



## **Recruitment and Sufficiency Strategy**

**Updated: December 2025**

### **Introduction**

Adoption Tees Valley became a “live” Regional Adoption Agency in May 2018, formed from the 5 regional Local Authorities of Darlington; Hartlepool; Middlesbrough; Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton. The RAA is hosted by Stockton Borough Council, and is governed through a management Board with representation of all 5 Local Authority DCS’s. The RAA has set out its vision and mission statements, building on the developmental phase of business planning for the RAA to go live.

**Vision:** Adoption Tees Valley sets out to achieve the best possible adoption outcomes for children and adopters, through the provision of high quality and timely services to them, and to birth family members, by an effective and financially sustainable organisation.

**Impact:** We want to provide early permanence and stability through adoption for children in the Tees Valley region with an adoption plan, securing their best possible outcomes now and in the future.

The RAA has operated a mixed economy of placements through ATV RAA adopters (internal) and purchasing interagency placements from the market- which includes other Regional Adoption Agencies, or Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

ATV will seek to plan for current and future requirements of adoption placements for children referred by the 5 LA’s, through an integrated Sufficiency and Recruitment Strategy, and Strategic Marketing Plan. We are setting out to develop better and more strategic approaches to delivering early permanence within the RAA, benefitting from the learning in the NE and Cumbria Early Permanence Project, and the work across the national RAA system on early permanence. This Recruitment and Sufficiency Strategy plan will reflect our intentions to increase awareness and consideration of early permanence practice within the region, and through work with prospective adopters as they move through their assessment and preparation.

A pan regional project has been commissioned to promote more sufficiency for early permanence placements, across the Tees Valley, Northeast and Cumbria footprint. Using a funding bid made to the national RAA Early Permanence Working Group, the Tees

Valley, Northeast and Cumbria have secured a Lead Consultant with expertise of EP and Concurrency to create a project team, with a specific objective of increasing sufficiency of EP placements.

### **Planning for Sufficiency to meet the needs of Children in Tees Valley**

- The aim is to place all children with an adoption plan with approved adopters matched to meet their needs, in a timely way.
- Adoption Tees Valley values the importance of regional and birth family identity for adopted children and will work to maximise the benefits to children of having an accessible long term adoption support service, and potential for direct and indirect birth family contact, where this is part of their plan. The added value to children's long term needs of placements within the region, or neighbouring regional local authorities is recognised in recruitment and sufficiency strategic planning.

In order to meet these goals for all children referred to Adoption Tees Valley (from the 5 Local Authority areas of Darlington; Hartlepool; Middlesbrough; Redcar and Cleveland; and Stockton) the service needs to plan to ensure sufficiency of adopters, who are assessed, prepared, trained and approved to meet the needs of the cohort of children requiring placement.

### **Plan**

1. Adoption Tees Valley will seek to recruit adopters to meet the needs of children referred and will support recruitment through a robust Strategic Marketing Plan. ATV has reviewed some aspects of its marketing approach and has generated more reach on social media; through pay per click; and through the website.
2. ATV works under the umbrella of the National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group and has followed the national messages for campaigning in National Adoption Week.
3. ATV staff have undertaken training in "customer journey" work, and the service is seeking to provide a consistent, inclusive approach to all enquirers, to enable smooth and timely transition to registration of Interest, and assessment. The service has had mystery shopping as part of the National RAA Customer Journey project, and has engaged with feedback received.
4. ATV has a robust approach to providing information about adoption at the earliest possible opportunity, with a dedicated duty system within the Enquiry Hub team, and duty social workers available each day for initial calls. There is an information pack available on the website, as a guide to adoption. ATV runs Information Evenings twice each month, facilitated by the Enquiry

Hub, with support from adopters, and one of the Adoption Support team. Information events are run alternately, in the office “face to face” and virtually, to meet all needs.

5. Adoption Tees Valley will set out to meet nationally agreed timescales for assessment and approval of adopters, including reduced timescales for fast track/second time adopters. These timescales are 6 months application to approval for first time adopters, and 4 months application to approval for fast track. We know that Covid impacted on timescales for assessment due to delays in health checks for adopters, however, maintain our aim for national timescales.
6. The staffing/workforce structure is designed to enable a dedicated focus to the recruitment, assessment and preparation of adopters, with a dedicated team, led by an Enquiry Hub Team Manager, and supported by a marketing officer. There are 2 social workers with a primary work focus of recruitment, with further resource available from the Assessment & Family Finding team, where required, to enable responsiveness. We know that we need to regularly develop and train our workforce to deliver consistency in recruitment practice, and customer focus.
7. Adoption Tees Valley has set out to work in partnership with regional VAA's to provide a needs analysis of children requiring adoption, to enable local VAA recruitment and delivery to form part of the sufficiency strategy. We want to shape a sustainable approach to market development, to ensure we can meet the current and future needs of children and achieve regional placements where possible.
8. Adoption Tees Valley uses the national commercial matching service, Linkmaker, to enable timely matches for children, until such times as other partnerships and collaborations are delivering sufficiency of adopters matched to meet the needs of the children in Tees Valley.
9. A needs analysis will underpin the Recruitment and Sufficiency Strategy, outlining our needs and recruitment priorities. Local data will form part of the broader market position statement, to inform future planning. We will use the performance information from the agency, and the wider 5 Local Authorities, to review and evaluate where we need additional placement types, and how we can work together with partners to plan to recruit for these needs.

10. We want to ensure that our recruitment practice delivers on our commitment to equality and diversity, with opportunity being available to adults from all walks of life, to consider adoption. We embrace applications from single adopters, same sex couples, Minority Ethnic applicants, and applicants from across the economic social groups within our local communities.
11. Adoption Tees Valley has a budget for external interagency placements. Adoption Tees Valley will seek to make available within the region, and nationally a number of approved adopters who are waiting, and will generate placement income, to offset expenditure on interagency fees.

### ***Needs Analysis***

#### **Tees Valley Children**

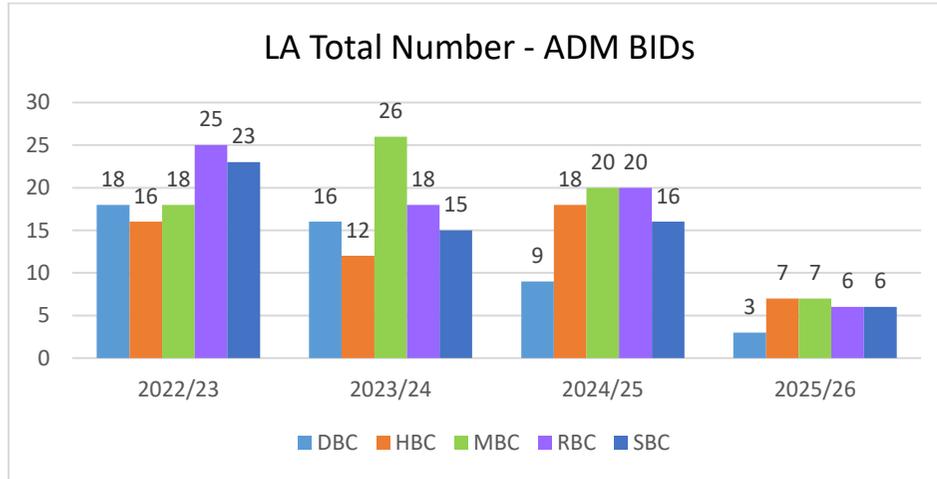
The period for the data is Q1 and Q2 2025-26 which is 01/04/25 – 30/09/25.

The sufficiency strategy is aimed at recruiting and sourcing adoptive parents for the children who require adoptive parents and an adoption placement in Tees Valley.

The referral rate of children to ATV with an adoption plan has reduced. Not all children go on to have an adoption plan, and numbers of children with a best interests ADM decision, has also reduced.

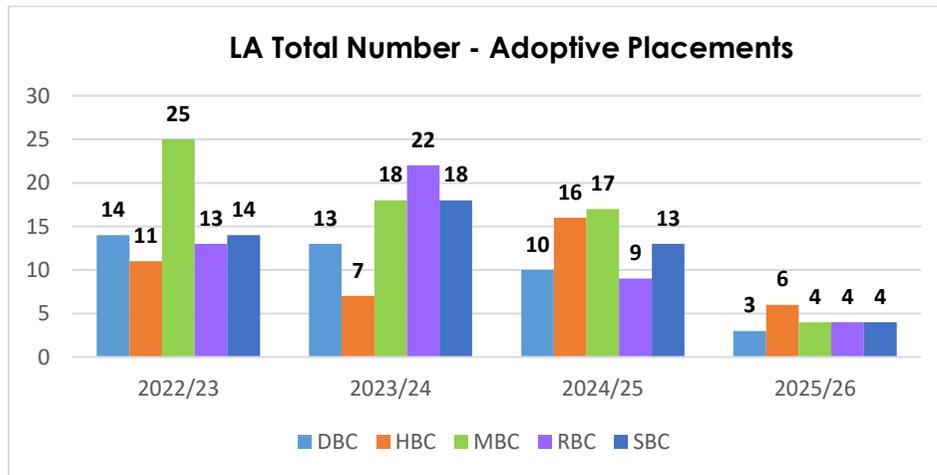
## ADM BIDs

ADMs for this year – 29 during Q1 and Q2, compared with full year in previous years.

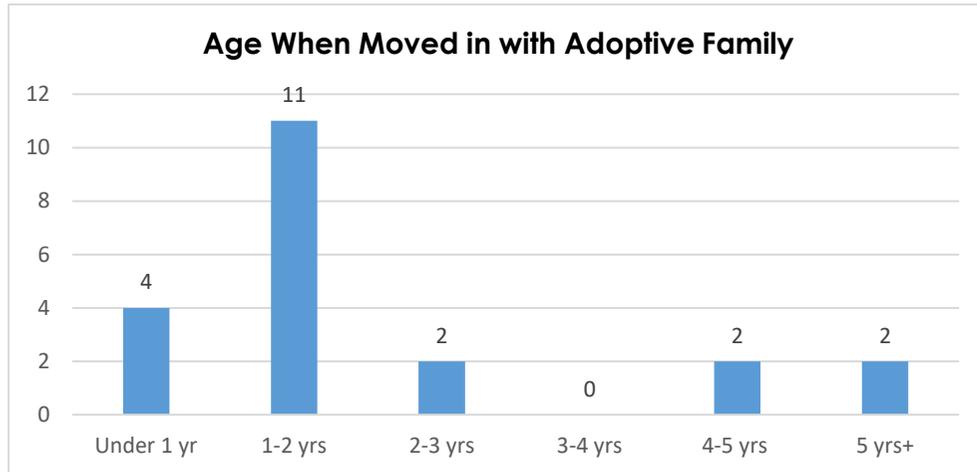


## Children Placed

ATV placed 21 children in this period

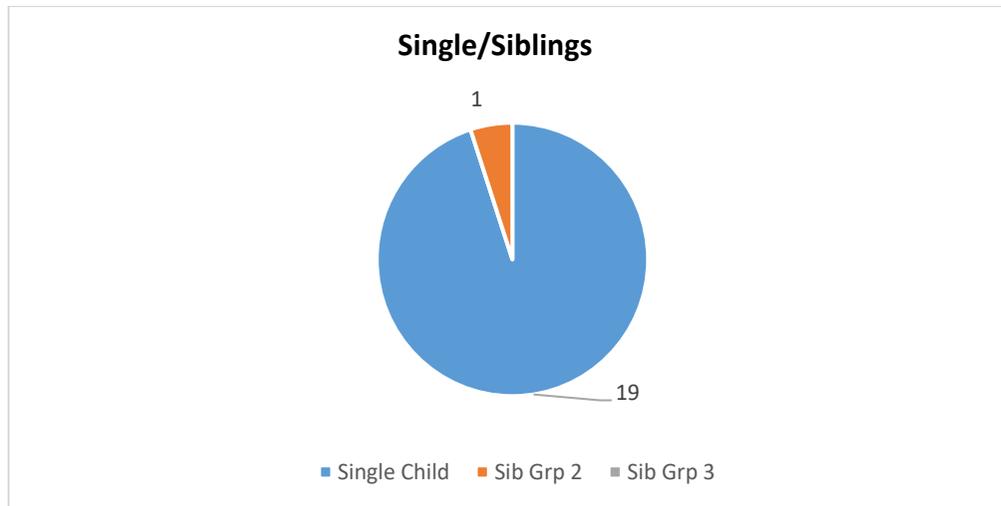


### **Age when moved in with Family**



52 % are in the age range of 1-2 years, and 19% were over the age of 4-5 years at the time of placement. A smaller number of these children were older at the age of placement, often with multiple previous moves and extended periods of exposure to early harm, this highlights some of the complex needs for many children who have been placed for adoption in this period. Characteristic of the Tees Valley area is a need for adoptive parents for older children.

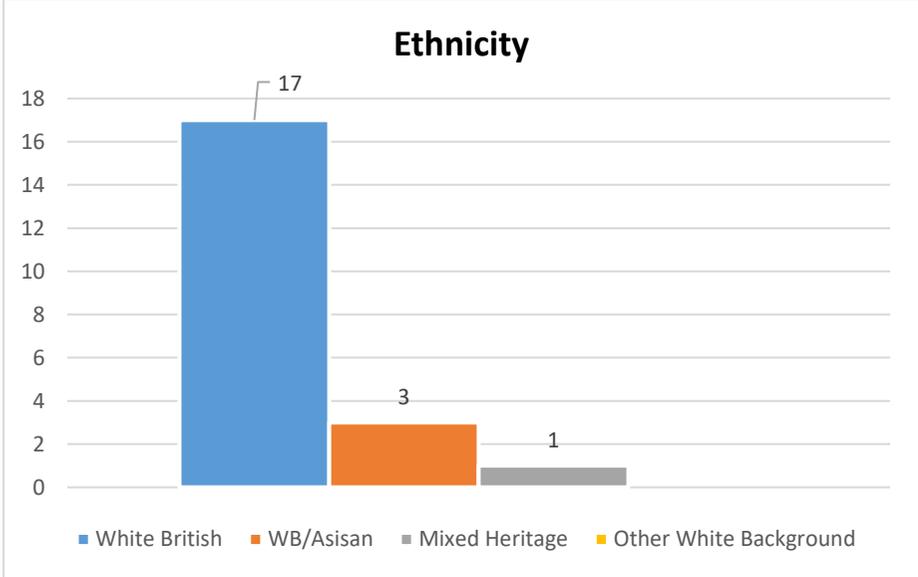
### **Single Children and Siblings**



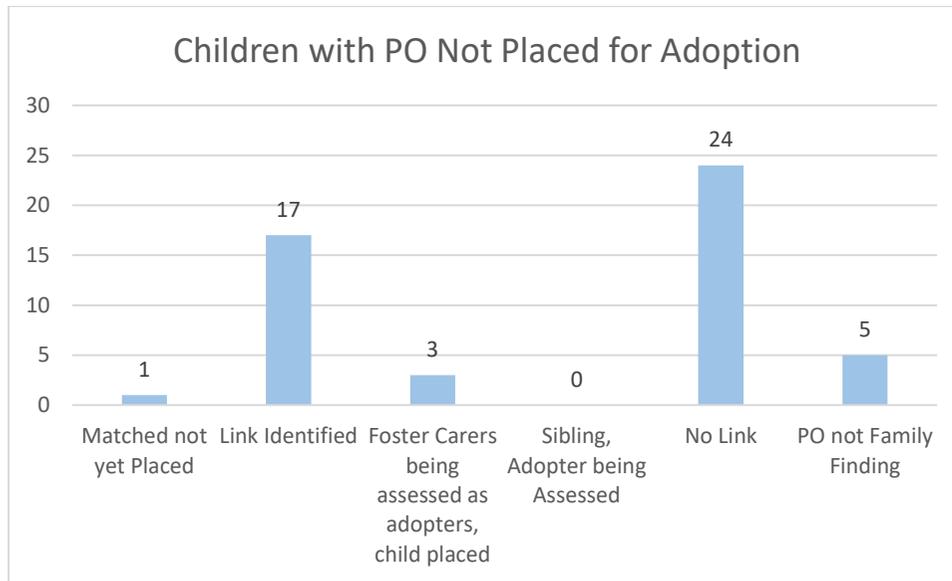
Of the 20 children placed during Q1 and Q2, 19 were single child placements, and 2 children were within a sibling group of 1.

ATV has placed a significant proportion of children with siblings in this period, which includes children in the older age categories. These characteristics of children place them in a high level of complexity. ATV has a need to find families for children in sibling groups, often with older siblings within this family group.

**Ethnicity**



**Children Waiting with a Placement Order**



ATV data shows 24 children with a PO, not yet placed.

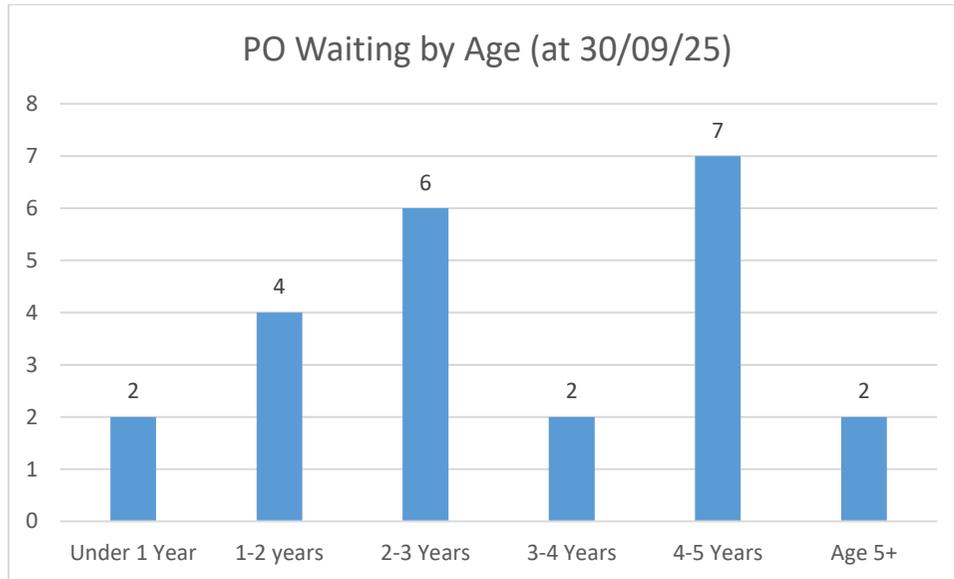
Of the 50 children, 24 are children for whom ATV is continuing to seek an adoptive family, with no family yet found; 21 are children who are linked with a family, not yet placed.

**Time waiting since PO granted.**

Of the 24 children for whom family finding is active, 11 of these have been waiting less than 3 months since the PO was granted.

***PO Waiting by Age***

The children waiting for whom active family finding is ongoing are aged as follows:



### Children waiting for a family in Tees Valley

The information about children placed, and children waiting with a PO shows that in The RAA region of ATV, there is a relatively high profile of older children, and children in sibling groups requiring adoption placements.

A relatively small number of children are waiting with a PO for over 6 months, and of these they are older children and sibling groups.

### ***Recruitment Targets 25-26***

ATV has a sufficiency gap and requires more adoptive parents for children in sibling groups, older children, and children with uncertain developmental prognosis, often arising from the unknown impact of in utero exposure to maternal drugs and alcohol use.

Recruitment has been impacted on this year and in line with many other northern based adoption agencies the societal “cost of living” crisis is felt to be affecting recruitment. ATV operates in an area of greater deprivation, and also with more children entering care, per 100,000 of population.

For this reason, in order to find families for children in a suitable timescale, ATV works actively with neighbouring VAA's to achieve sufficiency.

The service is aiming to recruit 50 – 55 adoptive families within the year, based on previous year placement numbers, and siblings requiring placement together.

Priority needs are to recruit adopters for:

- Early permanence placements
- Siblings
- Older children, including those aged 5 +
- Children with complex health needs
- Children with complex emotional needs, and attachment disorders
- Children with some uncertainty, arising from parental lifestyle
- Children of ethnic minority heritage, including children who are dual heritage
- Children who require direct contact with siblings, and potentially other birth family members

**Adopter Sufficiency**

	<b>Total 2024- 25</b>	<b>Q1 2025- 26</b>	<b>Q2 2025- 26</b>	<b>Total 2025-26 YTD</b>
<b>Approved</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Starting Stage 1</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Starting Stage 2</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Marketing Enquiries</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>% Enquiries Converted to ROI</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Snapshot of the "adopter pipeline"</b>	<b>End Q4</b>	<b>End Q1</b>	<b>End Q2</b>	
<b>Waiting to be matched</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>	
<b>Not yet approved, numbers in assessment</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	

## Adoption Support

Adoption Tees Valley have had to navigate the recent changes to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) — especially the reduction of the **Fair Access Limit (FAL) from £5,000 to £3,000** and the removal of separate funding for specialist assessments are having significant practical, emotional, and financial impacts on adoptive families.

### 1. Reduced access to therapeutic support

Because the annual therapy limit has fallen from £5,000 to £3,000 and match-funding has been removed, many families now cannot access the level or duration of therapy their children previously received. Therapy packages that were previously funded above the limit no longer qualify.

Families report:

- **Therapy being cut short** due to the new limit.
- **Packages scaled down**, resulting in fewer sessions or less specialist input.

### 2. Specialist assessments now draw from the same £3,000 pot

Previously, families had a separate allowance of £2,500 for assessments. This has now been absorbed into the £3,000 limit.

This means:

- A specialist assessment (often £2,500) leaves only around £500 for therapy.
- Families must now choose between assessment or therapy, even when both are needed.
- Many assessments simply can't proceed because they would leave too little funding for follow-up work.

### 3. Breaks in therapy and increased waiting times

ATV have seen some families have unavoidable breaks in children's therapy because:

- Applications had to be rewritten under the new criteria.
- Therapy must now be completed within a single financial year, reducing flexibility.

## **5. Greater financial and emotional burden on adoptive parents**

With match-funding abolished, families now cannot rely on additional support for more complex or costly therapeutic needs.

As a result:

- Some families are attempting to self-fund therapy, which is often not affordable.
- Parents report increased stress, guilt, and fear about their child's wellbeing.
- The changes feel abrupt and poorly communicated, adding to emotional strain.

## **6. Instability in existing support plans**

Families who had therapy underway or planned report that the new rules have created sudden changes mid-process, including:

- Unexpected pauses in therapy
- The need to renegotiate entirely new plans
- Providers having to reduce or compromise intervention quality

The FAL changes mean:

- **Less funding per child**
- **Support cut short or unavailable**
- **Delays and uncertainty for families**
- **Increased crisis risk**
- **Reduced access to specialist assessments**
- **Greater strain on RAAs and providers**

- **Emotional and practical pressure on families already dealing with complex needs**

Collectively, these changes are making adoption support feel less stable for families, and less effective at a time when demand continues to rise.

Adoption Tees Valley are working hard to offer families support in a variety of forms which are not ASGSF dependent.

ATV are developing an MDT approach. A emphasis on ensuring good quality assessment of children's needs through a trauma lens and evidenced based is the starting point. Adopters are prepared to parent a child who has suffered abuse and trauma and how this may show in their developments and behaviours. An Adopter Pathway Plan is completed to highlight additional training needs an adopter may have post placement. The emphasis in contemporary adoption is prevention and empowerment.

Adopter recruitment and sufficiency of placements remains the responsibility of Adoption Tees Valley. Adoption support services are a crucial part of providing stability for our children. ATV will continue to support families through our local offer while advocating for a long term adoption support offer via the ASGSF fund.