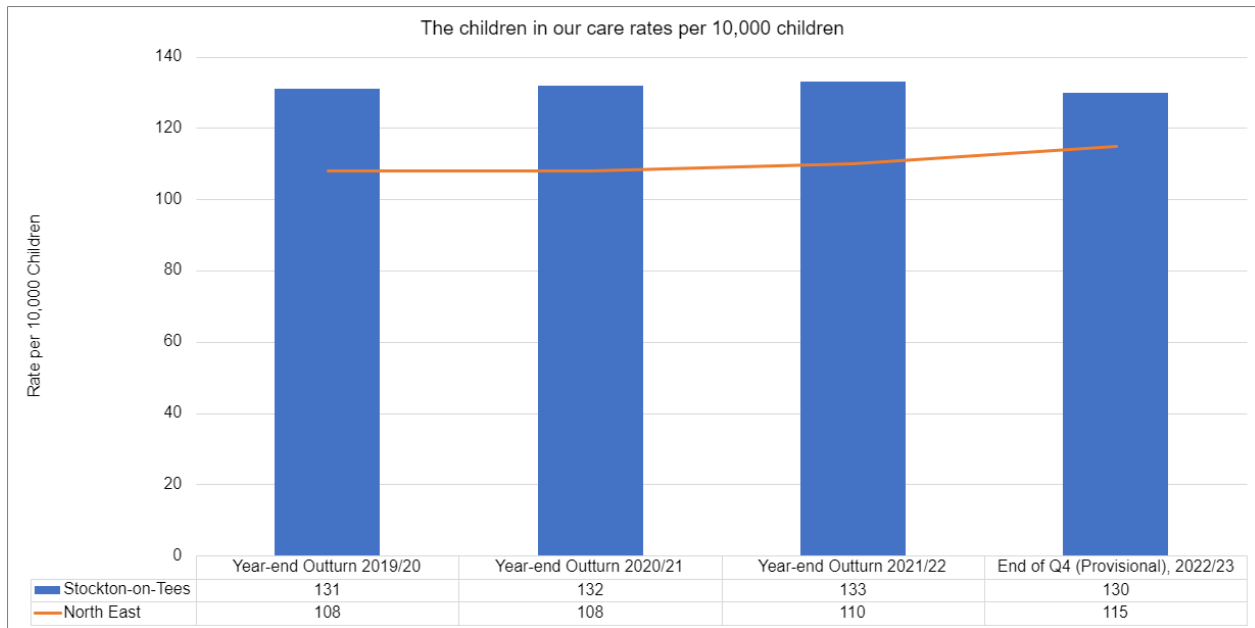
**Chart 4**



SOURCE: 903 DfE Submission report 2022/23 - ADCS North East Year End 2022/23, Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20

Chart 4 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we had fewer children per 10,000 starting to be children in our care (37 per 10,000) than we did in 2021/22. We are also performing better than the North East overall (45 per 10,000).

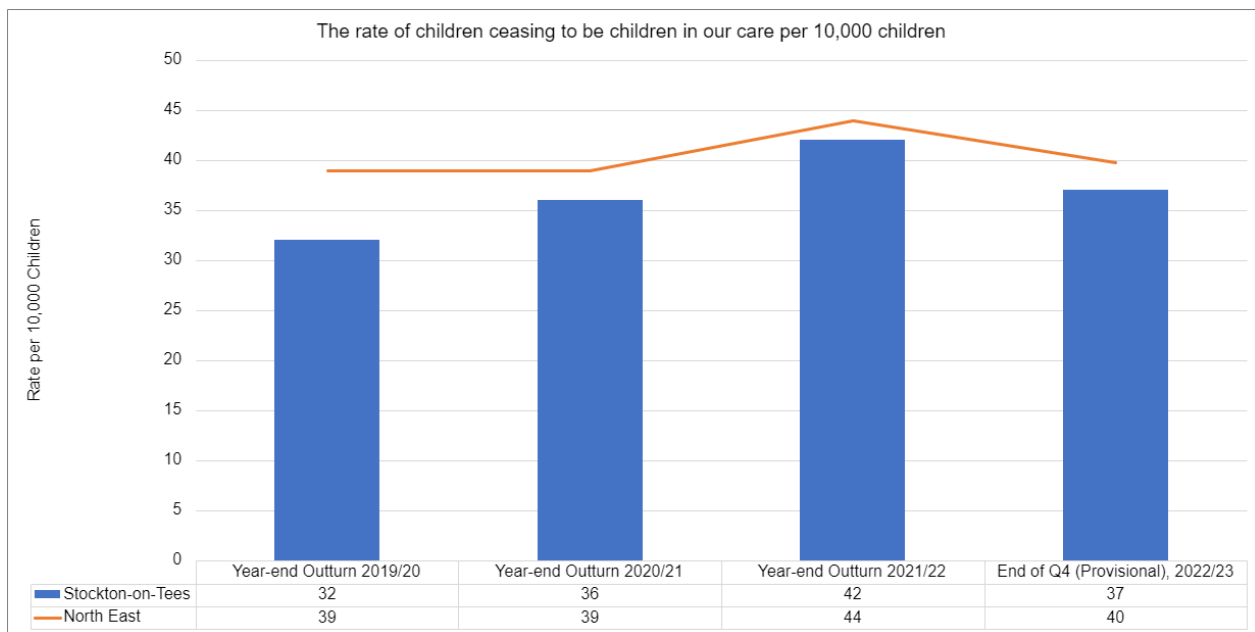
### Chart 5 Children in our care per 10,000 children



SOURCE: 903 DfE Submission report 2022/23 - ADCS North East Year End 2022/23, Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20

Chart 5 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we had fewer children in our care per 10,000 than we have in any of the last three years. However, we are above the regional average.

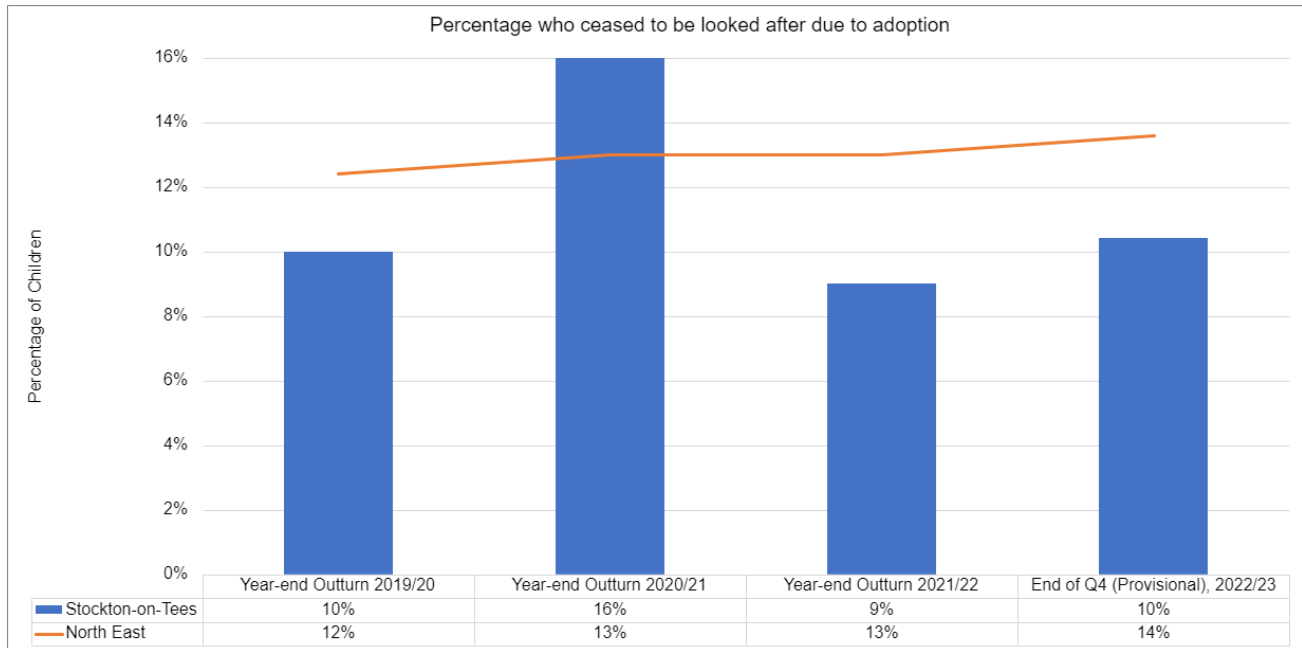
### Chart 6 Children ceasing to be children in our care per 10,000 children.



SOURCE: 903 DfE Submission report 2022/23 - ADCS North East Year End 2022/23, Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20

Chart 6 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we performed less well than we did in 2021/22 but better than in 2019/20 and 2020/21 in terms of children ceasing to be children in our care per 10,000. We also performed less well than the North East overall.

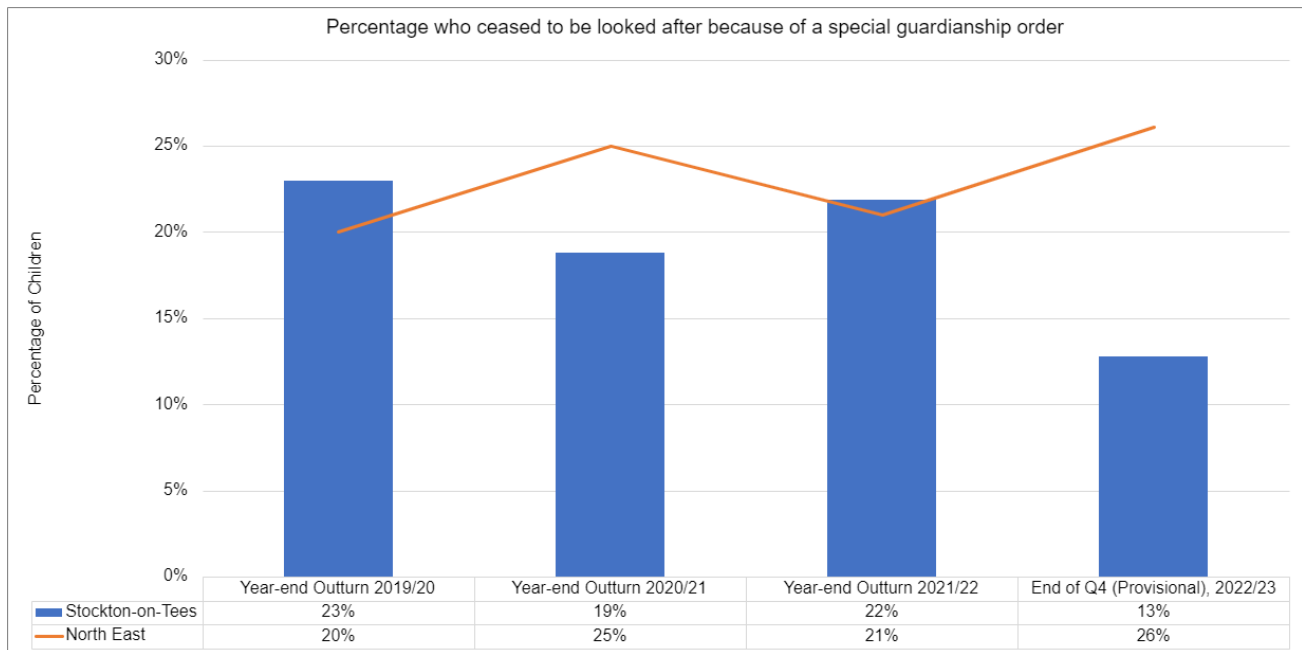
### Chart 7 Children ceasing to be children in our care who were adopted.



SOURCE: 903 DfE Submission report 2022/23 - ADCS North East Year End 2022/23, Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20

Chart 7 above shows that at year end 2022/23, more children ceased to be children in our care who were adopted than was the case in 2021/22. But, at the same time, we performed less well than the North East overall.

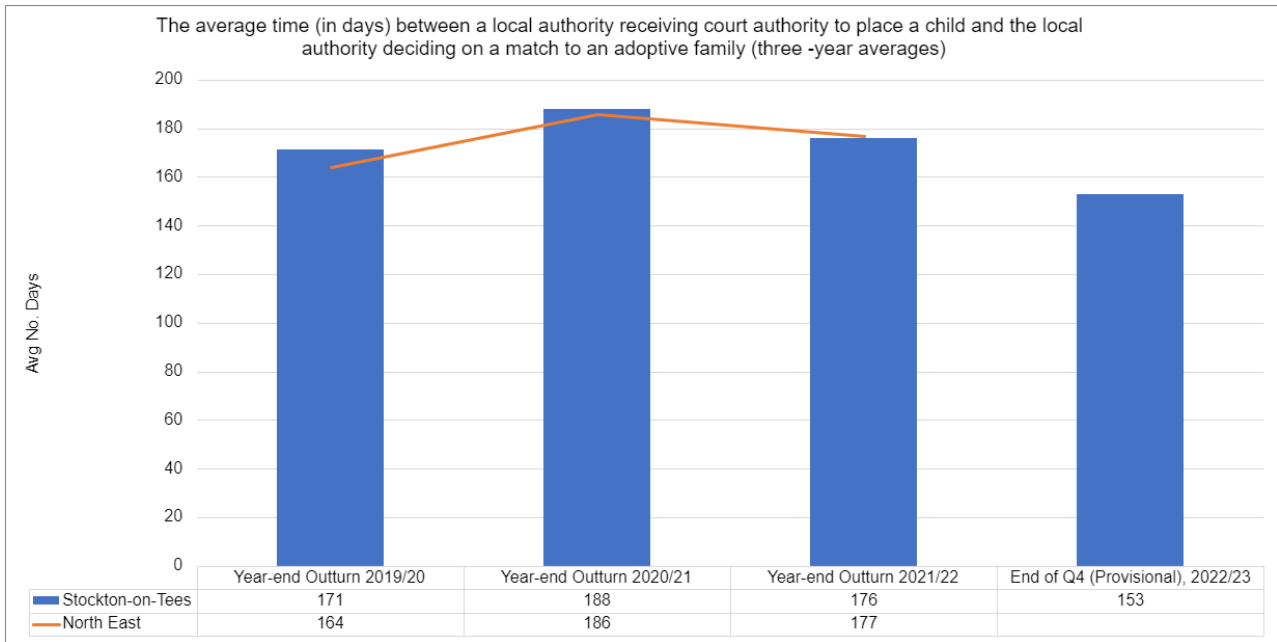
**Chart 8 Percentage who ceased to be looked after because of a special guardianship order.**



SOURCE: 903 DfE Submission report 2022/23 - ADCS North East Year End 2022/23, Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20

Chart 8 above shows that at year end 2022/23, fewer children ceased to be children in our care because of a special guardianship order than was the case in 2021/22. We also performed less well than the North East overall.

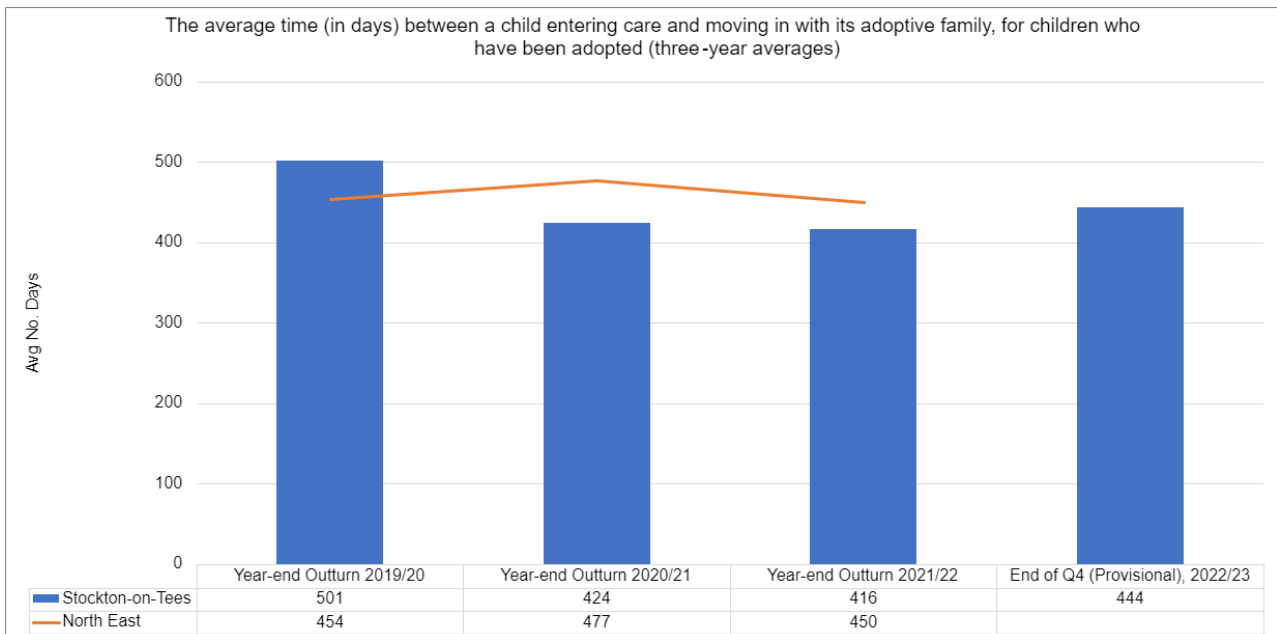
**Chart 9 Average time in days between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family.**



SOURCE: ASGLB - Various Reports (Q4 2022/23, Q4 2021/22, Q4 2020/21, Q4 2019/20)

Chart 9 above shows that at year end 2022/23, the time we took in days between receiving court authority to place a child and our deciding on a match to an adoptive family was better than at year end 2021/22.

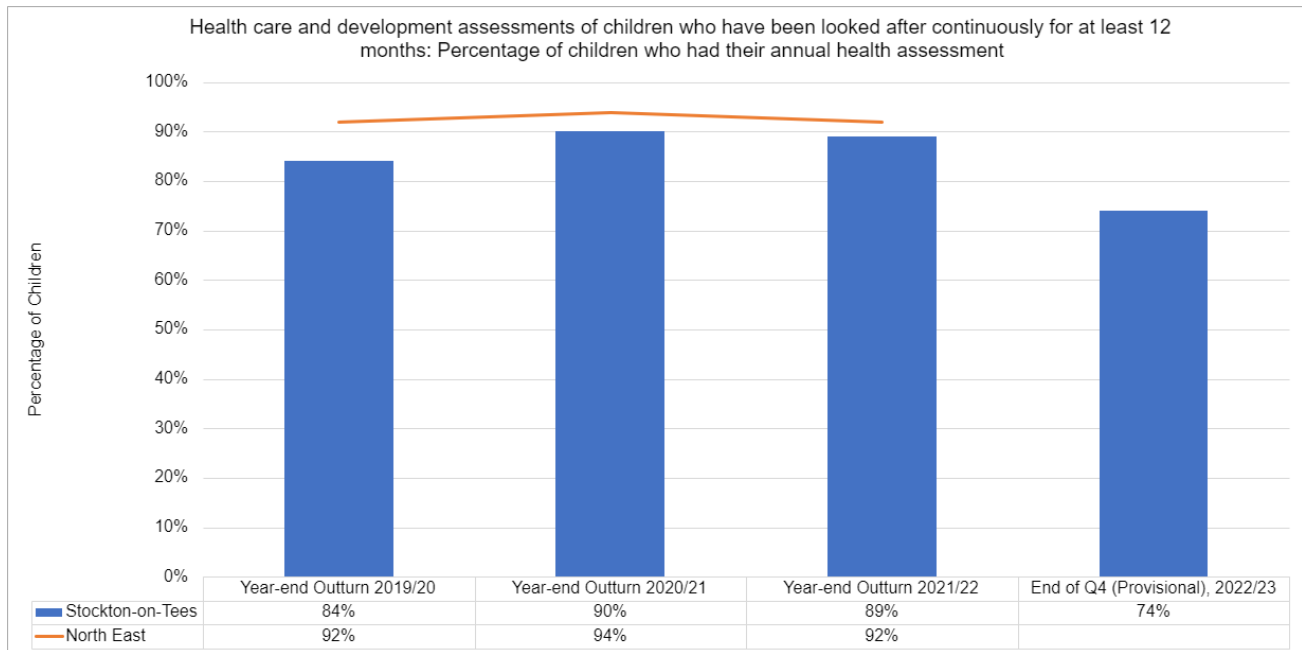
**Chart 10 Average time in days for children entering care and moving in with their adoptive family for children who have been adopted.**



SOURCE: ASGLB - Various Reports (Q4 2022/23, Q4 2021/22, Q4 2020/21, Q4 2019/20)

Chart 10 above shows that at year end 2022/23, the time we took in days for children entering our care and moving in with their adoptive family was less good than at year end in both 2021/22. Whilst North East comparative information for 2022/23 is not currently available, our year end 2022/23 performance is better than the North East overall in 2021/22.

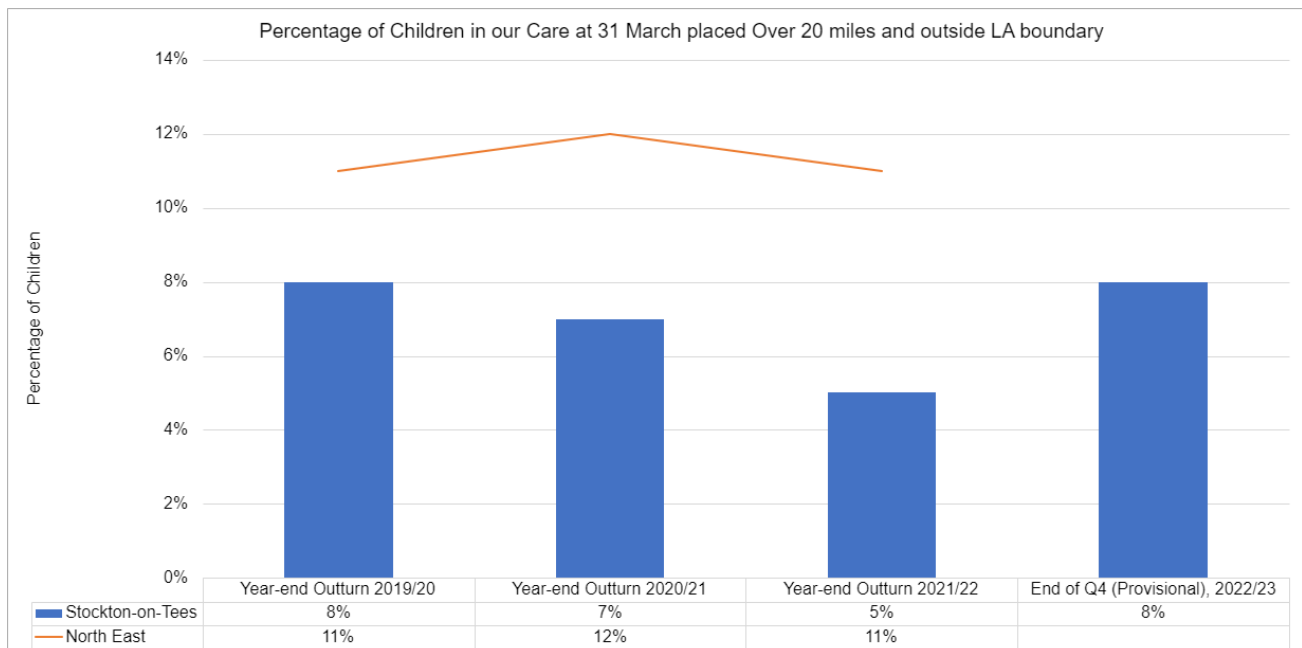
**Chart 11 Health care and development assessments of children who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months: percentage of children who had their annual health assessment.**



SOURCE: 903 DfE Submission report 2022/23 - SSDA 903 published data 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22

Chart 11 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we performed less well than we did at year-end 2021/22. Comparative data for 2022/23 is not currently available.

**Chart 12 Percentage of children in our care at 31 March placed over 20 miles and outside the local authority boundary.**

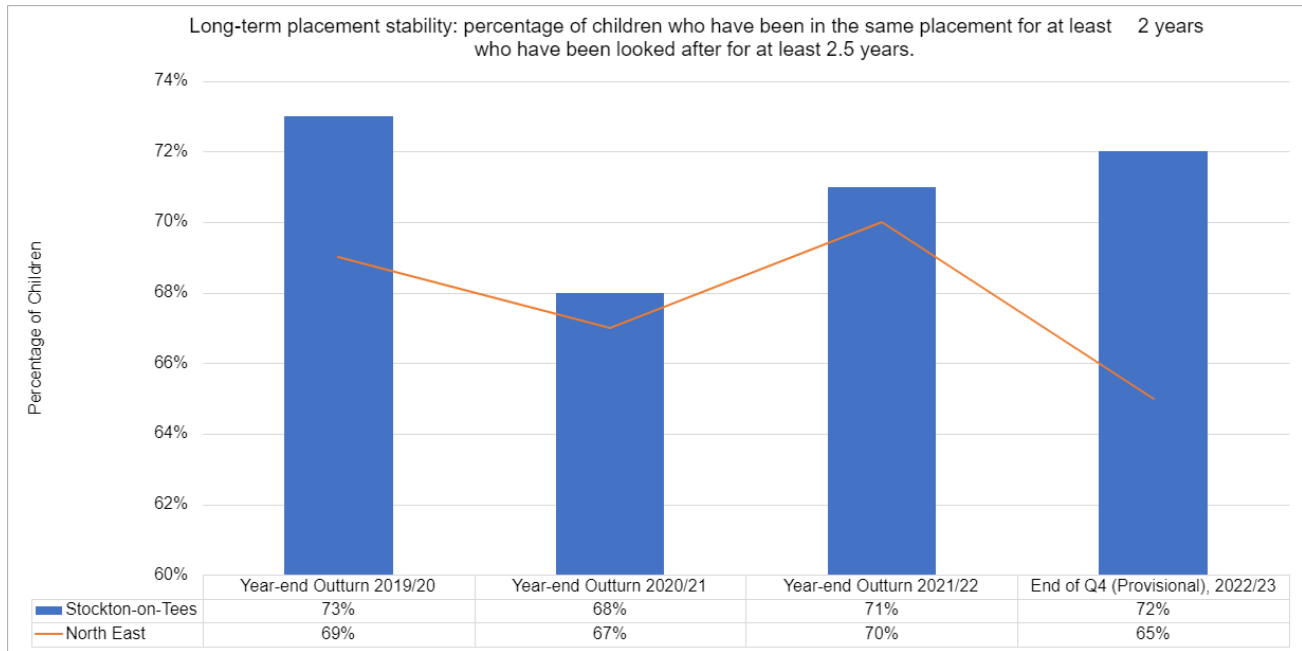


SOURCE: 903 DfE Submission report 2022/23 - SSDA 903 published data 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22

Chart 12 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we performed less well than we did at year-end in 2020/21. Comparative information is not yet available.



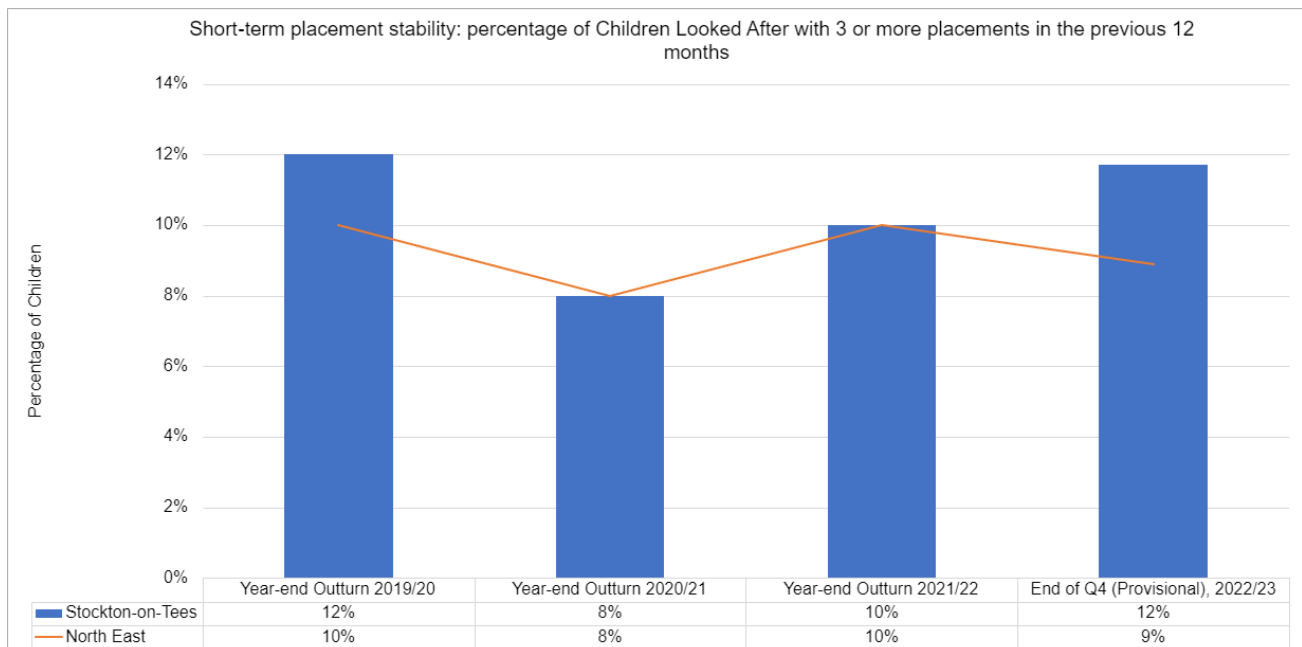
**Chart 13 - Percentage of children who have been in the same placement for at least 2 years who have been looked after for at least 2.5 years.**



SOURCE: 903 DfE Submission report 2022/23 - SSDA 903 published data 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22

Chart 13 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we performed better than we have since year end 2019/20 and better than the North East overall in this respect in 2022/23.

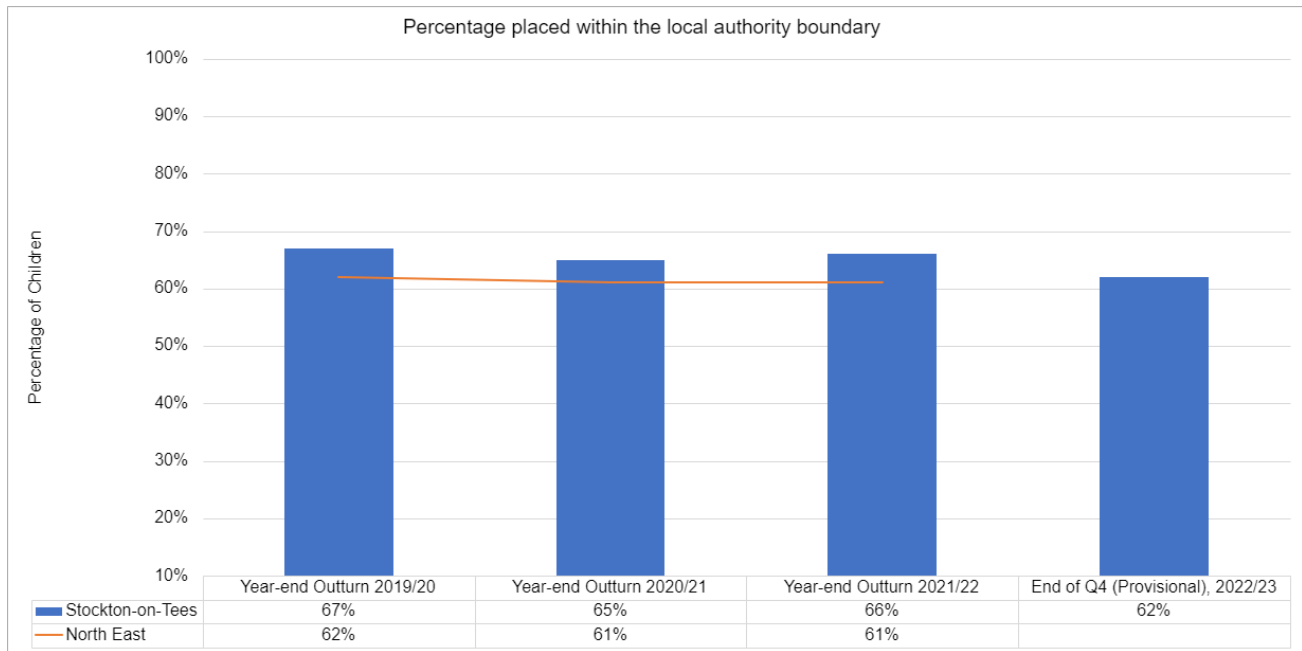
**Chart 14 Percentage of children looked after with 3 or more placement in the previous 12 months.**



SOURCE: 903 DfE Submission report 2022/23 - ADCS North East Year End 2022/23, Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20

Chart 14 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we performed less well on this measure than the previous year and compared to the North east. We also performed less well than the North East overall.

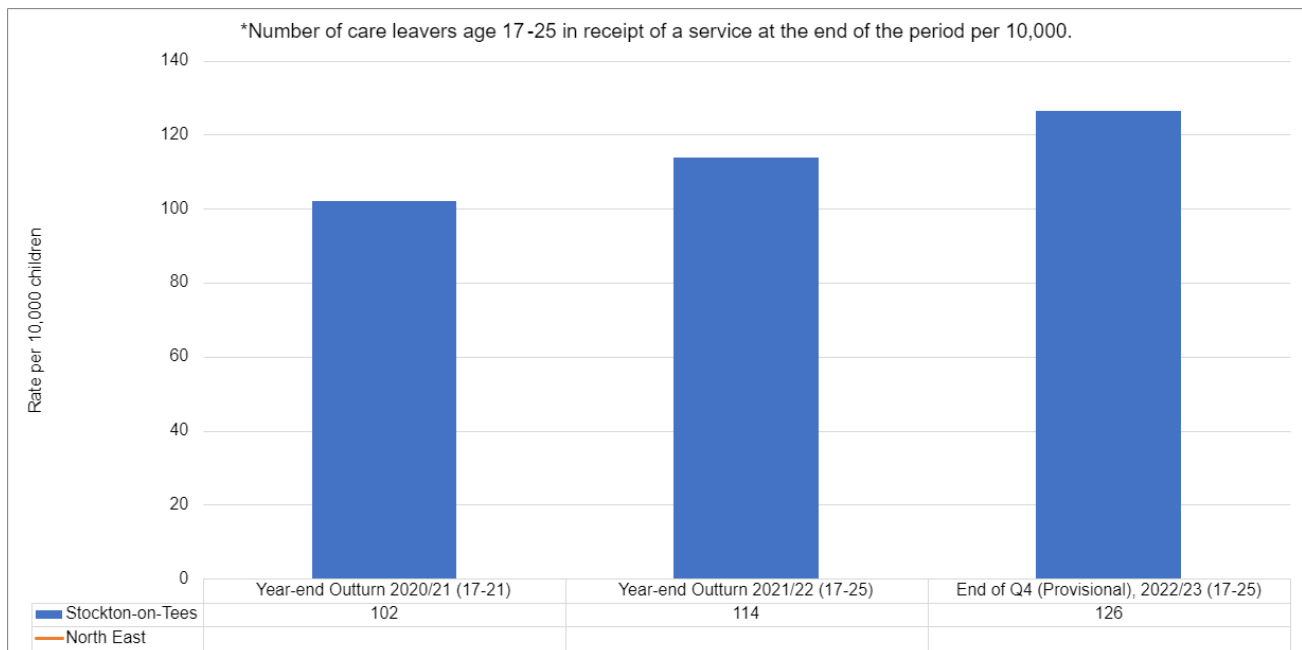
### Chart 15 Percentage placed within the local authority boundary



SOURCE: 903 DfE Submission report 2022/23 - ADCS North East Year End 2022/23, Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20

Chart 15 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we performed slightly less well than last year. Comparative information is not yet available.

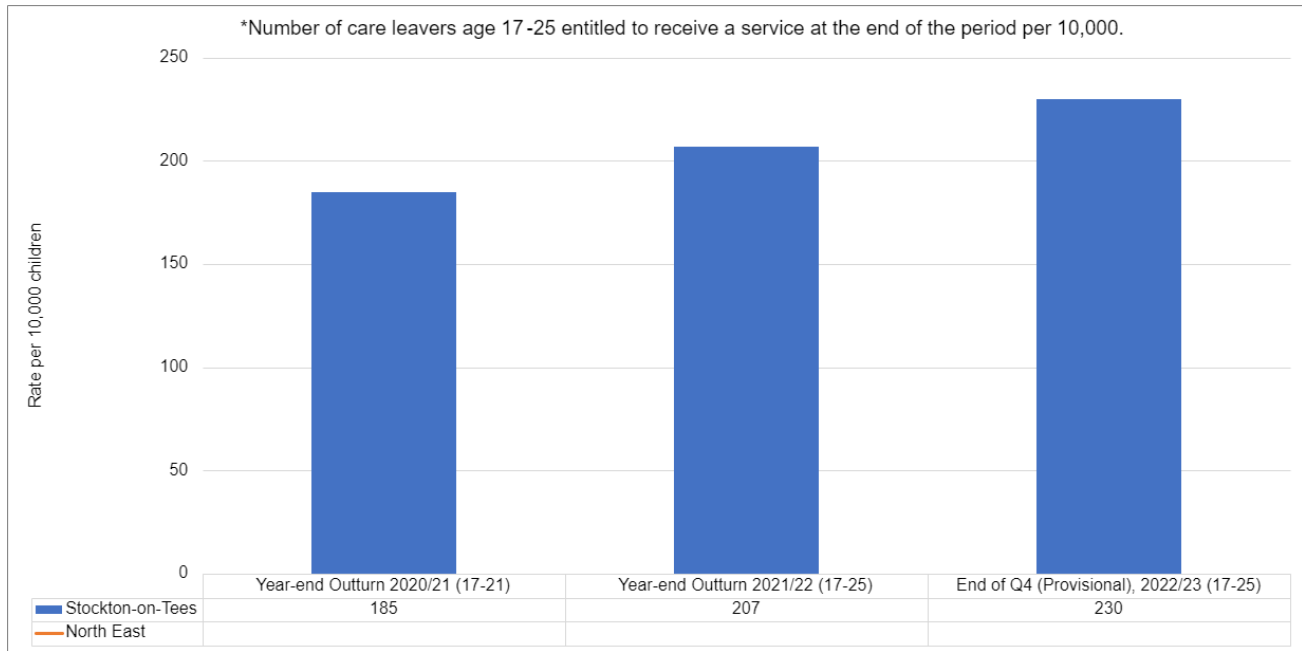
### Chart 16 Number of care leavers aged 17 – 25 in receipt of a service at the end of the period per 10,000.



SOURCE: ADCS North East - Various Reports (Q4 2022/23 (provisional), Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20) - population based on 17-24 for that year

Chart 16 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we performed better than we have in the last two years in terms of the number of care leavers aged 17 – 25 in receipt of a service at the end of the period, per 10,000. North East comparative information is not available.

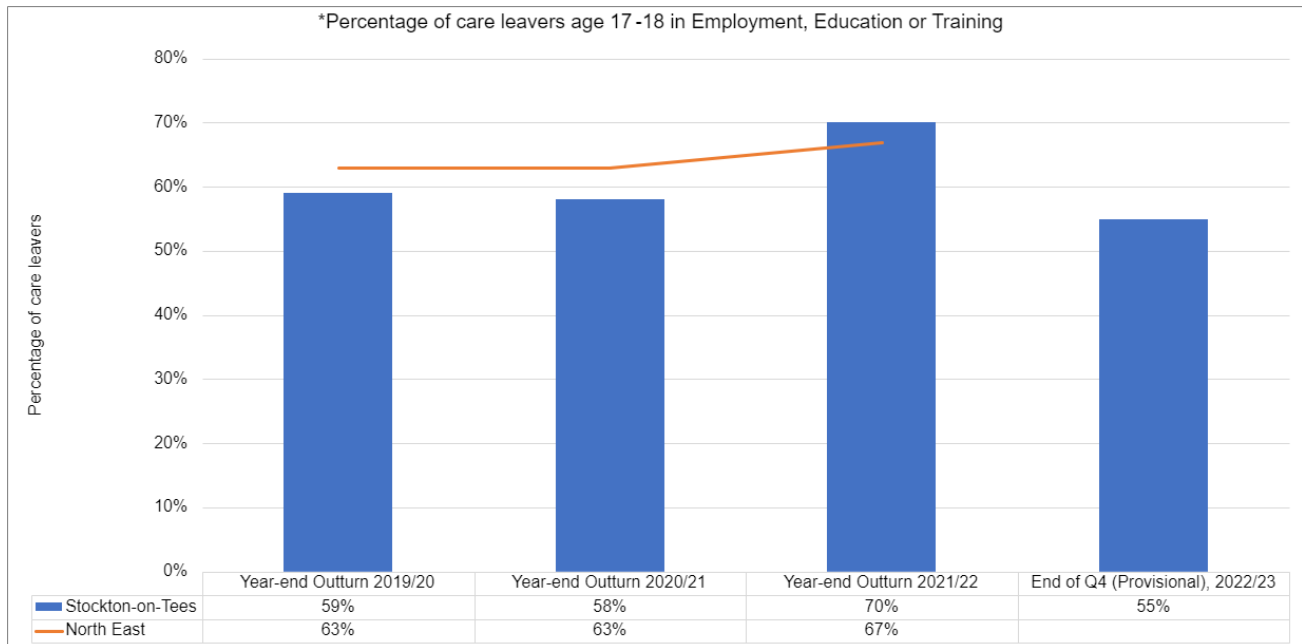
**Chart 17 Number of care leavers aged 17 – 25 entitled to receive a service at the end of the period per 10,000.**



SOURCE: ADCS North East - Various Reports (Q4 2022/23 (provisional), Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20) - population based on 17-24 for that year

Chart 17 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we performed better than we have in the last two years in terms of the number of care leavers aged 17 – 25 entitled to receive a service at the end of the in period, per 10,000. North East comparative information is not available.

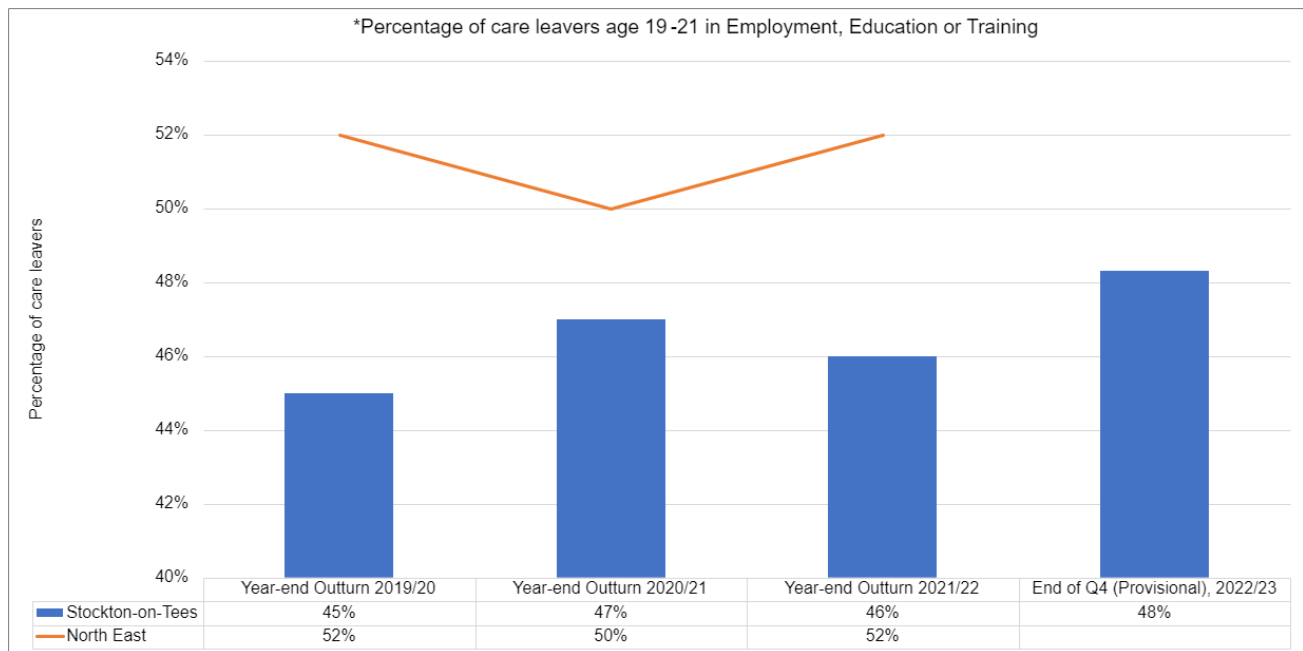
**Chart 18 Percentage of care leavers aged 17 – 18 in employment, education or training.**



SOURCE: SSDA903 Looked After Children Summary and ADCS North East - Various Reports (Q4 2022/23, Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20)

Chart 18 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we performed less well than we have across the last three years in terms of the percentage of care leavers aged 17 – 18 in employment, education, or training.

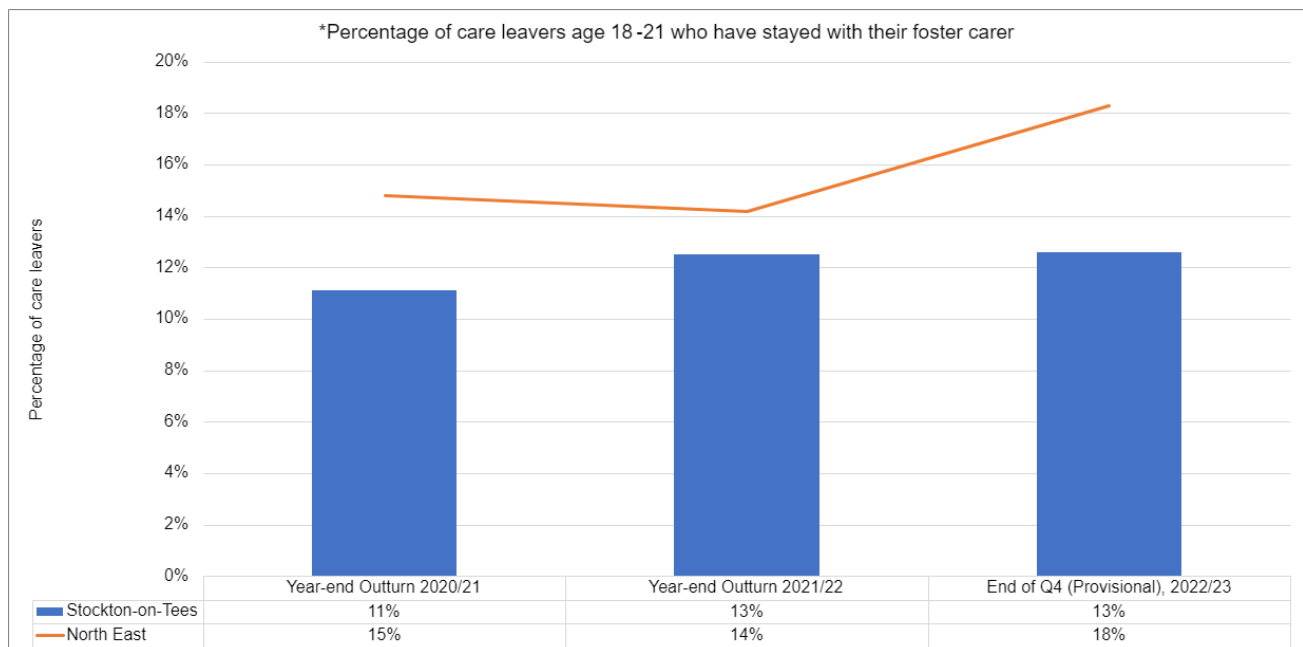
### Chart 19 Percentage of care leavers aged 19 – 21 in employment, education or training.



SOURCE: SSDA903 Looked After Children Summary and ADCS North East - Various Reports (Q4 2022/23, Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20)

Chart 19 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we performed better than we have across the last three years in terms of the percentage of care leavers aged 19 - 21 in employment, education, or training.

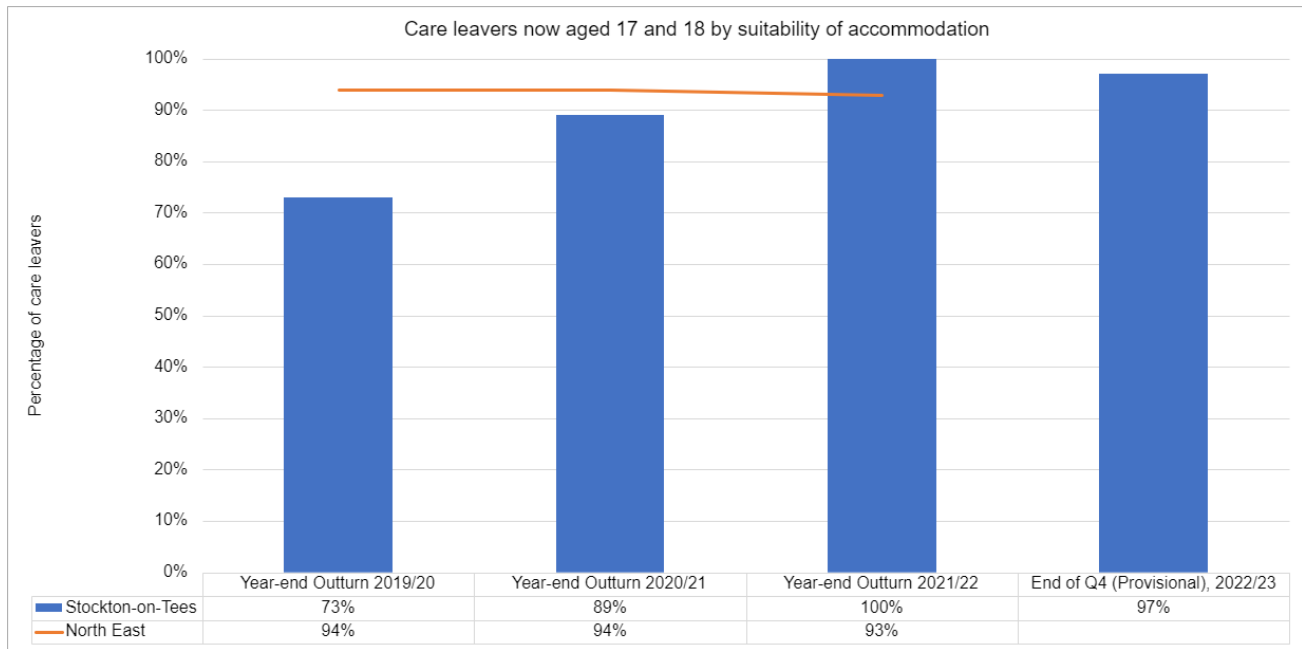
### Chart 20 Percentage of care leavers aged 18 – 21 who have stayed with their foster carer.



SOURCE: ADCS North East - Various Reports (Q4 2022/23 (provisional), Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20)

Chart 20 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we performed as well as we did last year and better than the previous year in terms of percentage of care leavers aged 18 – 21 who have stayed with their foster carer. Compared with the North East overall, our performance is less good this year.

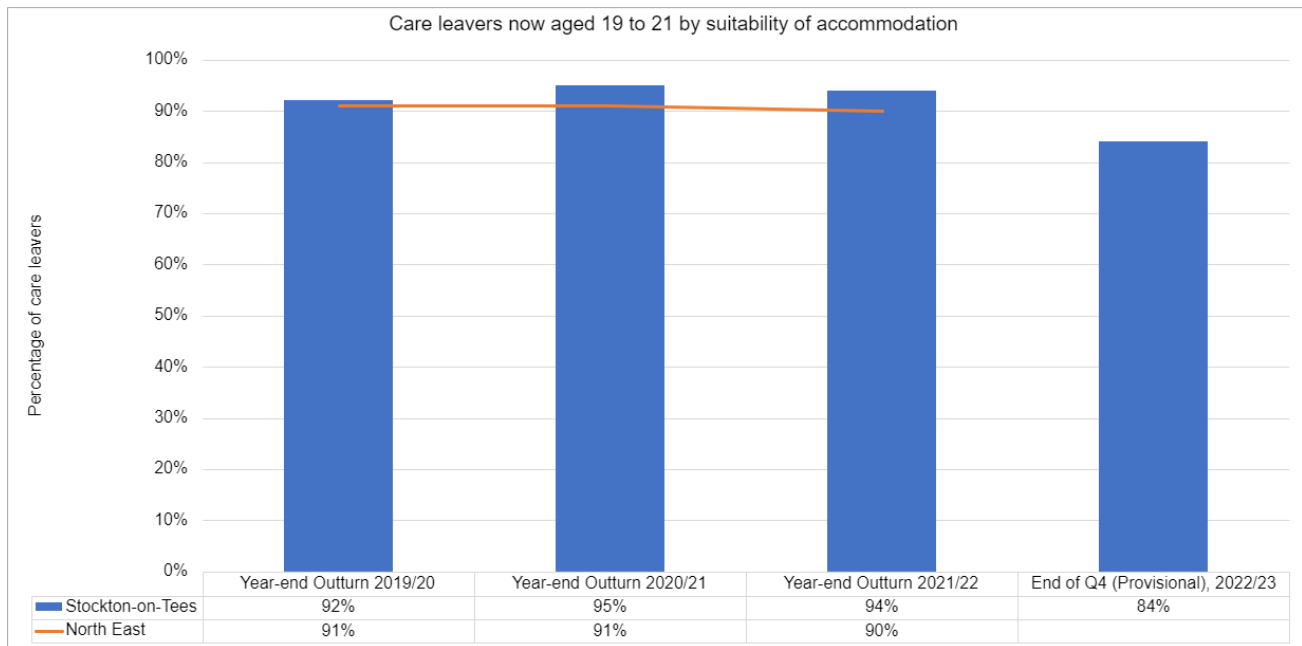
**Chart 21 Care leavers now aged 17 and 18 by suitability of accommodation.**



SOURCE: SSDA903 Looked After Children Summary and ADCS North East - Various Reports (Q4 2022/23, Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20)

Chart 21 above shows that at year end 2022/23, whilst we performed less well than we did in 2021/22. Whilst North East comparative information is not currently available for 2022/23, our performance in this respect was better than it was across the North East in any of the last three years.

**Chart 22 - Care leavers now aged 19 to 21 by suitability of accommodation.**



SOURCE: SSDA903 Looked After Children Summary and ADCS North East - Various Reports (Q4 2022/23, Year End 2021/22, Year End 2020/21, Year End 2019/20)

Chart 22 above shows that at year end 2022/23, we performed less well than in previous years.

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## Ofsted themes in house Residential provision

**Date of report: July 2023**

### 1. Aim and background to the report

1.1 The report will review the findings of Ofsted inspections of our residential provision. It will highlight areas of best practise and those that need to improve. To ensure that Stockton's Residential Homes are providing reliable and effective care for the CIOC in the borough, it will include plans for addressing any shortfalls.

### 2. Inspection Judgements

2.1 The table below illustrates the most recent Inspection Judgements made by Ofsted for Stockton's Children's Homes.

Ayton Place	Tilery House Turnaround	Oak View*	Rose House	Piper House	Hartburn Lodge	Our Place
SC456710	SC040583	SC035387	SC035222	SC442886	SC035380	2568244
04.07.23	17.01.2023	Currently closed for refurbishment	05.07.2022 – Full Inspection 28.03.23 - Assurance Visit	14.06.2023	01.02.2023	20.07.23
Good	Outstanding	Requires Improvement* 27.10.21	Requires Improvement	Good	Good	Good

### 3. Brief overview of each home and current Ofsted judgements

#### 3.1 Ayton Place

Ayton Place provides care for up to four children who have experience significant trauma within their lives and can therefore experience emotional and social difficulties. The home has a history of outstanding judgements through Ofsted inspection.

It was disappointing that the home's rating was reduced to good during Ofsted's most recent inspection on the 3rd and 4th of July. Despite this, Ofsted made it clear that although home continues to provide the highest standards of care, outside systems were responsible for the downgrading in this instance.

These systems are related to the residential missing from care procedures since it was determined that there was not enough staffing available overnight at the home to actively look for children who might have gone missing.

Children have individualised missing-from-home plans that are in place during the day, as identified by Ofsted. On-call systems, however, are insufficient to guarantee that children's plans are conducted at night. This implies that staff members cannot leave the house to look for missing children at night. Since this shortfall fell under the 'help and protect' judgement, it automatically lowers the overall grading regardless of the outcomes the home achieves.

Due to the recent Residential Review, the recruiting of waking night staff had been underway for some time before the inspection. But filling the roles has been challenging. To make sure that these shortfalls are resolved, other options are now being explored.

Positively, the most recent report acknowledges that 'Children in this home are loved and valued by the caring staff team, that children have consistently good experiences while living in the home. This is because staff understand and respond to their individual needs.'

This home has benefitted from a stable and consistent staff and management team. Ofsted said, 'the registered manager's vision for the home is admirable. The manager and her deputy work dynamically to ensure that children's needs are met and that all children make progress. Managers have high aspirations for children and staff, and they accept nothing less than good outcomes for the children they support.'

It is without doubt that this home has the foundations and determination to strive forward and once again obtain an outstanding recognition.

### **3.2 Piper House**

Piper House also provides care for up to four children who have experience significant trauma. The home has experienced significant challenges in the last 18 months and its Ofsted judgments reflect this.

The home previously achieved consecutive Outstanding judgements, however after the last Registered Manager progressed to her new role as Mentoring & Performance Manager, appointed new manager struggled to follow in her leadership. This has had detrimental impact which resulted in the home being downgraded to Requires Improvement in its inspection on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

During an internal investigation, the manager moved onto another role with a different LA. To resolve the issues an experienced manager with a history of receiving outstanding judgements took over the leadership in the home as an interim arrangement.

Several recruitment drives have been conducted to find a suitable replacement. However, as, this has proven to be a challenge. According to market intelligence, this is because of the offered salary, which is not entirely competitive with those of other external providers. A business case is currently being considered to explore solutions.

The input of the interim manager has been effective. The home was further inspected on the 14th June 23 and graded Good. The report reflects the work of the interim manager and deputy and noted the significant improvements in the home. 'The staff team is more settled, and staff are confident in their abilities.'



Ofsted noted that the children have made considerable progress since the last inspection. That the cornerstone of the children's progress is the positive relationships between them and a stable staff team. The staff provide consistency of care, which helps children to feel secure. These trusting relationships enable children to build a strong sense of identity, which helps them to achieve and have positive experiences.

As with Ayton Place, there is confidence that Piper House will again achieve outstanding. There is work to do be done. A suitable Registered Manager is the current key priority.

### **3.3 Rose House**

Rose House can provide care for up to three children. Currently there is one young person in the home due to the significant care needs they require.

Rose House's most recent full Ofsted inspection took place on 12<sup>th</sup> October 22 and resulted in a grade of Requires Improvement. Given the difficulties and challenges the young person was facing, this came as little surprise.

A follow up Assurance inspection was conducted on the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2023. The purpose of this inspection is to assess the ongoing effectiveness of the service and to ensure it is meeting its legal obligations. The outcome was that Ofsted did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children in the home.

Ofsted reported that Leaders and managers have made good progress in improving the home environment. The child is developing trusting relationships with staff. Agency staff still work in the home but at a much-reduced rate since the last inspection. This has led to more consistent care for the child from staff who are known to them. Staff have received specialist training and taken additional steps beyond their roles to support the child.

### **3.4 Our Place**

Our Place provides care for up to five children who may have social or emotional difficulties, and/or physical disabilities. The placements are a combination of short breaks and short to medium term permanent placements.

Our Place has just had their most recent inspection on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 23. The outcome was the home was judged as Good. We are still awaiting the final report.

Notably this home has provided and been recognised for their excellent care to UASC. Ofsted commented that Staff are experienced and skilled in looking after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and take great care and pride in doing so. They ensure the child's cultural and religious needs are respected, promoted, and provided for. Written information is translated into their spoken language. Interpreters are provided for meetings and direct work sessions. This ensures that they can be given the same information, support, and opportunities as their English-speaking peers.

This home has also experienced the challenges of not having a full time Registered Manager for the past 12 months. The homes deputy has acted up in support of the home during this time but has chosen not to progress a registration to Ofsted. During the recent review, the manager of Rose House applied to manage Our Place. He has since started his transition and is currently registering with Ofsted. The plan at this time is for him to manage both homes given his extensive understanding of the needs of the child currently in Rose House. Moving forward it is anticipated that Rose will become a 'cluster home' with one of our new or remaining homes.

### **3.5 Hartburn Lodge**

Hartburn Lodge provides care and support for children with physical and/or learning disabilities. The home offers short break care for up to five children, after school care and day care. Until recently the home had one long-term placement.

Hartburn has always achieved great results in their Ofsted inspections. They have a history of outstanding judgments; however, in the last 2 years they have been graded Good. The rationale for this has been two long-term placements. These placements have stretched the current staffing and there has been a reliance on agency to fill the shortfall. Short breaks for other children have been impacted and this has brought some discontent from families who services had to be reduced. Covid also played a significant part due to the restrictions on the care the home could provide, given the additional vulnerabilities of the children who attend Hartburn.

Hartburn's last full inspection was on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 23. Ofsted commented how the children have formed trusting and secure relationships with the staff and look forward to their visits to the home.

The registered manager has a clear vision for the service and how to achieve her goals. She understands where development is required. The management team makes its values and expectations clear, and staff share them. Staff feel confident under the strong leadership that is in place.

### **3.6 Tilery House**

Tilery House, or Turnaround as it is commonly known provides care for up to three young people. The home has a strength in supporting young people to be reunified to a family environment identified to meet their longer-term needs.

This home has been consistently graded outstanding by Ofsted and most recently on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 23. Ofsted said the home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection, and care.

This is an exceptionally happy home. It is also a family home, with the children's presence felt, seen, and heard throughout. When the inspector asked the children to rate the home out of 10, one child said, '100 out of 10.' The child said, 'Staff help me when I am upset.' Another child said, 'This is the best place I have ever lived. The staff are the best. I love them all.'

Despite moving into the home in difficult circumstances, and often after a succession of placement breakdowns, children make remarkable emotional progress. One professional said of the staff members, 'I can't sing their praises enough.' A family member said, 'They have worked miracles.' Children are shown unconditional love and that they deserve to be loved. As a result, children become more confident and positive. One professional said, 'This is a special place.'

We intend to use and build on the strengths of this home to develop our new 'turnaround' provision at Oak View. The Manager has been appointed as our first Cluster Manager and will manage both homes. We are in the process of recruiting team members and specialist training will be provided to support the team to care for a further three young people. The manager is excited about the challenge and there is full confidence in his abilities to achieve future outstanding outcomes.

### **3.7 Oakview**

Oakview has been closed for several months whilst we undertake significant renovations to the building. We anticipate that the home will be re-opened by the end of August 23.

The home will be able to accommodate up to a maximum of 5 young people, however this is dependant on the number of placements in Tilery as Ofsted regulations stipulate, we cannot have more than 6 placements over the two homes.

Planning is in progress to admit three young people who are currently in expensive external provision. Each of these children will have a detailed care plan with the intent to support them to be reunified to their families following a period of intensive support.

## **4. Summary**

4.1 There have been some challenges for the homes in the last couple of years. In summary these include:

- Recruitment and retention of suitably qualified and experienced Registered Managers.
- Recruitment and retention of Residential Care Workers, thus
- Reliance on use of agency staffing to meet the needs of young people. Such workers are often unqualified and inexperienced.
- Staff development and progression planning for staff and managers.
- The absence of the Team Manager due to completing additional studies.
- Needed maintenance and redevelopment of the homes.

4.2 In contrast, the homes have continued to provide excellent care for our young people. As recognised by Ofsted our homes have.

- Children make good progress.
- Children and young people can form trusted relationships with staff, and this is evident across all our homes.
- The young people told Ofsted that they were 'happy and felt safe, and that they thoroughly enjoyed their experiences.
- The staff and leaders are committed and professional.
- The homes are homely, where children can feel loved.
- The children's many achievements are captured.
- Managers invest in their staff and recognise their potential. A significant amount of time has been spent over recent months in developing the staff teams. In-house training days regularly take place, and staff attend specialist training on themes such as trauma. This helps staff provide the best possible care to the children.

## **5. Recommendations**

**5.1** Investment is needed to attract experienced and suitable Registered Managers and staff, given external market forces.

**5.2** Investment into internal development and progression opportunities. The development of an internal academy to provide necessary qualifications, training and progression planning is integral to achieve this.

**5.3** The Team Manager is now back full-time lead of the homes and recently taken the role as Responsible Individual. She is exceptionally experienced, skilled, and knowledgeable in managing and leading children's homes and has an established rapport with Ofsted. This will provide the homes with day-to-day direct support, and leadership and provide a direct point of contact with Ofsted.

## Brief Performance Report for Stockton Children's Homes Outcomes

Reporting period – Active as of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023

Date of Report – 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023

By – Louise Carling, Team Manager

### 1. Aim and background to Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to give the Corporate Parenting Board an update on Stockton's Children's Homes' performance as of March 31, 2023.
- 1.2 To report will provide a comparative analysis of the national picture of children's homes to guarantee the standard of care being given to our children in our care.
- 1.3 Reference and comparison will be made to Ofsted '**Official Statistics – Main findings: children's social care in England 2023**'

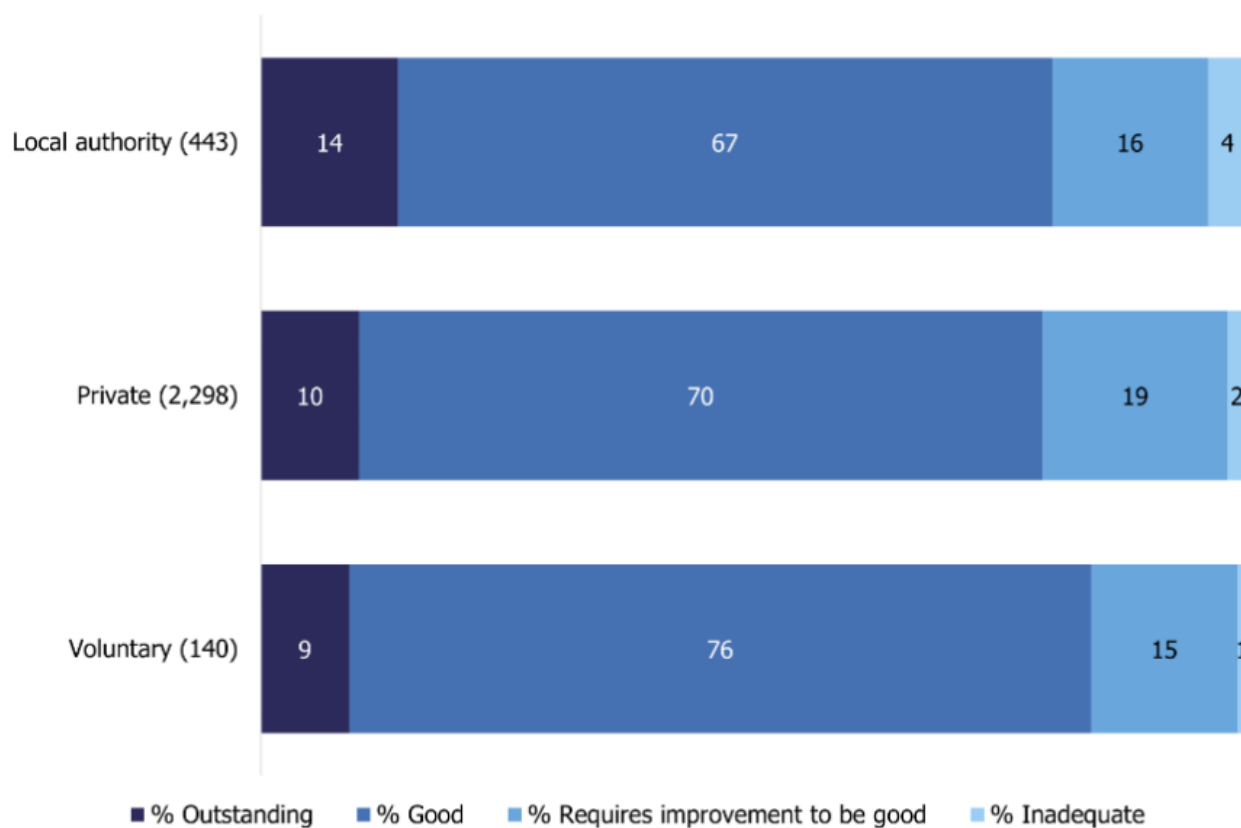
[Main findings: children's social care in England 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/main-findings-childrens-social-care-in-england-2023)

- 1.4 This report should be read alongside Ofsted themes in house Residential provision report .

### 2. National Picture – Ofsted's Main Findings, 2023

- 2.1 The number of registered children's homes in England continues to rise. [Ofsted] Nationally '*As of 31 March 2023, there was a 9% increase in the number of children's homes compared with 31 March 2022.*
- 2.2 Whilst the number of children's homes and placements continues to increase nationally, so too does the number of children needing to be cared for by LA's, including Stockton who currently have 594 Children in Our care with 16 of those being cared for in in house provision.
- 2.3 As of March 31, 2023, private organisations managed 2,450 children's homes, or 85%, and offered 8,791 beds. LAs operated 333 children's homes, accounting for 14% of all placements (1,529). In comparison to 2022, the private sector saw a rise in the number of homes (11%) and places (10%).
- 2.4 The proportion of children's homes of all types judged outstanding or good was 79% as of 31 March 2023 (10% outstanding, 69% good). This is a slight increase from 2022, when the proportion was 77%. 18% of homes were judged requires improvement to be good (compared with 21% in 2022) and 2% were judged inadequate (compared with 3% in 2022).
- 2.4 As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March four out of seven of Stockton's homes where judged good or outstanding. This has improved to five out of seven since the release of the national data.

## Grade profile of all types of children’s homes with inspection outcomes as of 31 March 2023, split by sector



2.5 It is noted that one home has been closed for refurbishment and therefore has not received an inspection in this time. This home is currently Requires Improvement; however, it is hoped once opened this will improve.

### 3. Conclusions

3.1 It is accepted that the children’s homes in Stockton have declined in their overall judgements in the past 2 years. Two homes have been downgraded from Outstanding to Good, one home was down graded to Requires Improvement, but improved at its next inspection to Good.

3.2 This decline has been due to a combination of Registered Managers leaving the LA and the subsequent difficulties to recruit suitably experience Managers to these positions.

3.3 Despite the difficulties the homes have faced, it is important to note that Stockton's current Outstanding Children's home is among the top 10% in the country, and the remaining good homes are among the top 69%.



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**STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FOSTERING PANEL**

**Date:** 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023

**Report Prepared by:** Judith Henderson – Family Placement Registered Manager

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report is intended to give an overview of the work of the Fostering Panel during the year April 22 to March 23.

**2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 The Fostering Panel considers matters referred to it under the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the Care Planning and Case Review Regulations 2010.

2.2 Panel considers assessments of applicants' suitability to foster for both unrelated and connected foster carers. Panel reaches a recommendation in respect of suitability and terms of approval, identifying type of fostering, numbers and characteristics of the children the carer should foster.

2.3 Panel also considers and makes recommendations in respect of matches of children with long term foster carers.

2.4 The Panel receives some foster carer annual reviews and recommends whether the foster carers continue to be suitable to foster or whether they should be deregistered. Panel considers foster care reviews in the following circumstances only:

- First annual foster care review.
- Following a safeguarding allegation or serious complaint against the foster carer or a member of their household.
- Where a foster carer is making a serious complaint against Stockton Borough Council.
- Following a disruption to a long-term foster placement.
- Following a significant change in circumstances (e.g. health, new partner).
- Where a change of terms of approval is recommended.
- Where an IRO recommends that the foster carer is no longer suitable to foster.

2.5 Other foster care reviews are considered directly by the Agency Decision Maker.

2.6 Panel also consider requests in respect of the extension of temporary approval of connected person foster carers (Family and Friends). Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 gives the local authority power to temporarily approve, as a foster carer, a person connected to the child, where a looked after child has been placed with them in an emergency. This temporary approval lasts for 16 weeks and during this period a full suitability to foster assessment should be undertaken. Regulation 25 allows for this 16-week period to be extended for a further 8 weeks, where the assessment has not been completed within the timescale. Before extending the approval, the local authority must consider

whether the placement remains the most suitable for the child and seek the views of the Fostering Panel. In these situations, therefore, Panel provide a view, rather than a recommendation, to the Agency Decision Maker, who is the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care.

- 2.7 Panel has a role in the quality assurance of fostering work undertaken by the Department. This quality assurance involves scrutiny of the written reports, timescales and whether the Department and the workers are following regulatory requirements.
- 2.8 Panel recommendations are forwarded to the Agency Decision Maker who makes a decision about whether a person is suitable and/or continues to be suitable to foster, whether a child should be placed for long term foster carer with a specific foster carer and whether the temporary approval of a connected person should be extended for up to 8 weeks.
- 2.9 The Agency Decision Maker in Stockton is the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care. During this reporting period, Rhona Bolland acted as ADM for the first 6 month period and the role transferred to Adele Moore in November 2022.

### **3. CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL**

- 3.1 The Fostering Regulations require the local authority to maintain a 'Central List' of people considered to be suitable to be a Panel member. The Agency Advisor must ensure that there are sufficient members and that each individual member has the experience and expertise necessary to effectively discharge the functions of the Panel. The Panel must have an Independent Chair, one or two Vice Chairs and one or more social workers who have at least 3 years relevant post qualifying experience. The Central List must be made up of independent members as well as those who are employed by, or carry out functions of, the Council.
- 3.2 The Panel needs to have 5 members present to be quorate, including the Chair or Vice Chair and at least 4 other members, one of whom must be Independent (not including the Chair) and one a social worker.
- 3.3 At 31 March 2023 there were 19 members on the Central List, an increase of three from the previous year. There were two resignations of Panel members during the year 2021/22; these were social work members who left their SBC social work roles. Recruitment has increased the diversity of the Central List and given a greater robustness, reducing the risk of lack of quoracy. Current membership comprises an independent Chair and two Vice Chairs (all registered social workers), an adoptive parent, a person who was fostered and adopted, 1 foster carer from a neighbouring local authority and one SBC retired foster carer, 1 local authority councillor, 1 youth worker, 1 housing officer and 4 SBC social workers, 3 independent social workers and 2 panel members who were previously registered as fostering and adoption social workers. Achieving quoracy has been generally achievable over the past year. Only 2 Panels were cancelled due to not being quorate, both happening through the first six months of the reporting period. The business from these Panels were fitted into another Panel and/or a replacement Panel was held. Panel Chair/Vice Chairs and members have continued to be extremely flexible over the past year and are now confident in accessing Panel paperwork via Microsoft Teams and attending remotely.

- 3.4 Access to legal and medical advice for Panel is provided by the Legal Advisor and Medical Advisor. The Legal Advisor has not routinely attended Panel in recent years, and the Medical Advisor ceased attendance following the transition of adoption services to Adoption Tees Valley in 2019. A process is in place, whereby Panel members can request legal and medical advice prior to Panel via the Agency Advisor. Should advice be needed on the day of Panel, attempts would be made to gain this information at that time to avoid a potential deferment. To date, this has not caused any difficulties.
- 3.5 There have been only 2 Panels cancelled during this reporting period because of no business in comparison to 11 during the previous year. Panels have been significantly busier over the past year with a number of Panels considering more than 5 items. Five further Panels were cancelled due to bank holidays and consideration is being given to changing the Monday Panel to Wednesday in order to minimise this disruption.
- 3.6 There have been 44 Panels held during 2022-23, a significant increase from 35 during the previous reporting period. Panel was chaired by the Independent Chair on 20 occasions, and by one of the Vice Chairs for the remaining 24. This is the first year that Vice Chairs have chaired more frequently than the Chair and is reflective of having three people sharing the chairing as well as some Panel cancellations due to a lack of quoracy and/or business. Typically, Vice Chairs share the chairing of the Monday Panels and Chair facilitates the Tuesday panels.
- 3.7 The National Minimum Standards for Fostering identify that Panel members should be allowed 5 working days to read Panel papers. The Agency has consistently met this requirement throughout the reporting period. This helps Panel members to ensure they have thoroughly read and considered the information prior to Panel. Panel paperwork has been provided electronically via a secure platform since December 2020 and this has been well-received by Panel members.

#### **4. QUALITY ASSURANCE**

- 4.1 Panel has a role in quality assuring the fostering business of the local authority.

##### **Suitability to Foster Applications**

- 4.2 There were 29 suitability to foster assessments presented to Panel during the reporting period; 6 of these were mainstream applicants and 23 connected carers. 26 were unanimous recommendations and 3 majority. 1 recommendation was that the applicant (connected carer) was not suitable and 1 was deferred for further information. All recommendations of suitability were agreed by the Agency Decision Maker. The majority recommendation of not suitable to foster was not agreed by the Agency Decision Maker, who approved the connected carer.
- 4.3 Regulation 26 (3) of The Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 provides that if, before the full fostering assessment is complete, information comes to light indicating that the applicant is unlikely to be suitable to foster, a brief report can be compiled to set out reasons for considering the applicant is unsuitable. There were no brief reports presented to Fostering Panel during this period. Where, during the period of temporary approval and prior to completion of the full assessment, the assessing social worker or Panel identify that the carer does not meet the requirements for approval, a recommendation can be made not to extend temporary approval and approval lapses after 16 weeks (24 weeks during the period of the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus)(Amendment) Regulations 2020 Coronavirus).

- 4.4 In respect of mainstream suitability to foster, Panel was satisfied with the quality of all the assessments.
- 4.5 Fostering applications should be presented to Panel within 8 months of the registration of interest, or 4 months for fast-track assessments. Of the 6 approved, 4 were completed within timescale but 2 were outside of timescale (9 months and 11 months). In one case delay was as a result of the carers initially being assessed as connected carers for a named child, however, this placement ended, and further assessment was needed of the prospective carers' capacity to care for other children. In the second, delay was due to the prospective carers having to address some home safety concerns before the assessment could conclude.
- 4.6 Panel was satisfied with the quality of all but 2 Connected Persons assessments. In one case there was a small quality issue with one item and in the second, the recommendation in the approval document was positive but an addendum changed that to not suitable. It was confusing when reading the first document.
- 4.7 Connected carer applications should be completed within 16 weeks of the child being placed or, if there has been an extension, within 24 weeks. If the child is not in placement, then the timescale is the same as for mainstream applications, 8 months. Of the 23 applications presented, 14 were completed within timescale, 9 were completed outside of timescales. During the second half of the reporting period, only one assessment was completed outside of the 24 week timescale; that case had been presented within timescale but had been deferred for further information. During the first half of the year, the most frequently cited reason for delay was lack of capacity within the team, holidays, sickness and complexity of the cases. It is notable that as capacity in the team increased following the Children's Services Review and recruitment for additional staff, timescales for completion significantly improved.
- 4.8 1 connected foster carer household was recommended as not suitable to foster during this reporting period. If, after taking into account the recommendation of the Panel, the Agency Decision Maker is satisfied that the foster carer or the household is not suitable to foster, the Agency Decision Maker will make a 'qualifying determination' decision and will:
- Give written notice to the applicant that she proposes to agree with Panel's recommendation.
  - The written notice will include the reasons for doing so and the recommendation of the Panel.
  - The written notification will include advice to the applicants that they have 28 calendar days from the date of the decision in which to consider the following 3 options:
    - a) Accept the qualifying determination and inform the Manager of the Fostering Service in writing of this acceptance.
    - b) Make written representation to the Manager of the Fostering Service. OR
    - c) Apply to the Secretary of State to have the qualifying determination decision reviewed via the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).
- 4.9 In this case, however, a qualifying determination was not issued, as the Agency Decision Maker did not agree with Panel's recommendation and approved the foster carer.

## **Foster Care Reviews**

- 4.10 There have been 74 foster care reviews considered for the following reasons:
- 19 first reviews
  - 41 recommended a change to terms of approval
  - 3 changes of circumstances
  - 11 were due to allegations or a complaint
- 4.11 Panel was generally satisfied with the quality of information in all cases but noted that, in three cases, the information at panel was six months or more old which was confusing. These were due to a delay in the IRO returning the completed review. In a further case, which had a not suitable recommendation, panel members would have liked the information presented to be more analytical.
- 4.12 Fostering regulations require that the foster care review takes into account the views of any child placed and the views of the responsible authority for any child who has been in placement during the previous year. In practice, the latter means obtaining the views of the social worker for any child in placement since the last review. It is Stockton Fostering Service's policy to seek the views of the children cared for by the foster carer via the child's own social worker. This is in order that the children can give their views openly to the social worker who does not have direct responsibility for the foster carer. During this reporting period, Panel has continued to monitor the availability of the views of children and placing social workers in the foster care review. Formal recording of views in Panel minutes started in January 2022.
- 4.13 In 9 cases there were no children's views available, where Panel considered it would be possible to obtain those views. This diminishes the quality of the review process. This is a slight improvement on the previous reporting period where no views were recorded in 11 (out of 62) cases. In 13 reviews there were no views provided by the placing social worker. This gap in information also lessens the value of the review. This is similar to the previous reporting period, when there were 9 reviews (out of 62) without social worker views and is likely to be reflective of a significant number of social workers leaving Children's Services during the latter half of the reporting period. The IRO chairing the review is now also requesting the feedback from the placing social worker, where this has not been provided to the supervising social worker. This has helped but this continues to be an area for improvement.
- 4.14 There was 1 deregistration heard during this period, in comparison to 0 during the previous reporting period. The foster carers appealed the qualifying determination to deregister them, however, a second Panel made a further recommendation to deregister and this was agreed by the Agency Decision Maker.
- 4.15 Panel noted that during the first 6 months of the reporting period 15 (of 35) foster care reviews were completed out of the usual annual timescale, however, during the second half of the year, only 2 (out of 39) were held late. This represents a significant improvement over the latter part of the year.
- 4.16 Foster carers are invited and encouraged to attend the Panel meeting where their review is being considered, however, this is not a requirement. During this reporting period 32 (43%) of foster carers chose to attend, which has continued the higher trend in attendance from the previous year (31% attended during 2021-22).

### **Extension to Temporary Approval of Connected Carers**

- 4.17 There have been 34 requests for extensions of temporary approval of connected persons. Of these, Panel's view was that all but 1 should be extended. 1 further request for an extension was deferred for further information.
- 4.18 Panel were satisfied with the papers submitted in all but 1 case, where no Regulation 24 report had been completed by the child's social worker.
- 4.19 Extensions for a further 8-week temporary approval under Regulation 25 of the Care Planning and Case Review Regulations should be presented to Panel before the 16-week temporary approval under Regulation 24. Four of the 34 requests were submitted outside of timescale (1 had been submitted for an earlier panel but had been deferred) which was a further improvement on the last reporting period (9 out of 41).
- 4.20 Panel noted a decrease in extensions coming to Panel during the first half of the reporting period, but this increased again slightly during the second half. In 10 cases, the child's social worker (or their manager) was not able to attend Panel which is unfortunate and the quality of discussion is inevitably diminished.

### **5. LONG TERM FOSTERING MATCHES**

- 5.1 Eight long-term fostering matches were considered by Panel over the year. Panel was satisfied with the quality of the reports in 6 of the cases. One match was deferred for further information and a further did lead to a positive recommendation, however, was deemed to lack detailed information about the needs of the child.
- 5.2 There is not a prescribed timescale for long-term fostering matches to be presented to Panel, however, over a year might seem delayed and within 6 months of a placement start, a little too quick. Panel's view of the matches presented was that 3 were presented at an appropriate point and five were delayed longer than ideal. Reasons identified in one case was in respect of housing alterations and in another due to working with another fostering agency.
- 5.3 It is important that timescales for a match are considered and agreed on an individual basis according to the individual needs and circumstances of each case.

### **6. FEEDBACK IN RESPECT OF PANEL FUNCTIONING**

- 6.1 The following feedback has been gained through completion of questionnaires from staff and applicants attending Panel during the reporting period. Unfortunately, it has continued to be challenging to gather feedback as applicants and social workers rarely complete feedback sheets, despite these now being sent twice; once electronically with the invitation to Panel and again as a paper copy, when the Agency Decision Letter is sent by post. Similar to the previous reporting period, only 8 feedback questionnaires were received. Of these, 6 were from carers/prospective carers and 2 from fostering social workers. There was no feedback from children's social workers.
- 6.2 Information gathered from feedback questionnaires:
- In all cases, the process had been explained to attendees.
  - Attendees felt welcomed and had had introductions.

- All said they had been given guidance on attending a remote Panel.
- With respect to questions, all the suitability applicants had the questions in advance, and one said, "it was very helpful". With respect to fairness of questions, all said the questions asked of them were "very fair"
- All respondents said they had the process of decision making explained.

General comments made:

- *We were made to feel very welcome and at ease*".
- *"Everyone was friendly"*.
- *"It was a very positive experience"*.

6.3 One of the significant improvements for applicants/foster carers attending a virtual Panel is the reduction in waiting times. During face-to-face Panels, a small number of people attending had a wait time of between 30-60 minutes due to a delay with a previous item. This has not been the case with virtual Panels. In response to a question about waiting times, 2 attendees commented they had no wait, 1 waited 10 minutes and 1, 15 minutes. Others did not comment. The Panel adviser always keeps in touch with workers about any likely wait while the Panel is happening, so attenders do get up to date information, if there are delays.

6.4 The feedback questionnaires asks if applicants would prefer to attend Panel remotely or in person; of those that answered four preferred remote and one ticked either.

6.5 General Functioning of the Agency and Child Placement Panel noted by Panel Chair:

- All except two Panels held were quorate. For one of those the business was accommodated in an extra Panel.
- Panel members have again shown a high commitment, as the business has increased in volume again.
- Attendance of children's social workers during the first half of the year remained high but declined a little in the second half, which is disappointing. Children's social workers bring an important perspective when considering connected carers, as the suitability of carers is inevitably linked to needs of the children.
- The overall quality of the documentation presented to Panel has remained high.
- The Panels are still being held remotely but this appears to be meeting the needs of all involved
- All the Panels' membership, except one, held in the period were diverse in gender (ie at least one man)
- The two vice chairs continue to chair Panels successfully. The agency adviser is holding regular chair/vice chair meetings for support and to discuss issues arising. The chair and one vice chair are attenders at the Foster Care Network quarterly chairs meeting on most occasions. The other vice-chair will begin attending.
- The commitment and perseverance of the staff supporting Panel over this period has again been very impressive.

## 7. TRAINING FOR PANEL

- 7.1 One specific training event has been held for Panel members during this reporting period. It was held face to face over a full day in October 2022. The training was in relation to Attachment Issues in Fostering and was held with Darlington Panel.
- 7.2 A Fostering Panel business meeting was held in person on 7 July 2022.
- 7.3 Annual appraisals of central list members required in this period, have been carried out virtually, mostly following the Panel meetings. These focus on individual development and give a pointer to future training needs.

## 8. APPROVED FOSTER CARERS

Year	Approved foster carers
2018/19	26
2019/20	24
2020/21	43
2021/22	21
2022/23	27

- 8.1 Of the 27 foster carers approved:

- 21 are connected carers (compared to 18 last year)
- 6 are new foster families (compared to 3 last year)

## 9. QUALIFYING DETERMINATION DECISIONS (A DECISION NOT TO APPROVE SOMEONE AS SUITABLE TO ADOPT OR AS SUITABLE TO FOSTER OR DEREGISTRATION OF A FOSTER CARER AS THEY ARE NO LONGER SUITABLE TO FOSTER.)

- This year there were 5 applications where the recommendation was that prospective foster carers were not suitable to foster. The Agency Decision Maker agreed with Panel recommendation and the applicants accepted the Qualifying Determination. There were 6 during the previous reporting period.
- This year there was 1 recommendation by Panel to deregister foster carers (compared to 0 in the previous year.)
- 0 applicants have applied to the IRM for a review of the qualifying determination decision. 1 foster carer asked for a review via the Agency.
- The ADM agreed with the recommendation of Panel in all, but one case.

## 10. CURRENT STATUS

- At 31 March 2023 there were 162 approved fostering households, a decrease of 4 from the previous reporting period (166).
- There were 88 mainstream approved foster carers (which has reduced by 3 from the previous year).
- There were 74 approved connected carers (which has decreased by 1 from the previous year).
- Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, 10 mainstream foster carers resigned (compared to 14 during the previous year). 4 of these carers retired from fostering



due to age/ill health, 4 due to work commitments, 1 following an allegation and 1 transferred to their own local authority.

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Adoption Tees Valley  
Annual Report  
2022-2023



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## **Introduction**

### **1. Executive Summary**

This annual report of the Regional Adoption Agency business covers the period 1.4.22-31.3.23.

This year has been one of building on partnerships, and existing practice to strengthen and improve adoption in Tees Valley. There has been more work with regional partner RAA's, and the regional VAA's, on collaborative projects which are detailed later in this report. Work has continued with the 5 partner Local Authorities to continue to strengthen early twin track care planning for adoption.

The adoption team have been working on trauma informed practice within this year, inspired by one of the presentations at the national RAA Adoption Support Conference in September 22. ATV has now implemented a model of the Trauma Timeline, and use of the trauma tree in assessments of adopters, and in preparation for matching children. Staff, adopters, partner Local Authorities and Panel are reporting very positively on this practice, which is helping to focus on the long term needs of the child, arising from early trauma.

ATV continues to work within the overall framework of the National Adoption Strategy. This year has seen significant focus on early permanence, including the launch of the National Early Permanence Practice Standards. <https://earlypermanence.org.uk/resources/>. While there have been the same number of EP placements as in the previous year, more prospective adopters have been approved for early permanence, however, we continue to aim for greater numbers. The focus has also continued on adoption support, including on the long term identity needs of adopted children and adults. With more early permanence for children, and continuous development of the framework for these placements, more adoptive parents are meeting with the parents of the child from the outset, and we see a national move towards long term maintenance of significant relationships, enacted through direct and indirect ways of keeping in touch, including "letterbox" contact. Research, including the latest Adoption Barometer Report (PAC UK) continues to tell us that many adopted people want to have some form of contact with their birth relatives, and as a whole system we need to continue to review how we move in this direction.

This year followed the "tail" of the Somerset judgement, and its repercussions for children in the adoption system across England. A small number of children in Teesside had delayed adoption orders, and there were some delayed placements due to the legal implications of Somerset in the previous year: for this reason, we see a small number of children who have gone on to

be adopted, or even placed for adoption within this period, who might otherwise have had that part of their adoption journey in the previous year.

Adoption Orders are higher than the last year, while children placed for adoption remains the same as in the previous year. This level of placement activity is at a lower level than has been the case, which follows the national trend, where adoptions from care have reduced over the last 2 years. Of Significance in this region is the increase in numbers of Placement Orders granted within this year – 87 which is the highest level in the previous 4 years. Similarly, ADM best interests' decisions have risen significantly - 100 in this year, a 28% increase on the previous year, also the highest for the previous 4 years.

This shows Local Authorities are planning for adoption for more children, and these care plans are being authorised through Court, indicating that adoption is the right plan for the child.

ATV continues to perform well in timeliness of adoption for children. Many children are being placed within government set timescales for placement once the Placement Order is granted. Timescales (PO to match) have improved this year, from 174 to 146 days and ATV continues to perform better than the England average by some 50 days, although remains over the government target. The time from a child starting their first care placement to moving in with adoptive parents has increased, with average days being 411 across the Tees Valley, which is lower than the national target (421 days) and 70 days lower than the England average.

The number of families approved over the past year has risen from the previous year, with 55 families having been assessed and approved to adopt. While this increase is welcomed, ATV continues to need more families for siblings, for older children up to the age of 5, and for children who may have some uncertainty in relation to developmental delay.

As part of this annual report, I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of "Lesley" (name changed) a Mum who has had 5 children leave her care, and one adopted, and who makes an important contribution to prospective adopter preparation training within this region. She talks at every preparation training group, about the perspective of birth parents and why keeping in touch matters. "Lesley" is truly exceptional. She has had the courage to talk to hundreds of prospective adopters over the years, and she makes a real and tangible difference to their views and feelings about birth parents, which then goes on to translate into a more informed understanding around keeping in touch.

## **2. Governance**

ATV is governed by the Board of Directors which comprise the DCS's for the 5 partner Local Authorities. There are additionally 2 non-executive directors who are adoptive parents.

In this year, the ATV Board was chaired by the Middlesbrough DCS, Sue Butcher, who has now left post. In February 2023 Sally Robinson, DCS in Hartlepool took over as chair.

Sally has significant operational experience in adoption. she is the ADM for Hartlepool and chairs the regional ASGLB until its decommissioning in 2022. Sally remains as chair of the NE regional adoption network meeting, involving LA's, VAA's and CAFCASS.

The ATV Board meets 4 times each year, and considers performance information, finance, and adoption operational and strategic issues within the region.

## **3. National Adoption – National Strategy**

Adoption Tees Valley works within the wider sector forum of the national Regional Adoption Agencies group, which is linked to ADCS, CVAA, DfE and a wide range of stakeholder committees and groups. The RAA leaders group works with a strategic plan, closely aligned to the National Adoption Strategy, Achieving Excellence Everywhere (2021). Through the RAA leader's forum, the DfE has made available national funding to support strategic delivery against the national priorities. The Service Manager at ATV chairs the national Early Permanence Working Group. Managers and practitioners in ATV have access to forums and training opportunities that are delivered through the RAA Leaders network.

This year has seen stronger pan regional working together across the 3 RAA's of Adoption Tees Valley, Adopt North East, and Adopt Coast to Coast. The 3 RAA's cover the 12 Local Authority areas of the North East, and through collaborative working we have together set an agenda for greater consistency of delivery in this "pan region".

We have secured funding for 2 significant projects pan regionally to offer improved services, and greater consistency of delivery in adoption across the NE region.

### **NE and Cumbria Early Permanence Project**

This is a 2 ½ year funded project to increase the number of children who have access to early permanence, and to develop a range of placements including more concurrent planning placements. The funding is £330,000, funded until April 2025, and has been secured and managed through the support of Stockton BC Procurement Team.

The project has recruited a lead consultant who is Kate Knowles, a manager from the North West Concurrency Project –which has strong experience and expertise in concurrent planning placements. Each RAA has seconded at least one social worker into the project, and one regional VAA, Arc Adoption, is also involved as a partner. The aim is to achieve regional sufficiency of EP carers, and more children having the opportunity for a single placement, without moves around the system, until a Court decision is made on the final care plan.

Adoption Tees Valley has been an active contributor to the Project, with 2 social workers, Angela Simmons, and Kirsty Taylor, being seconded for 1 day per week, to strengthen practice and delivery of EP placements.

### **North East Multi-Disciplinary Adoption Support Service**

This is a 2 year funded project to set up and establish a multi-agency adoption support service for the NE region. It is a pilot project testing out a model of adoption support for any child within the age range of 7-11, who it is considered would benefit from a multi-disciplinary assessment and intervention. The project has a clear ethos that to support children, parents must also be supported, and is seeking to test and refine a model which will be available for ASF funding in the long term.

A strength of the project is the partnership that has been achieved with the 3 RAA's and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) for the NE region, bringing social care and health together in this developing service.

The project has secured £950,000 funding over 2 years and will run until April 2025.

## **4. Partnership Working**

Following the Review of ATV in 2021, the service has strengthened its focus on partnership working, a theme which is also evident in national strategy.

Working in partnership is one of the key elements of the service plan 2023-25, and new ways of working together are continually being tested in the maturation of the RAA. The 2 projects highlighted above reflect a stronger regional partnership, where we are achieving more together than would have been achieved by any single agency.

ATV works together with Local Authorities, through strategic and practice working arrangements. This year has seen a strengthened approach to



working with LA Fostering Services, for early permanence. Also, a shared adoption support process, and a new approach whereby ATV will attend Legal Gateway meetings in the LA.

Work with VAA's has been strengthened through the early permanence project above. This builds on ATV regular working together with regional VAA's to secure regional placements for children where no in house option is available. Working relationships are positive although challenges exist in the increasing costs of VAA placements, while funding to LA's and the RAA is not increased.

ATV works with health predominantly around provision of the Medical Advisor role. This has been an area of significant challenge within the year, especially within the South Tees Trust, affecting Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland. There have been pressures in achieving timely adoption medicals, and adult adopter health appointments. To address this, there has been a lot of collaborative working between Local Authorities, ATV, South Tees Trust and the ICB. Significant management and practitioner time in all agencies is dedicated to addressing how children can progress without delay. ATV remains appreciative of the Medical Advisors, who's expertise and commitment are valued, in helping to ensure that children's health needs are fully understood, and that adoptive parents are given high quality information about the child's health, prior to matching.

Pan regional partnership working has been positive in the year, reflected in the 2 projects highlighted above.

ATV has valued the continued support of the Virtual schools, in helping to understand and promote the needs of adopted children who can be "hidden" if schools are unaware that the child or young person is adopted. Working together is supported by tri-annual meetings and the partners virtual schools' collaborative funding of the ATV Education support worker. See section 13 for details of education support in this year.

ATV works with commissioned providers of services including multiple therapy providers via a commissioned framework, and a VAA providing independent support services to birth parents, and access to adoption records.

## **5. Benchmarking – Key Performance Data**

The key performance data is presented in summary in this section. More detailed performance information, presented by local authority is detailed in section 8.

Data is presented for ATV for the year 2022-23, at the end of quarter 4, and for the previous year 2021-22 for comparison.

Key Indicator	ATV 2021-22	ATV 2022-23	Current c/w previous	National Govt Target where applicable
Adopter Approvals	46	55	Inc 19%	N/A
Children referred to ATV	179	223	Inc 25%	N/A
Children with ADM -BID (Best interests' decision)	78	100	Inc 28%	N/A
PO	74	87	Inc 18%	N/A
Matches	79	81	Inc 1%	
Placed	77	77	No Change	N/A
Early Permanence	11	11	No Change	
Adoption Orders	78	84	Inc 8%	N/A
Disruptions – pre order	0	1		N/A
Timescale – A2 (PO to match)	174	146 days	Dec 16%	121 days
Timescale A10 – BLA-Moved in with Adopters	383	411	Inc 7%	421 days

## 6. Marketing and Recruitment

ATV marketing aims to promote awareness of the need for more people to consider adopting. ATV also seeks to increase awareness of the role of ATV in providing support to adoptive families including children and adoptive parents. ATV has a multi-channel approach to marketing, using social media including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and also commissioning support to digital marketing campaigns during key campaign periods. It can be difficult to evaluate the impact of any particular campaign, other than numbers of enquiries received. However, it is recognised that the consideration of adoption is a major life decision and there is a pre-contemplative period for adults in deciding to go on an enquire about adoption. As a result, we use social media reach, and engagement, enquiry numbers and approval numbers to indicate whether marketing is being effective. However, it is not an exact science, due to the time period that people may require, either before enquiring, or following enquiry, before commencing the “adopter journey”.

ATV is seeking to reach out to prospective adopters who can offer the family homes to children in the region where their needs are more complex arising from the child's needs or being part of a sibling group. Marketing has therefore been targeted to people who are interested in older children (age 4+) children with additional needs, and siblings.

Activity	ATV 2021-22	ATV 2022-23
Number of ATV recruitment campaigns year to date	3	5
Number of all Adopter enquiries year to date (all methods )	287	309
Number of ATV enquiries converted to ROI	61	73
% of ATV enquiries converted to ROI	22%	24%
Number of adoptive families attending information events	123	131
Social media followers	11,724	11,751
Website visits	16,819	17,422

What has gone well?

- Greater numbers of enquiries, and adopter approvals
- Attendance at Pride at Newcastle- the major LFJB event in the North
- Introduction of blogs on the ATV website written by adoptive parents
- Press and media presence with coverage on ITV Tyne Tees twice in the last 12 months, interviews on BBC radio Tees and press releases local news outlets including the Gazette and Northern Echo.
- Conversion rate of enquiries to ROI increasing, and numbers increasing.

Challenges?

- The service continues to need more enquirers and adoptive parents for siblings and for older children, and those with more complex needs.

## **7. Preparation, Assessment and Approval of Adoptive Parents**

	Total 2021-22	Total 2022-23	Current c/w previous
<b>Initial Visits to prospective Adopters</b>	71	106	Inc 35%
<b>Stage 1 Starts</b>	46	58	Inc 26%
<b>Stage 2 Starts</b>	52	51	Dec 2%
<b>Adopter Approvals</b>	46	55	Inc 20%
<b>Numbers in assessment at the end of the period</b>	39	38	Dec 2%
<b>Numbers waiting to be matched at end of period</b>	29	29	No change

<b>Timescale S1 (Govt target 60 days)</b>	106	239	
<b>Timescale S2 (Govt target 121 days)</b>	146	156	

ATV has increased numbers of initial visits to prospective adopters and has focussed in this year on the Enquiry to Registration of Interest (ROI) timeline and experience. ATV has created a new role for enquiries management, and through this role, we have seen conversion from enquiry to ROI increase by 2%, however rising well beyond this in the current year, and we expect to see significant improvement in 2023-24.

ATV has partnered in with Redcar and Cleveland, and Darlington Virtual Schools, to share the new Virtual Reality Video headsets adopted by both agencies. These headsets are now being used in all preparation groups, to enable adoptive parents to experience the world of the child in a range of scenarios that a child may have experienced, for example- where domestic violence has taken place around the child. The headsets are aimed at helping prospective adopters have a better understanding of the trauma a child has experienced, and feedback so far is that they are powerful, impactful, and helpful.

ATV has incorporated learning from a national Child Safeguarding Review of a child placed for adoption (LJC case) and has progressed to a trauma informed approach across the service. The team now use the Trauma Timeline approach in assessment work with families, and then through the matching work for a child, helping prospective adopters and all professionals understand the lived trauma of the child. The Trauma Tree is a tool used within the direct work with families, and in preparing to care for a particular child.

ATV is now requiring all family and friends' networks to be involved during the assessment process. The aim is to raise the profile of the role of support networks in any potential safeguarding matters, and to help them be better prepared to support the child and family, with more awareness of the impact of trauma and attachment disruption for children.

All adoptive parents undertaking their first approval are required to complete the 4 day preparation training course, which is underpinned by the Secure Base Model (Schofield and Beek), the Trauma Timeline, and PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) parenting.

Families are all asked to register with CATCH (commissioned from PACT) which is an on line learning and support forum, and which is integrated into the ATV adopter journey, from assessment onwards.

Timescales for assessments have been challenging in this year (239 days on average with a target of 182 days), and the explanation is largely due to delays in medicals being completed in full during stage 1. This may be with either the GP practice, or with the Medical Advisor providing a summary of the adopter health and advice to the agency.

To address challenges around Medical Advisor capacity, ATV Service Manager has negotiated extensively with partners in the ICB, and Foundation Trusts and fed back to the ATV Board on this key challenge. As the year closes, the ATV Board and ICB have agreed to fund a dedicated “Adult Adopter” Medical Advisor (MA) for ATV to relieve pressure on the paediatricians carrying out adoption health assessments of children, through provision of a MA who will consider all adult health reports. This MA will also have a role in supporting GP awareness of the safeguarding nature of adopter medicals, and in improving GP returns in an improved timescale, through dedicated awareness raising sessions.

What has gone well?

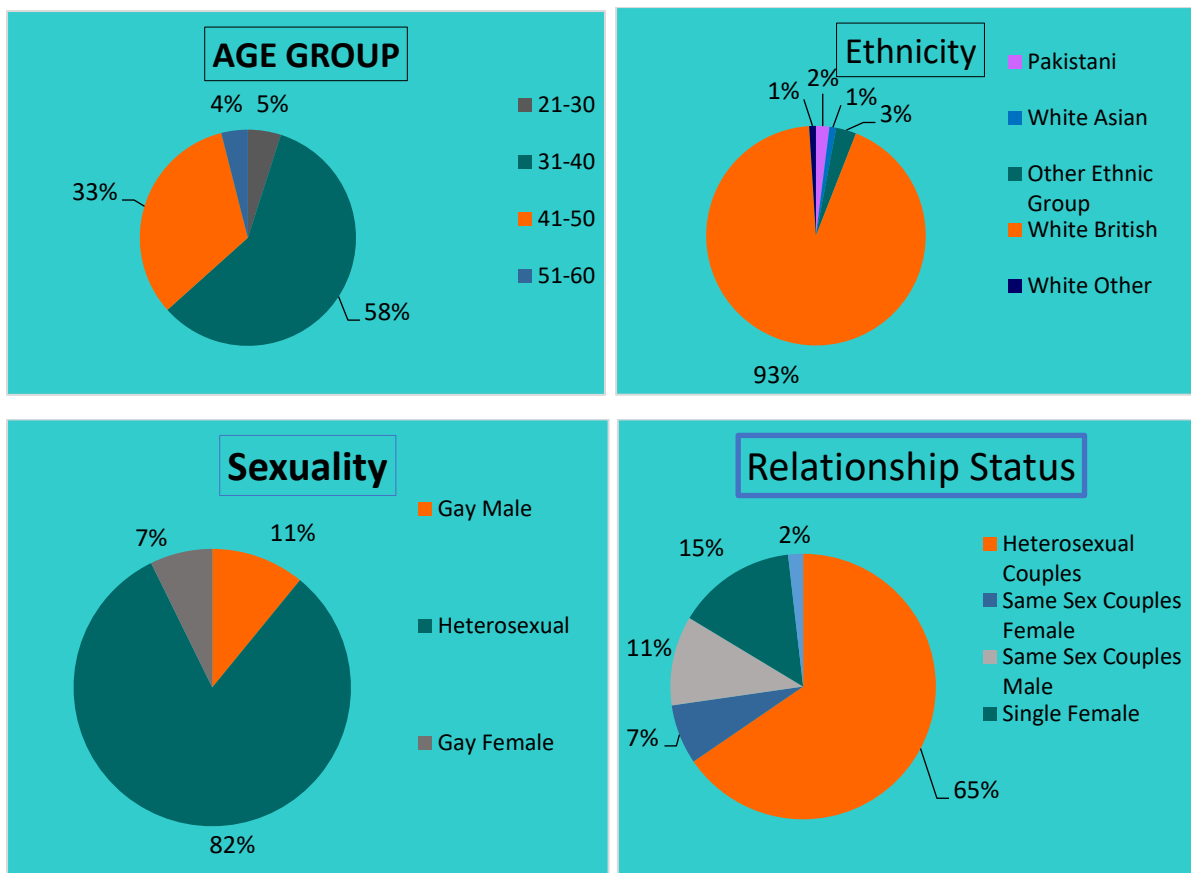
- Strengthening of work around trauma informed practice, and positive partnerships with LA's, enabling shared resources.
- Increased numbers of adopter approvals in 2022-23
- Improvement in the enquiry to ROI conversion
- Improved timescale from enquiry to ROI
- Response to the LJC safeguarding review- continued review on safeguarding and trauma informed practice.
- Collaborative response to medical advisor pressures.

Challenges?

- Not enough adoptive families for children who have more complex needs.
- Timescales for stage 1 are longer than wished for, and the key reason is delays in health information, either from GP, or from Medical Advisors.

*7.1 Who did ATV approve?*

Total approvals: 55 families: 99 individuals



Sexuality/relationship status: 35 heterosexual couples; 10 same sex couples; 8 single women and 1 single man.

Prospective Adopters approved for early permanence: 10 (18%)

Age- 92 % of all adopters are aged between 30 and 50 years old.

Ethnicity- most of all adoptive parents are white British, with 93 % in this category.

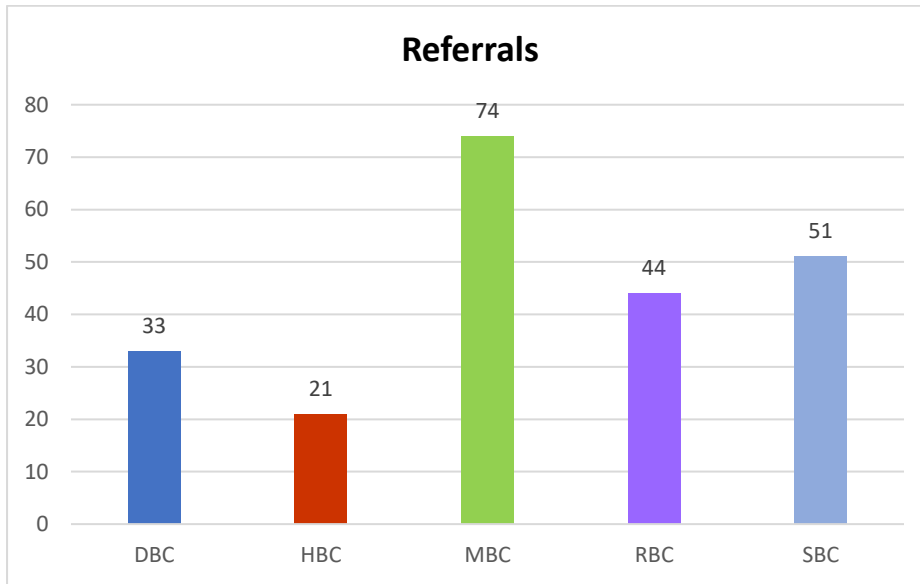
Timeliness of matching adoptive parents: of the adopters approved and matched within the period, 23 were matched with a child within 3 months of approval, and 28 were matched more than 3 months following approval. 4 were not matched within this period.

**8. Referrals of children**

There has been an increase overall in referrals of children who may require an adoptive family in this year. This has translated into higher numbers of ADM's and POs, although placements remain the same as in the last year.

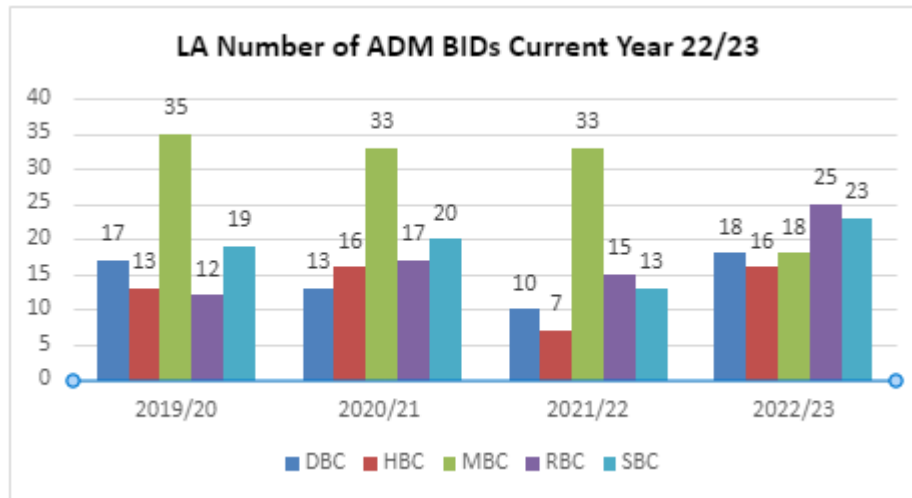
Data is provided below on the number and timescales by Local Authority

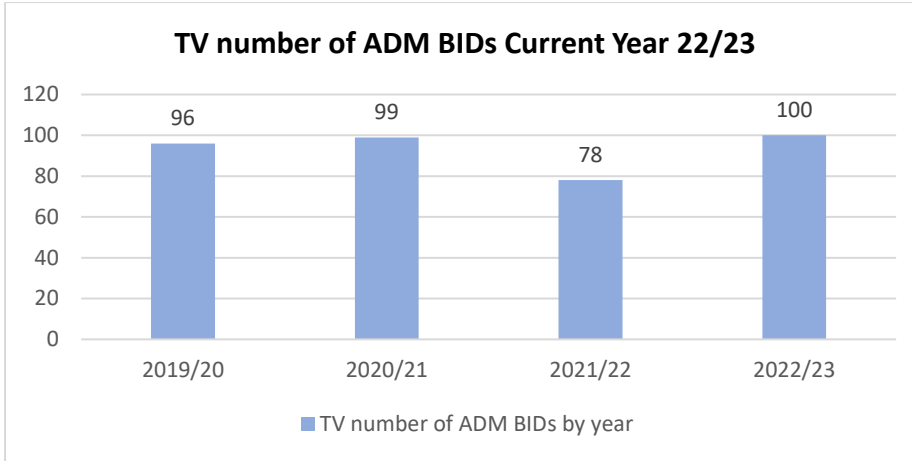
### 8.1 Referrals – Early Notifications by Local Authority



223 were referred in total. ATV asks for referrals of children at the earliest point they may have an ADM. Not all children progress to a plan of adoption. Middlesbrough are the highest referring LA, followed by Stockton.

### 8.2 ADM- “Best Interests Decision” by Local Authority



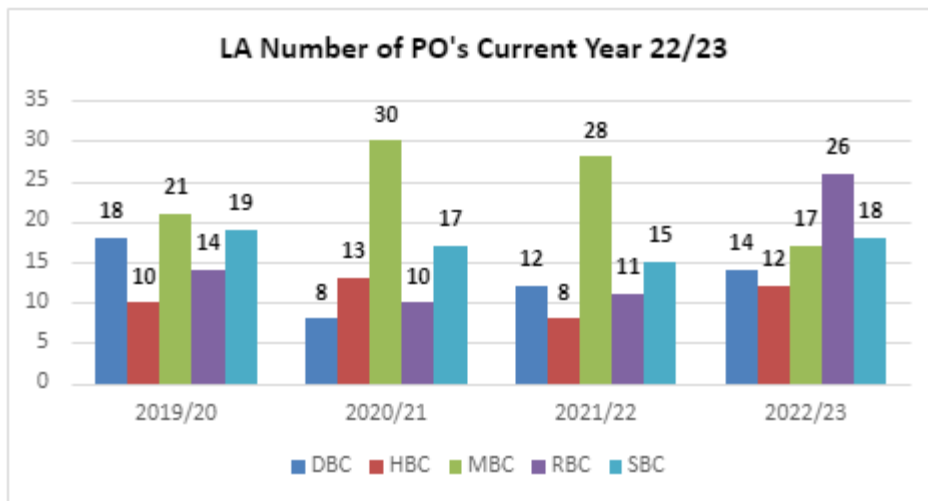


*Change by LA on Previous Year*

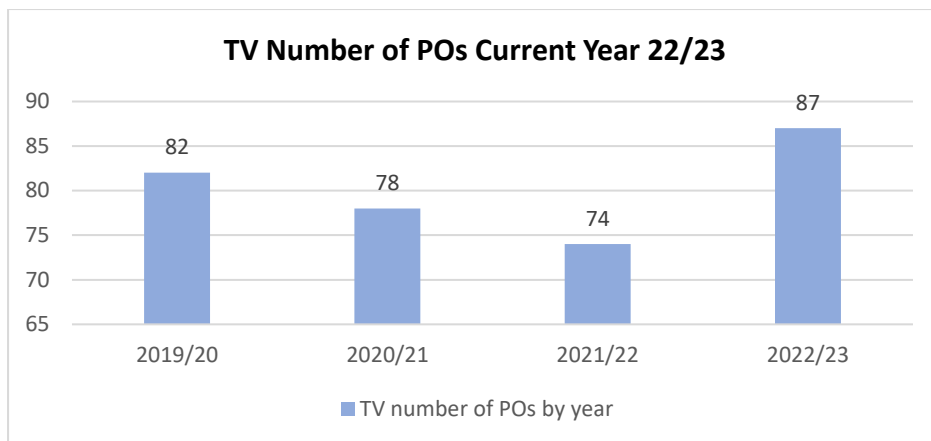
- Darlington increase by 8- 80%
- Hartlepool increase by 9- 128%
- Middlesbrough decrease by 15- 45%
- Redcar and Cleveland increase by 10 – 66%
- Stockton increase by 10- 77%

4 of the 5 LA's have seen a significant rise in the numbers of children for whom they are planning for adoption. Middlesbrough is the outlier with a considerable decrease in numbers of children with an adoption plan.

*8.3 Placement Orders- by Local Authority*





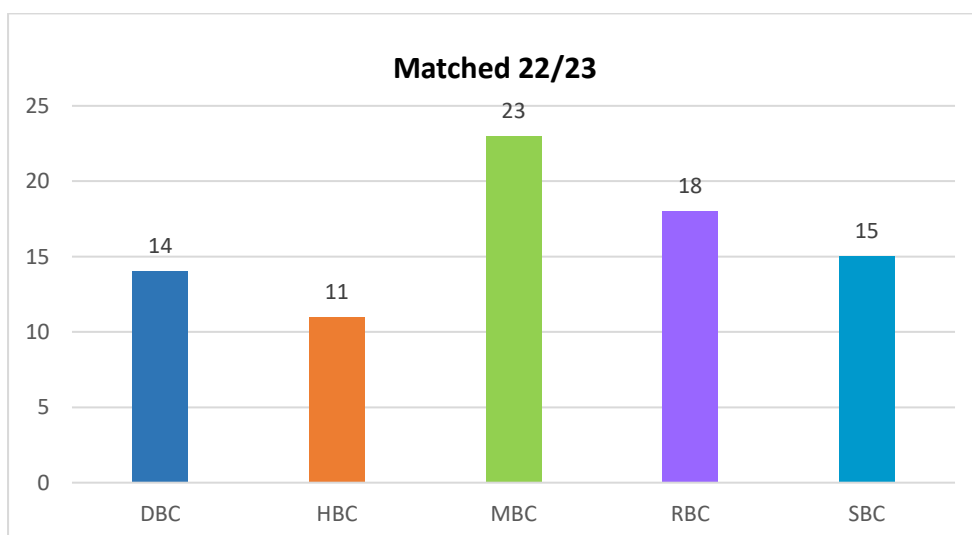


*Change by LA on Previous Year*

- Darlington increase by 2- 17%
- Hartlepool increase by 4- 50%
- Middlesbrough decrease by 11- 39%
- Redcar and Cleveland increase by 15- 136%
- Stockton increase by 3- 20%

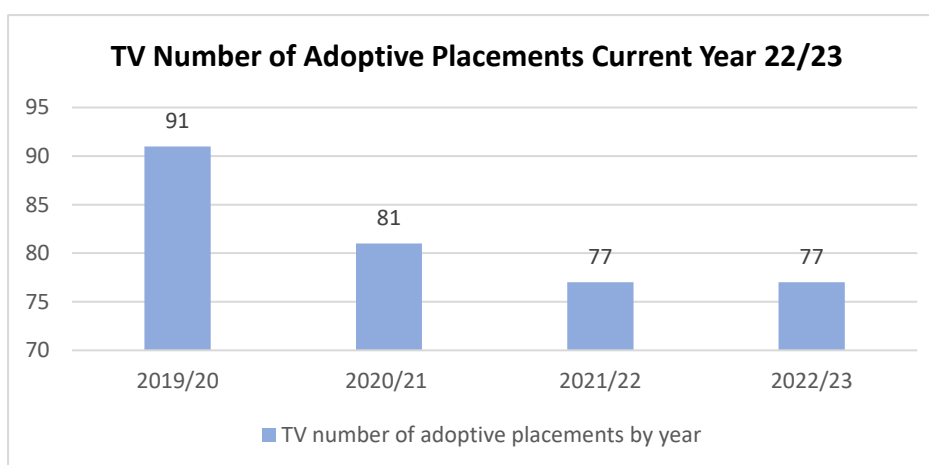
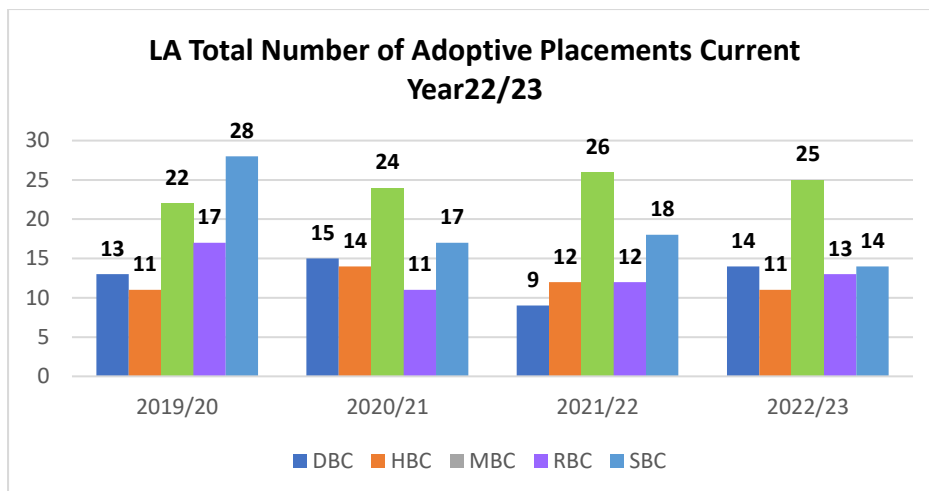
Again 4 LA's have increased the numbers of children for whom a PO has been granted, giving the LA Court authority to place for adoption. Redcar have seen an exceptional increase in numbers on previous years, and Hartlepool have returned to a similar number seen across a number of years, where 2021-22 was an exceptionally low number. Middlesbrough is an outlier with a significant reduction on previous years.

*8.4 Matches by Local Authority*



The numbers of children matched for adoption will reflect the numbers placed. Slight differences re due to timing within the year period under review.

*8.5 Placements of children for adoption by Local Authority*



*Change by LA on Previous Year*

- Darlington increase by 5- 55%
- Hartlepool decrease by 1 – 8%
- Middlesbrough decrease by 1- 4%
- Redcar and Cleveland increase by 1- 8%
- Stockton decrease by 4- 22%

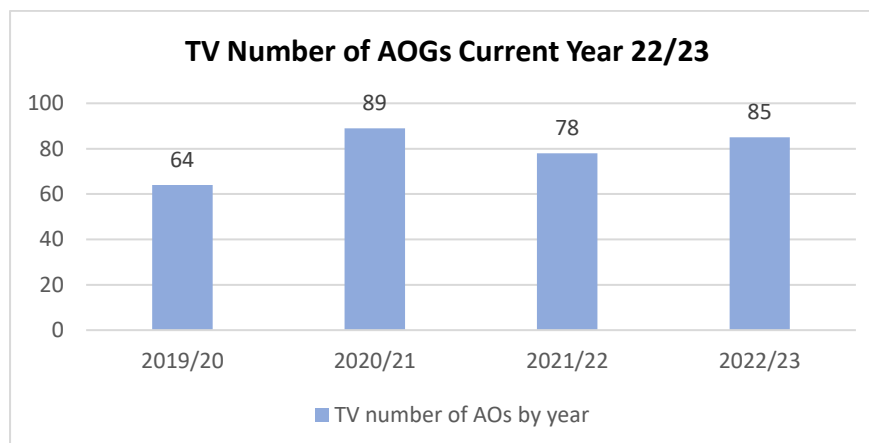
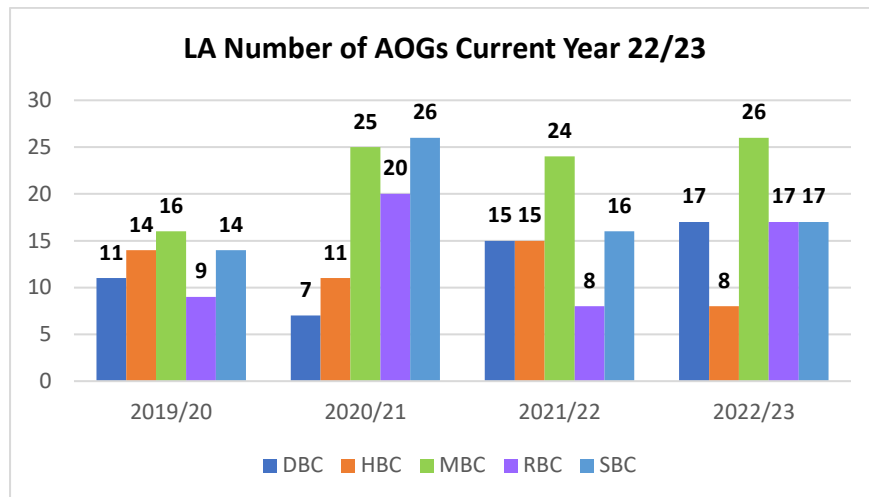
Placement numbers have remained the same over the last 2 years. Reviewing the increase in numbers of PO and ADM BIDs overall, it is identified that there was a rise in rate of PO during Q4 2022-23 and these children will be progressing to match and placement in the forthcoming months.

Although placement numbers remain the same, it is reasonable to evaluate that there is an overall increase in the numbers of children progressing for adoption in this region, due to ADM and PO activity.

Middlesbrough is the outlier. There has been a turnover of workforce, including Agency Advisor and ADM in Middlesbrough and this LA has been impacted by capacity in the Medical Advisor role, which is required for ADM to take place. Work is underway, including in partnership between the LA,

ATV and the South Tees Acute Trust to improve and address capacity issues for MA time.

### 8.6 Adoption Orders Granted by Local Authority



#### Change by LA on Previous Year

- Darlington increase by 2- 13%
- Hartlepool decrease by 8- 53%
- Middlesbrough increase by 2- 8%
- Redcar and Cleveland increase by 9- 112%
- Stockton increase by 1 – 6%

Hartlepool decrease reflects a lower number of placements in the previous year.

### 8.7 Timescales for Children Matched and moving in with Adoptive Parents

The headline measures for timeliness of adoption are:

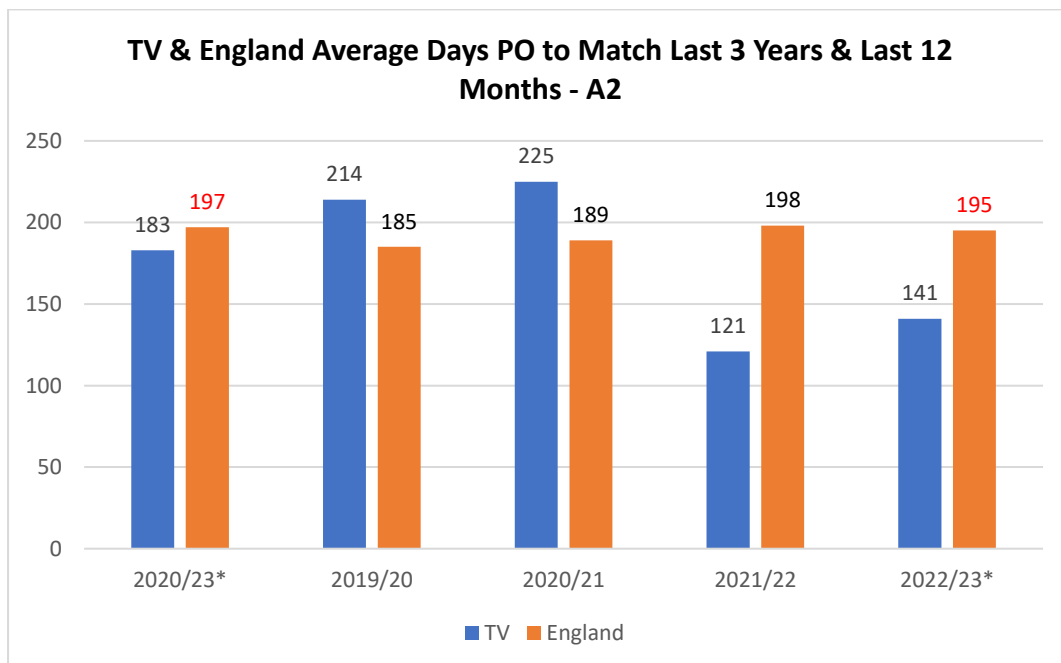
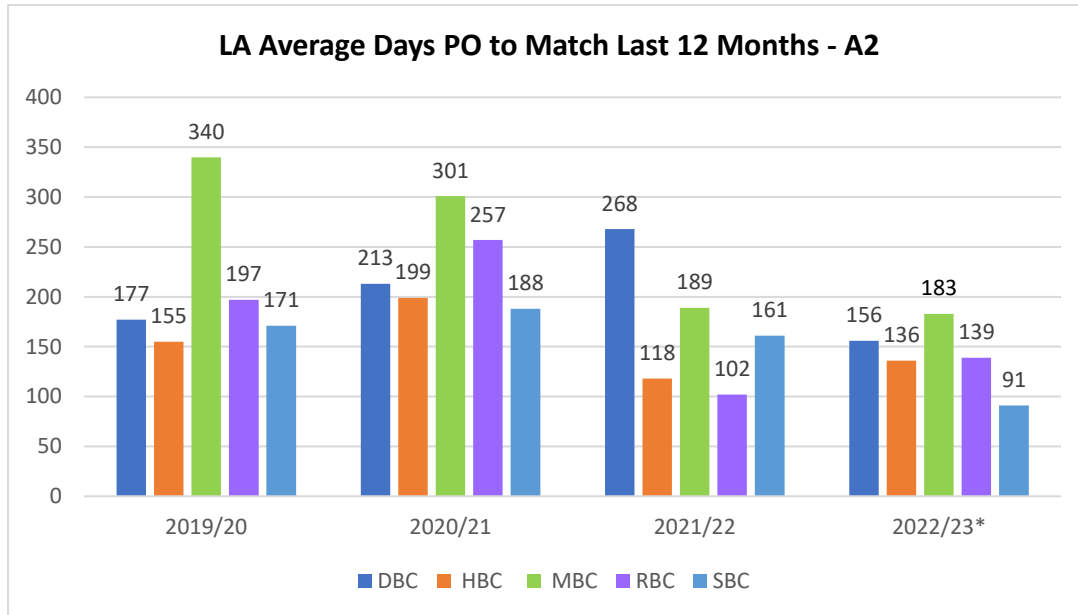
- Adoption scorecard indicator A2- Placement Order to match timescales

- Adoption Scorecard Indicator A10- date child became looked after, to date moved in with adoptive parents

All are based on the timescales of children who have been adopted in the year and are an average of those children. As numbers are low, children with exceptionally high timescales can distort figures.

### 8.8 A2 – PO to Match by Local Authority

The government target is 121 days



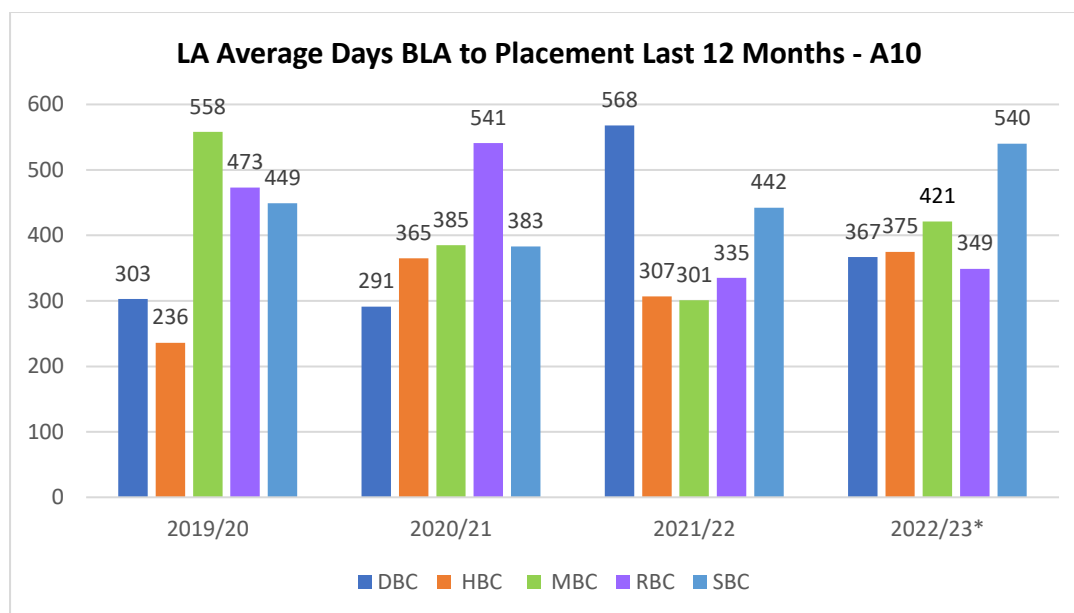
Change by LA on Previous Year

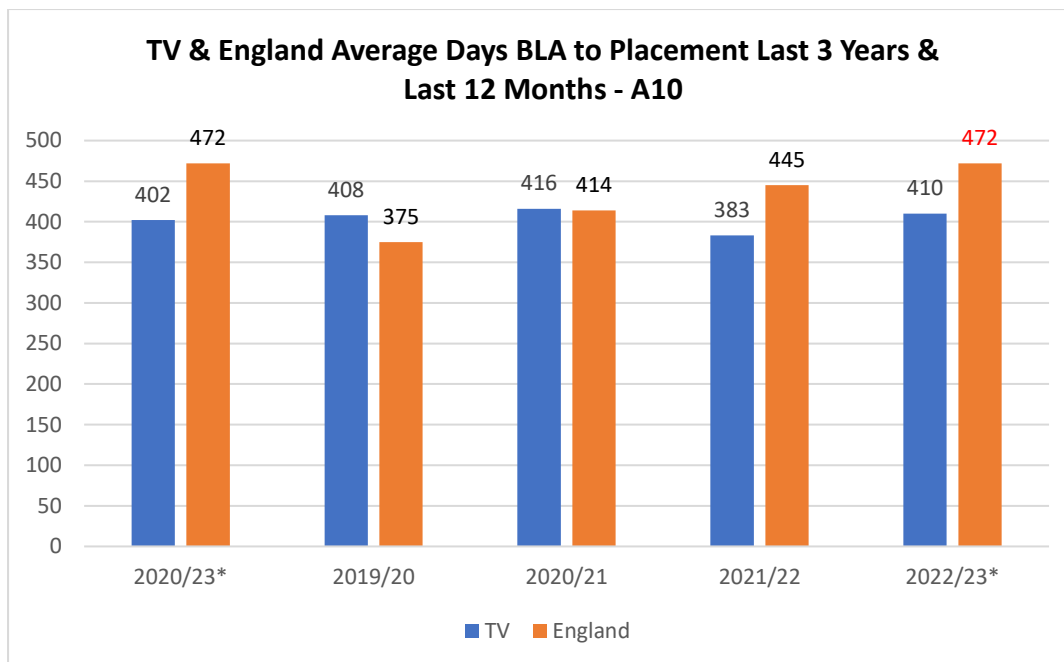
- Darlington reduced PO to match by 112 days, which is positive. The LA remains over the target time, but a reduction by 42 % in average timescale is positive.
- Hartlepool increase by 18 days, an increase of 15%
- Middlesbrough have reduced by 20 days, a decrease of 11%
- Redcar and Cleveland have increased by 37 days, an increase of 36%
- Stockton have reduced by 70 days, which is a decrease of 43%, which is extremely positive.

PO to match timescale is dependent on finding the right family for the child, and having good quality information on which to seek a family who is well positioned to meet the needs of the child. Family finding is most effective where there is an up to date good quality child permanence report, a good quality profile of the child, with high quality photographs and video imagery. Where social workers know the child well and consider the profiles and prospective adopter reports offered in a timely way, linking is effective, and centred around children’s needs. Where children are to be placed alongside siblings, have more complex needs, or need to have contact with family members, it is important to have a good, well evidenced and up to date assessment of needs, as this is critical for successful matching.

8.9 A10- Became a child in our care, to moving in with adoptive parents, by Local Authority

The government target is 421 days.





*Change by LA on Previous Year*

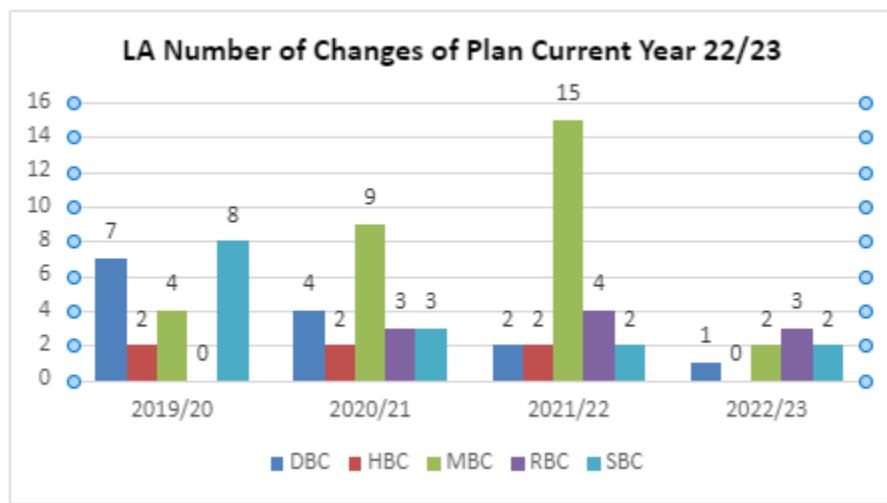
- Darlington reduced by 201 days, and 35% overall. Darlington has significantly reduced timescales for the children adopted, which is extremely positive.
- Hartlepool has increased by 95 days, which is 31%, Hartlepool remains on average within the government target timescale. 3 children had timescales which were higher than expected. As only 8 children were adopted in the year, these 3 children have increased overall average.
- Middlesbrough increase by 90 days, an increase of 30%
- Redcar and Cleveland increase by 14 days, and increase of 4%
- Stockton have increased by 98 days, an increase of 22%

Only Stockton have an average timescale which is over the government target timescale for children in this year, although 4 of the 5 LA's have increased overall timescale averages.

The analysis of timescales for Adoption Tees Valley shows that the average timescale overall for Placement Order to match has increased and is slightly above the government target. However, compared with the England average ATV continues to perform well, and there are generally few children waiting with a PO.

The timescales from a child entering care (CIOC) to moving in have increased for 4 out of the 5 Local Authorities. 4 remain within government target timescales on average, while one LA has a significantly higher average timescale, which is accounted for by a number of children. A theme is a child returning home on a care order, then coming back into care, and going on to be placed for adoption.

### 8.10 Changes of plan away from adoption by Local Authority



The total numbers of children for whom there is a change of plan away from adoption has reduced year on year, with a significant decrease in this year, which is largely accounted for by Middlesbrough continuing with a plan of adoption for more children (following ADM BID). Changes of plan can arise for a number of reasons, which can include the RAA being unable to find an adoptive family, the needs of children changing, or family members being identified at a late stage during care proceedings.

### 8.11 Interruptions

There were 2 children who had an interruption to their planned placement. This is where the child is in introductions to their new family, and the plan does not proceed to placement. The 2 children were siblings.

### 8.12 Disruption

One child has had a disrupted placement. A disruption is where the child leaves the family prior to the granting of an adoption order.

A disruption meeting has taken place, independently chaired, and learning disseminated, and considered by the ATV team, and panel.

### 8.13 Children Returned to Care, post Adoption Order

6 Children are identified as having returned to care post adoption order, all being in the teenage age range.

## 9. Children Matched and Placed 2022-23

### 9.1 *Internal- External Families*

	Totals 2021-22	2022-23 Q1 and Q2	2022-23 Q2 and Q3	2022-23 Totals
ATV children placed with ATV adopters	58	31	21	52
ATV Children placed with external adopters	19	15	10	25
External children placed with ATV adopters	0	0	0	0
Total ATV children placed	77	46	31	77
Total placements	77	46	31	77

52 of the children were placed with ATV families, and 25 with external agencies.

17 of the 25 (68%) children placed with external agencies were placed with the regional VAA's, with whom ATV works in partnership.

Of the 7 children being placed away from the region, 4 were placed with RAA's, in the North region.

ATV continues to strive for sufficiency of adoptive parents. The gap for ATV is adopters who can take siblings, and older children or children with additional needs, including needs arising from maternal alcohol consumption in pregnancy, and significant attachment difficulties.

### 9.2 *Children waiting with PO – not linked at the year end*

On 31.3.23 there were 5 children with a PO not linked or matched.

Of these children, 2 were siblings, and there were 3 single children.

No child had a PO for over 7 months, and 4 of the 5 had PO for less than 3 months.

The single children were aged 4, 2 and 1.

One child was of mixed ethnicity, Asian- White British.

### 9.3 *Demographics of Children*

Of the 85 children adopted in the last 12 months:



<b>Aged under 5 years</b>	73	<b>Aged over 5 years</b>	12 (14%)
<b>Female</b>	39	<b>Male</b>	46
<b>Minority ethnic background</b>	10 (12%)	<b>White British</b>	75
<b>Disabled</b>	0	<b>Part of Sibling Group</b>	27
<b>“Harder to Place”</b>	37 (44%)		

#### 9.4 Matching and Family Finding Developments

The first option for considering families for ATV children will always be with ATV approved adopters, and all children with an ADM, or progressing to ADM are considered for available ATV families. Children are placed with families who match their needs, and if no internal family is a suitable match, the agency will seek external families approved to adopt.

ATV has a developed process for family finding regionally, through regular VAA meetings with ATV Family Finding managers. 8 children were linked through these meetings in the reporting period.

Any child not linked by the time of PO is placed on Linkmaker, the national portal for linking children to the right family. In the reporting period 16 children were linked through Linkmaker to external adopters.

There have been 3 funded activity days for children, through the national RAA programme. 1 child has been linked through the Activity Days programme.

ATV has commissioned a professional photographer, to do high quality photos where these are not available, showing children in a positive, and playful light.

## **10. Early Permanence**

### *Key developments and Vision*

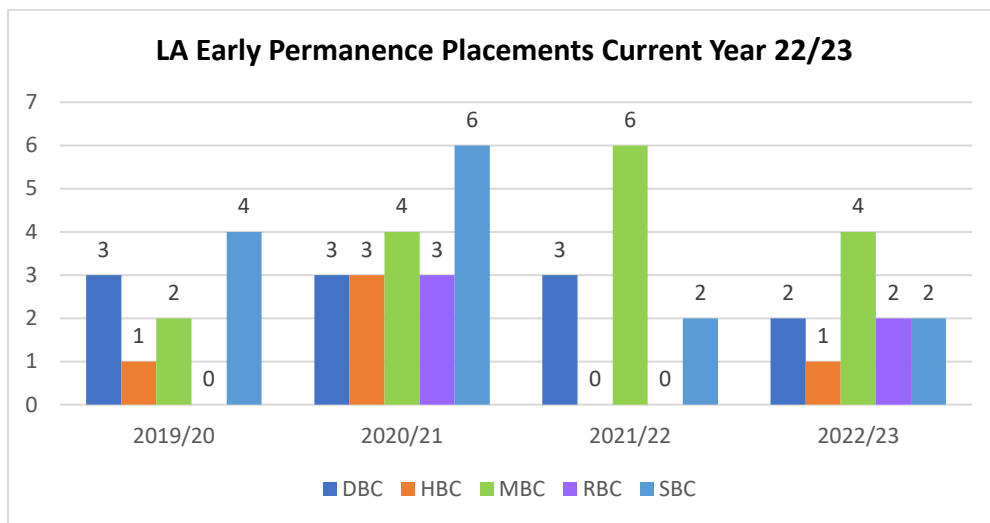
Early Permanence is a key strategic priority for ATV. The reason is that this reduces moves for children, while care plans are being developed, provides the potential for earlier secure attachments, but is not a pre-emptive placement prior to final Court decision making. The service has continued to practice a dedicated early permanence approach for children. Close monitoring of all new referrals by Permanence Champions enables early consideration of those children for whom early permanence may be an option to be considered.

ATV sets out what early permanence means from an early stage with all people approaching the RAA to adopt. This starts with the Information Events, and is followed through initial visits, preparation training and assessments.

Learning from practice, ATV has:

- Moved to a dedicated 2 day preparation programme for all carers wishing to undertake early permanence, following the Coram BAAF EP training programme for carers. The focus is on the fostering role, and working with the wider system, and with birth parents.
- Started a support group for EP carers which is facilitated by one of the senior social workers in the team.
- Commenced wider system engagement through working with Fostering Managers and Fostering Supervising Social Workers, to increase working together. Each Fostering service has a named EP Champion who will promote knowledge and awareness of EP in the LA Fostering team.
- Continued with workforce development of LA social workers by delivering training to LA staff and managers.
- Worked across the regional Sufficiency and EP Placement Project footprint to develop more consistent practice in the North East, and to secure more availability of EP placements.
- Following learning from the National EP Conference, is now moving to attend Legal Gateway meetings in all LA's, where earlier knowledge of children during PLO enables active consideration of EP for more children.
- Has a suite of leaflets available for various parties, including birth parents.
- ATV now has experience of returning children to parents' care. It is viewed as a positive option where this is safe and right for the child, and the RAA is confident and experienced in promoting a better understanding of this with staff and EP carers.
- ATV will in 2023-24 create a dedicated EP team, to increase sufficiency of carers and promote more children having access to EP.

### 10.1 Early Permanence in Local Authorities



There have been 11 EP placements made this year. The distribution is shown across the partner Local Authorities.

11 adoptive families have been approved who can undertake EP.

The service will aim to increase the numbers of children who have access to EP and are placed through this route, and the numbers of adopters approved who can also undertake this placement type.

### 11. Adoption Support

Adoption Support continues to be a key focus for ATV and as a national priority. We know that adopted children and their families need every bit as much consideration for support as foster carers. The child is no longer in the care system, but their needs associated with early adversity, and identity with a birth **and** adoptive family do not change because they are adopted. Adoption is a good outcome for children where no family members can provide the assurance of permanence for the duration of childhood and beyond. We know adoptive families accept, love and care for their children, and relatively few return to Local Authority care. However, many children and families need support to help them thrive and ATV continues to develop its support to adoptive parents and children, aiming to create a community of adoption, and early support for all children and families as they start their lives together.

#### Tier 1

Support made available and provided for all adoptive families:

- Access to ATV closed Facebook group
- Monthly newsletter
- Face to face Stay and Play weekly- a facilitated support group where adoptive parents come, make friends, talk about parenting and the

children play. This also enables an early help offer where more support is required.

- Loud and Clear music group, facilitated by the Sage, Gateshead. A music group encouraging relationships, bonding and fun, through the sensory world of music.
- ATV events available to all adoptive families, subject to numbers- events such as Christmas party, art days, etc... which engage children and families with ATV.
- Letterbox contact arrangements to support keeping in touch and maintaining significant relationships moving forward. Includes direct support to birth family members where needed.

In this year, 21 children and 23 parents have joined the weekly Loud and Clear music group, bringing opportunity for bonding, sensory development and building relationships between families for the future.

## Tier 2

Focussed groups, to support children and adoptive parents, according to needs.

These are:

- Children's Groups, ages 7-11, and 11-16. See below
- Nurturing Attachments- a therapeutic parenting training programme
- Talking about Adoption- a life story course to help parents talk about adoption as their child grows up
- Future Stars- a sensory therapeutic parenting programme for adoptive parents and children
- Non Violent Resistance- a 10 week programme for parents of children who are violent to parents/carers
- STEP group- a 6 weekly support group for adoptive parents undertaking early permanence placements, at any stage of that journey
- Education support provided by ATV dedicated Education Support Worker (ESW) . In many cases, the ESW works alongside an allocated social worker, to provide a multi-disciplinary approach to adoption support, according to the needs of the child.

### **Partnership work with Virtual Schools**

ATV continues to work closely in partnership with the 5 LA Virtual Schools who co-fund the Education Support Worker in ATV. Additionally, VS Heads, and ATV Managers and ESW meet termly to work together to develop a comprehensive education support service developing in partnership with local and regional priorities and changes.

This year, Darlington and Redcar and Cleveland VS's have collaborated to share their virtual reality headsets with ATV, enabling prospective adoptive parents to gain this realistic and experiential insight into the early experiences of children placed for adoption.

Jo Johnson, Redcar and Cleveland Virtual School Head said:

*"It is fantastic that partners are so supportive of each other, focusing on the issues that are imperative to strengthening our offer to children and families. ATV have embraced the VR headsets, trained staff and are beginning to deliver headset sessions advocating a trauma based approach to the wider audience of our adopters, early permanence carers and the impact that this undoubtedly has upon our previously looked after cohort of children. This develops what the Virtual Schools are working on within schools and education providers across the Tees Valley."*

In this year, 15 parents have attended Nurturing Attachments to develop therapeutic parenting approaches and skills.

7 families/7 children have joined the Future Stars programme, benefiting from a therapeutic sensory programme for children.

13 families have attended the "Talking About Adoption" workshops, aimed at supporting adoptive parents to talk about adoption as their child grows up.

### **Tier 3**

A dedicated specialist adoption support service, with an allocated social worker from the ATV adoption support team. The adoption support assessment will have indicated a need for a specific adoption support intervention, provided through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF), or for more specialist intervention from a partner agency. ATV has expanded its work with Local Authority early help and assessment teams, to create a shared understanding of adoption support needs, and a shared responsibility for provision of advice, supports and services, including financial support packages.

The service has in this year changed the way in which adoption support assessments are responded to, with a shorter 1 hour telephone assessment

within 10 days, enabling parents to feel confident there is access to support and therapy more quickly. Although delivery of therapy remains within timescale of the Adoption Support Fund (28 days application agreement process) this early response is better for adoptive parents and children and is reflected in a better response on the adopter survey – see below. The early duty response to requests for assessment involves:

- A social work response to requests for an adoption support assessment, either for a specific identified support, or a more comprehensive assessment of support needs.
- An offer of services available under tiers 1 and 2
- Therapeutic support provided by one of the commissioned therapy providers who have been agreed to join the ATV providers framework.

Currently, the gap is a more joined up approach with health services, provided via TEWV and CNTW mental health specialist services. It is planned that this will be improved through the new partnership model for adoption support, outlined in the introduction to this report.

In this period, work has been undertaken to agree shared Adoption Support procedures across all 5 Local Authorities, and ATV. These detail the responsibilities of ATV, the local authority and how the agencies work together in respect of statutory responsibilities for assessment and provision of adoption support.

## **12. Commissioned Services**

### *12.1 Independent Birth Parent Support and Access to Adoption Records*

Adoption Tees Valley commissions independent birth parent support, and an access to adoption records service from a regional VAA.

In this year, the contract for these services was re-tendered, and was awarded to Arc Adoption, having previously been awarded to Adoption Matters.

The transitional arrangements have been supported by Stockton Procurement, as the host Authority for the RAA. The transition of the contract has been smooth and well managed, and recognition is given to both VAA's for the work that they have/are undertaking for the support of birth parents and adopted adults.

### *12.2 Framework of Therapeutic Providers*

ATV has operated a Framework of Therapeutic Providers for delivery of adoption support therapeutic services for children and families. The framework has been in operation since 2018 and has been fully retendered

within this period. The funding for therapies for children is drawn down from the Adoption Support Fund.

Assessment is undertaken by the adoption support social work service as detailed above, and application is made in each case for the most appropriate therapeutic intervention based on the assessment, and in some cases, specialist assessment- also a commissioned service, through the Framework.

There are a total of 20 providers on the framework, who are awarded the contract for specific therapeutic input, as detailed within each aspect of the framework, dependent on their successful application. The providers are a mix of small and larger local and regional therapy providers, and the range of providers is valued, giving a range of options for therapy for children and families. Therapeutic approaches include: theraplay, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), play therapy, family therapy, sensory integration, therapeutic life story work.

The new multi-disciplinary adoption support service under development (MDASS) will bring the added benefit of a partnership with health, enabling more clinical oversight of assessments and of commissioned services.

### 12.3 ASF Applications

The value of applications to the ASF is set out below. A new process is in place, whereby invoices are paid once the therapy has been completed, and so actual payments are less than the value of applications.

The numbers of referrals and assessments, including cases with education support is set out below.

	2021-22	2022-23	
Number of adoption support referrals	106	126	Inc 19%
Access to Files requests/completed	40	45	Inc 12.5 %
Adoption Support Assessments completed	106 +94 repeated assessments	126 + 163 repeated assessments	Inc 19 % inc 74% repeated assessments

Successful application to ASF	200	289	Inc 44 %
Unsuccessful application to ASF	0	0	0
Value of applications to ASF	£718,302	£1,060,651	Inc £342,349
Education Support Cases during year	77	32 new 114 total	

The information shows an increase in adoption support activity during the year.

ATV makes group applications to fund the Tier 2 therapeutic programmes, and the increase in Tier 2 supports accounts for some of the increase in funding applied for, and assessments.

It is planned that ATV will trial a new outcomes framework- measuring the outcomes of adoption support and therapeutic intervention during 2023-24. This is a national pilot, and a voluntary arrangement. However, ATV will be progressing to develop an outcomes framework, in line with national development moving forward.

### **13. Involving Children and Adults in ATV**

ATV has made good progress in working together with adopted children, and with adoptive parents, to help the service be shaped and informed through the voices of people with lived experience. This year has seen a resumption of groups for children, and of the adopter partnership forum, following the pandemic.

#### *13.1 Children's involvement – Childrens Groups*

There has been a full resumption and development of work with children and young people who are adopted, following the pandemic. In April 2022 ATV recommenced the children's groups, which are face to face groups led by one social worker, 2 adoption support workers, and the Education Support Worker.

There are 2 groups in place, each of which meets monthly.

There is a group for 7-11 year olds, and a group for 11-16's.



The groups have been well attended and are very valued by adopted children and their parents. Activities are collective, and promote adopted children meeting with each other, forming friendships, and getting more comfortable with their identity as adopted young people.

### *13.2 Voice and Influence – Children and Young People*

The service has started a dedicated Voice and Influence Group, and development of this is underway within the reporting period, and into this new reporting year ( 2023-24).

The team have been supported in the development of this group through specialist training: they have learned that it's important to take time to develop the confidence of young people and seek their involvement in having a voice in service development as a separate activity to the focus of the young people's groups. With support from the National RAA project team, ATV has commenced its journey of development of our own Voice and Influence group.

There are 9 young people who have begun involvement, ranging from age 11 to 17, and the group has started to form its aims, and goals, which will include presenting to the ATV Board its ideas.

Young people have been involved in interviews for staff and have begun exploring their big issues which they feel need better understanding for adopted children, including education, and life story work.

### *13.3 Adoptive Parents- the Adopter Partnership Forum*

The Adopter Partnership Forum has recommenced following covid. A survey via the ATV newsletter was sent to adoptive parents to seek expressions of interest for the forum, and a good response was received. The forum has now reconvened, with a monthly meeting, joined by the Service Manager and one of the Team Managers. Attendance is still relatively low, however, is increasing gradually, and the group is forming ideas for involvement of more adopters, and how the voice of adoptive parents can influence the service delivery.

The forum has considered the adopter survey (see below) feedback, and some changes have been made as a result of the feedback and discussion. For example, a new matching agreement, to enable newly approved adoptive parents to tell the service how they want to be kept informed of potential matches.

The ATV Board has decided that the Adopter Forum will be asked to select the next ATV Non-Executive Director for the ATV Board. This has been discussed and will be progressed in the next 3 month period.

A further benefit of the Forum is that one adoptive parent has been able to generate positive links with the Tees Valley museums, who are now considering ways in which adoption and adopted people can be given support through the Museums network.

ATV Board continues to hold 2 Non-Executive Director seats for Adoptive parents in the ATV community. Currently, Pete Kirby Bowstead holds one position. Pete is also a headteacher in a primary school in the region and has been a voice and support of adoptive parents in Tees Valley. Pippa Turner has decided to step down from her position as NED after 3 years on the board. ATV is grateful to Pippa for her contribution on behalf of adoptive parents.

#### 13.4 Adopter Survey

An adopter survey was undertaken with adoptive parents, circulated through the ATV mailing list. There were 44 respondents- all adoptive parents at different stages of their journey.

The survey mirrored a previous adopter survey undertaken at the end of 2021, and much of the feedback is encouraging.

87% were satisfied or very satisfied with ATV response to their initial enquiry.

87% were satisfied or very satisfied with the adoption process through ATV.

88% were satisfied or extremely satisfied with their preparation training.

81% were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the linking and matching process.

90% were satisfied or highly satisfied with the plan of introductions to their child.

72 % were extremely satisfied or satisfied with the adoption support provided in the last 18 months, and 79% were satisfied or extremely satisfied that adoption support was offered in a timely manner. This is a huge and positive development with this figure being much lower at the last survey. As detailed above, ATV has restructured how adoption support initial contacts and assessments are undertaken, and the improved adopter satisfaction is encouraging.

Similarly, the survey tells us that many adopters are aware of the Adoption Support Fund, that they find the CATCH on line training platform valuable, and that they value the monthly ATV newsletter.

*Where do we need to pay most attention?*

58 % were satisfied or very satisfied with the education support offered, which appears lower than expected. We believe this may reflect some families who

have not needed or taken this up, and therefore are not providing a positive response.

29% of those replying said that they experienced some mental health problems, sadness and/or depression following the child joining their family.

Taking these issues forward, all of the areas for reflection and improvement are tabled for discussion, or have been discussed with the adopter forum, and have been included in the ATV 2023-25 Service Plan.

#### **14. Adoption Panel**

Within this year ATV Board has agreed additional funding for a 3 day per week Panel Manager and Agency Advisor to the adoption panel. This has enabled improved performance, quality assurance and consistency in relation to all panel matters and has brought a dedicated focus to panel from one single panel manager. This has brought an improved quality assurance feedback process, with Local Authorities and ATV receiving evidence based quality feedback in a more focussed way. The Panel Manager has provided training on key aspects of adoption panel related work, including production of quality Child Permanence Reports (CPR's).

Panel Business meetings with panel chairs and the Agency Service Manager, who is also ADM for adopter approvals have continued, and are now convened by the Panel Manager. These are supported by 6 weekly business meetings between the Panel manager, Chair, and vice Chairs. The panel now has an improved QA function in relation to feedback forms for applicants, attending social workers, and panel members, and feedback is acted on.

The panel members have all undertaken annual appraisal, using a new more efficient and effective 360 approach, which has been positively welcomed. Panel members have undertaken training on a number of key aspects of adoption related business including early permanence. Panel chairs, vice chairs and the panel manager have undertaken training on Cultural humilities, and a session for all panel members is planned.

The panel chairs 6 monthly reports have been produced and presented to the ATV Board. This details in full the work of panel, including timescales, and quality issues and themes.

In this year, there have been:

- 56 adoption panels convened.
- 71 matches presented, including 79 children.
- 9 cases presented where the child was already placed in an early permanence placement.
- 1 consensual adoption case (previously known as relinquished)

- 55 approvals presented.
- 1 brief report presented.

Panels have remained largely virtual in this year. A survey has been undertaken with all parties to seek views on the question of virtual or face to face panel meetings. The feedback received indicated that a significant minority would value some opportunity for face to face panels again. This has been incorporated into a new plan, with one face to face panel per month, which any applicant who wishes for it can ask to be booked on to.

The agency continues to seek to increase diversity into the Central List, and this year a new panel member who is a young adult with lived experience of being adopted has joined. There are now more male members of panel also. The agency continues to strive to find more panel members from ethnic minority communities, with the aim of having at least one non white panel member wherever a child or family from a minority ethnic background is presented. We have heard nationally from black adoptive parents who feel very disempowered when an all-white panel hears their case, and ATV is placing a priority on this issue. Currently there are 2 black central list members, however, the service is currently seeking to increase this number.

Feedback from panel:

- Quality of matching documentation good
- Child's trauma timeline is appearing in most matching documentation
- Number of children having life appreciation days is increasing
- Quality of CPR's is improving
- The need for continual workforce training in LA's is noted
- PARs are generally good quality.

As part of their role, all 5 Local Authority ADM's have now observed the adoption panel, to be assured of the practice and approach of the RAA adoption panel. Feedback from ADM's has been positive.

The ATV Board has considered the full Panel Chairs report.

### **15. Staffing**

As noted above, the service has appointed a 0.6 FTE Panel manager and Agency Advisor, which is a new post. 2 further social workers (2FTE) have been agreed and are now in post.

The service has 18.85 FTE Social Workers, which includes 12.85 in recruitment, assessment and Family Finding and 5 in Adoption Support. 1 FTE is dedicated to partner adoption assessments.

Within the current year, the service will be undergoing a temporary change in structure, for succession planning for the future. The current Service Manager will be reducing to 3 days per week, a new temporary post of Deputy Service Manager has been created, which is now recruited to, and the service has moved from 2 Team managers, and 2 Assistant Team managers, to a 3 Team manager structure. All appointments are temporary secondments and have been internal.

This will be further reported on in the Bi Annual report, 2023-24.

Overall staff retention remains good. In this year, 1 permanent part time business support staff member retired. This post has been filled by the apprentice, who was successful in gaining a position.

### **16. Quality Assurance**

ATV operates from a position of continuous improvement, across all areas of the work. The service continually develops and seeks to improve through alignment with wider sector influences, changes, and developments; its own feedback mechanisms; audit; research; inspection; self-assessment.

Quality assurance is carried out through a variety of mechanisms. Key means of assuring quality are outlined below, and the service plan 2023-25 is underpinned by a cross cutting platform of continuous improvement and quality assurance.

The ATV Board has a role in being assured of quality of the service delivery, and a risk register is in place around key areas of risk for delivery, and/or quality concerns.

- *Service Plan*

There is an updated service plan, which has been developed through work with managers and staff, and is reflective of local development, and the national strategy and agenda on adoption. This plan will be updated quarterly and presented to the ATV Board with monitoring of progress against target measures, and outcomes.

- *Practice Model*

The service adopts elements of several key practice models in delivery of the adoption service.

The **Secure Base Model** (Schofield and Beek) is an operational model of attachment for children placed with alternative care givers and is used in preparation training and in assessment of adopters, and adoption support.

The **UEA Moving on to Adoption** is adopted in practice in many cases and is adapted dependent on the needs of the child, and family.

As detailed above, the service has adopted the **Trauma Timeline**, and is promoting trauma informed practice, within the RAA's own work, and across partner agencies.

Aspects of **Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and Practice (DDP)** ( Dan Hughes) are supported through the service delivery, including PACE parenting.

The Education Support worker is trained in the **Thrive** approach and adopts this within work with families and across schools.

ATV adopts a relational based approach throughout its work, both with families and children, and with staff in the service.

- *Performance Monitoring*

The RAA collates detailed adoption performance data, as required by the (former) ASGLB for quarterly returns. ATV has a key role in co-ordinating with partner LAs on adoption performance data. A quarterly balanced scorecard (BSC) is produced, which details performance measures, as set out within this annual report. There is a quarterly meeting with each Local Authority adoption service lead, to review each individual LA performance, key practice themes, and also for the LA to be assured about the adoption service. The BSC is presented quarterly to the ATV Board.

- *Panel*

Panel forms a key QA function for the work of ATV and partner agencies. In this year a separate Panel Quality Assurance Action plan has been developed, which is shared and reviewed by the Panel manager, Service Manager, and panel chairs.

- *Surveys and Feedback*

An adopter survey has been undertaken, as reported on above. Changes have been made as a result of feedback and will continue to be made.

Children and Young people have fed back on the groups that have been run. The voice and Influence group will have a role in seeking children and young people's views more widely.

- *Policies*

ATV policies are in a process of review. These are being reviewed to ensure that they reflect current and most up to date practice and expectations. The Adoption Support procedure has been implemented to reflect the shared responsibilities across all 5 agencies with respect to assessment and support of adoptive children and their families.

Policies will be available on the ATV website.

- *Supervision*

All staff receive monthly supervision in ATV, which includes reflective practice.

All staff have an annual appraisal which sets out their further personal development plan for the year ahead, aligned to their own career and role, and service planning.

- *Workforce development*

The service offers and supports workforce development, aligned to service and sector development, and learning needs of staff. Workforce development may be through attending a training event, shadowing, or through group reflective sessions.

Examples within this year are:

- Early permanence training- national
- Whole team reflection on the LJC Safeguarding review.
- ADM training day facilitated by RAA leaders/Coram BAAF.
- National Adoption Support Conference, focussing on trauma informed practice.
- Team day -developing trauma informed practice and the trauma timeline.

3 managers are currently undertaking level 5 management qualification. This will strengthen the management capacity in ATV and support overall succession planning.

- *Audit*

Audits have been regularly carried out with staff involved in individual cases. The audit process has been LA specific in this year, due to a number of partner LA's undergoing full ILACS inspections by Ofsted. The ATV Board has had one overview report presented, following audits within the service. A further overview report is planned.

Audit has helped the service reflect on quality of case records and ensuring that records reflect what an adopted person may need in the future. It has also informed practice standards and implementing these within the team.

- *Ofsted*

4 of the 5 partner LA's have been inspected by Ofsted, which includes inspection of the RAA- Adoption Tees Valley, through the lens of the Local Authority. These are- Redcar and Cleveland; Darlington; Stockton; Middlesbrough.

While a lot of preparation goes into being ready for each Ofsted inspection, reports only include a single short paragraph on the Adoption Agency. In

each Ofsted inspection, the report on ATV was positive, with strengths being the experience of adoptive parents, timeliness of adoption, and the adoption panel.

Ofsted is planning for inspection of RAA's as a single inspection in 2023-25.

## 17. 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.

### 17.1 General Running Costs

Expenditure	Budget 2022/23	Outturn 2022/23	Variance 2022/23
Employees	1,640,000	1,596,000	(44,000)
Running Costs	244,000	377,000	116,000
Support Service Costs	113,000	114,000	1,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,997,000</b>	<b>2,087,000</b>	<b>73,000</b>
Interagency Fees	500,000	652,000	152,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,497,000</b>	<b>2,739,000</b>	<b>225,000</b>

Employee costs underspent due to delays filling vacant posts in year and savings in staff mileage.

Running costs overspent due to additional utility costs of premises and additional adoption support and post adoption costs.

Excluding interagency fees, additional contributions from each Local Authority are:

	New % contributions	Additional 22/23
Darlington	14.6%	11,000
Hartlepool	14.9%	11,000
Middlesbrough	28.1%	20,000
Redcar & Cleveland	15.5%	11,000
Stockton	26.9%	20,000
		<b>73,000</b>

### 17.2 Interagency Fees

Interagency fees exceeded the budget figure by £152,000. Additional contributions from each Local Authority are as follows as follows:

	Percentage	Budget 22/23	Actual 22/23	Additional 22/23
Darlington	15.95%	80,000	104,000	24,000



Hartlepool	14.22%	71,000	93,000	22,000
Middlesbrough	27.16%	136,000	177,000	41,000
Redcar & Cleveland	15.95%	80,000	104,000	24,000
Stockton	26.72%	133,000	174,000	41,000
	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>500,000</b>	<b>652,000</b>	<b>152,000</b>

## 18. Service Development Plan

The service developments planned at the end of 2021-22 were:

Development Planned	Progress	Forward Plan
Strengthening voice and involvement of adopted children in ATV	Positive progress- V&I group in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to develop the group, with dedicated staff to support</li> </ul>
Strengthening preparation and assessment of adopters, to support more adopters taking more children with additional needs	Preparation strengthened through the Trauma Timeline – trauma Informed Practice, and addition of virtual reality headsets. Challenges remain in ATV adopters providing sufficiency for children with additional needs	Strengthening: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopters waiting group.</li> <li>Ongoing training and support to adopters waiting.</li> <li>Clear information on profile of children from the outset of the adopter journey</li> </ul>
Strengthening sufficiency of adopters, through increased marketing	More adopters approved in 2022-23.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to focus marketing on the needs of children ATV needs to find families for</li> </ul>
Taking early permanence strategy to the next stage – phase 2	Pan regional Project-funded for 2 years in place. 2 ATV social workers dedicated to EP lead roles Work ongoing with fostering services LFJB discussions on EP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dedicated recruitment plan for EP carers- Autumn 2023</li> <li>Full range of information for all stakeholders about EP</li> <li>LFJB development session on adoption to include EP</li> <li>Target increase of 20% EP carers, and 20% more children accessing EP</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendance at legal gateway- all LA's, to jointly plan for early permanence</li> </ul>
Strengthen partnership working, including with early help, to strengthen support to adopters when they need it.	<p>New model of assessment has significantly reduced waiting times.</p> <p>Ongoing work with early help/CHUBs across TV to strengthen understanding of adoptive families, and challenges.</p> <p>MDASS team is in progress for more multi-disciplinary adoption support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wider multi-agency representation on ATV Board</li> <li>Develop shared approach of ATV involvement with any child referred to LA CHUB, to prevent child/YP prematurely leaving the family home/return to care.</li> </ul>
Continuing to address life story book model.	Now with LA SW's LA's are responding to any LSB's identified as not being completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor for completion of LSB's and liaise where not provided to plan for completion</li> </ul>
Continuing to address timescales for adoption support assessments	New model embedded, and survey indicates more satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New staff to be trained in early response, and assessment</li> </ul>
Taking forward Panel improvements to maintain a streamlined approach to panel, and quality CPR's	Achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diversify membership of Panel</li> <li>Quality feedback to individual LA's.</li> </ul>
Continue to develop a focus on children's diversity needs, and welcoming/increasing prospective adopters from ethnic minority backgrounds	More adopters have been recruited. Children from minority ethnic backgrounds are placed with ethnically and culturally matched adopters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embed a dedicated focus on ATV approach to valuing and strengthening diversity including access to adopting for adults and understanding children's racial, religious, cultural and ethnicity needs for the future, and in matching</li> </ul>
<b>2023-25 – Key new Developments Planned</b>		
Planned Development		Target timescale

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restructure for future resilience in adoption activity, and for succession planning.</li> </ul>	September 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a dedicated EP team.</li> <li>ATV attendance at Legal Gateway - more children identified for potential EP, reducing moves for children, and releasing pressure on fostering resources.</li> <li>Recruit more carers for EP</li> </ul>	October 2023 – March 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase sufficiency of adopters, able to take ATV children, including siblings and children who have more complex health and development needs.</li> </ul>	April 2023-March 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen adopters' family and friendship network support</li> </ul>	By December 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve access to early medical assessments for adoption for children, and for adult health reports by appointment of dedicated adult health Medical Advisor</li> </ul>	By October 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workforce development across Tees Valley on adoption, early permanence, and CPR</li> </ul>	By December 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement and test new outcomes framework in adoption support</li> </ul>	By March 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on developing post adoption direct and indirect contact plans to maintain relationships, and promote life long identity and connections</li> </ul>	By March 2024

Vicky Davidson Boyd

Service Manager Adoption Tees Valley

July 2023

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## Corporate Parenting Board

## Forward Plan

<u>Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
Friday 11 August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption Tees Valley Update (<b>Vicky Davidson-Boyd</b>)</li> <li>• Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022/2023 (<b>Martin Gray</b>)</li> <li>• Annual Report of the Fostering Panel and Fostering Service Report 2022 – 2023 (<b>Debbie Farrow</b>)</li> <li>• Inhouse residential provision (<b>Debbie Farrow</b>)</li> </ul>
Friday 13 October 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate Parenting Strategy (<b>Adele Moore</b>)</li> <li>• Post 16 and Care Leavers support and accommodation report (<b>Debbie Farrow</b>)</li> <li>• Corporate Parenting Strategy Action Plan - Update (<b>Adele Moore</b>)</li> </ul>
Friday 8 December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual School Update (<b>Janet Wilson</b>)</li> <li>• Corporate Parenting Strategy Action Plan - Update (<b>Adele Moore</b>)</li> </ul>
Friday 9 February 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate Parenting Strategy Action Plan - Update (<b>Adele Moore</b>)</li> <li>• Corporate Parenting Performance Update (<b>Johanne Parker</b>)</li> </ul>

To be scheduled

Mockingbird Update.

Standing Items:

- Adoption – 6 monthly Update (**Vicky Davidson-Boyd**) (Usually February and August each Year)
- Corporate Parenting Performance Update (**Johanne Parker**) (Usually February and August each Year)
- Virtual School Update (**Janet Wilson**) (Usually June and December each year)
- Corporate Parenting Strategy Action Plan - Update (**Adele Moore**) (from October, usually each meeting)

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