

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

## AGENDA



**Tuesday 15 September 2020**

**at 4.00 pm**

**in the Council Chamber,  
Civic Centre, Hartlepool.**

**PLEASE NOTE: this will be a 'remote meeting', a web-link to the public stream will be available on the Hartlepool Borough Council website at least 24 hours before the meeting.**

MEMBERS: CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

Councillors Hamilton, Harrison, Lauderdale, Lindridge, Little, Moore, Smith.

Co-opted Members: Jo Heaton, C of E Diocese and Joanne Wilson, RC Diocese representatives.

School Heads Representatives: Mark Tilling (Secondary), David Turner (Primary), Zoe Westley (Special).

Six Young Peoples Representatives

Observer: Councillor Little, Chair of Adult and Community Based Services Committee

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
2. **TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS**
3. **MINUTES**
  - 3.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2020 (*previously circulated and published*).
4. **BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS**

No items.



## 5. KEY DECISIONS

No items.

## 6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION

- 6.1 Approval of Term and Holiday Dates 2021-22 – *Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*
- 6.2 Change of Name of Hartlepool Pupil Referral Unit and Review of Management Committee, Constitution and Roles and Responsibilities – *Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*
- 6.3 To Nominate a Local Authority Representative to Serve on the Governing Body of Kingsley Primary School – *Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*
- 6.4 Special Guardianship Policy – *Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*

## 7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

- 7.1 Fostering Service Interim Report - 1 April 2020 – 30 June 2020 – *Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*
- 7.2 2019/20 Annual Report of Adoption Tees Valley – *Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*

## 8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting – Thursday 19 November 2020 at 4.00 pm



# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

15<sup>th</sup> September 2020



**Report of:** Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

**Subject:** APPROVAL OF TERM AND HOLIDAY DATES 2021-22

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## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 Non key

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To seek agreement of the Children's Services Committee to the pattern of school term and holiday dates for the school year 2021-22 for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools.

2.2 To seek agreement of the Children's Services Committee in recommending these dates to governing bodies of Aided and Foundation schools and Academies in Hartlepool.

## 3. BACKGROUND

3.1 As the local authority (LA), the Council has the responsibility for setting the school term and holiday dates for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools in Hartlepool. Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools' governing bodies and Academies are responsible for setting their own school holiday pattern within the agreed national framework of working days. Traditionally the LA and the governing bodies of all of the Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools work together to ensure a consistent pattern across the town in respect of school term and holiday dates, though in the case of Roman Catholic schools in particular, some variation does occur in some years.

3.2 Five PD days are provided for in the teachers' conditions of service and can be taken in combinations of part-day "twilight" sessions at the direction of individual schools. The pattern proposed for 2021-22 provides for an "envelope" of 195 days.

- 3.3 Local authorities for a number of years have tried with some success to agree a unified calendar of term dates across the northern region from Yorkshire to Northumberland based on guiding principles agreed by the regional group in 2012-13.

#### 4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 In the late autumn 2019 the Tees Valley region consulted on a pattern for school term and holiday dates 2021-22 based on the guiding principles within their own authorities and regional authorities as shown in **Appendix 1**. The proposed pattern enables schools to begin the academic year on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021 and end the year on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2022.
- 4.2 Following discussions, arrangements were made to consult all head teachers in Hartlepool through the Director's termly meetings on the school year pattern for 2021-22. During the Director's termly meeting in the autumn term head teacher's agreed to consult on a further pattern for 2021-22 which had been proposed by a Hartlepool Secondary Head teacher as shown in **Appendix 2**. The proposed pattern enables schools to begin the academic year on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2021 and end the year on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2022 with an expectation that schools will take the first and last day of the academic year as Professional Development Days and children beginning the academic year on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2021 and ending the academic year on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2022.
- 4.3 Consultation took place within Hartlepool School Cluster meetings which includes members from Community, voluntary Aided and Foundation schools and Academies across the town. Two of the four Cluster groups responded and provided feedback on the models with the preferred option being **Appendix 2**.
- 4.4 The Cluster groups preferred model will enable staff and children to be in school for full weeks before and after school holidays. Christmas, Easter and half term breaks will match holidays within **Appendix 1**. However a return to school by children on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2021 will result in children having seven weeks summer break at the end of the academic year 2020-21.
- 4.5 Due to children having prolonged and interrupted time off school during the academic year 2019-20 due to the Coronavirus pandemic, uncertainty in relation to the current academic year 2020-21, and the need for all children, but particularly vulnerable children, to catch up on lost education in the summer term in 2019-20 there are reservations about a seven week break for children and families in the summer of 2021.
- 4.6 On the completion of local consultation in the region, local authorities within the Tees Valley have formally agreed the pattern for the school year 2021-22 **Appendix 1**; Darlington, Stockton on Tees, Redcar and Cleveland, there is no information available in relation to Middlesbrough Council at this time.

Regionally, Durham County Council and North Tyneside have also agreed this pattern for the school year 2021-22. South Tyneside and North Yorkshire County Council have agreed a pattern for the school year 2021-22 similar to **Appendix 2** with the term beginning on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

- 4.7 As only two of the four Cluster Groups responded to the consultation, all Head Teachers of schools and academies in Hartlepool have been contacted, in order that they have the opportunity to confirm their preferred option in relation to the pattern of term dates in order to, assist members of Children's Services Committee in their consideration of a pattern of school term dates. A verbal report on responses received from Head Teachers will be made to members of the Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

## **5. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 None.

## **6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 None.

## **7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 None.

## **8. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 None.

## **9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 9.1 None.

## **10. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS**

- 10.1 None.

## **11. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 11.1 None.

## **12. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 12.1 To approve the scheduled term dates and holiday dates for 2021-22 for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools.
- 12.2 To recommend the scheduled of term and holiday dates for 2021-22 to governing bodies of all Voluntary Aided, Foundation Schools and Academies in Hartlepool.

### **13. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13.1 The schedule of term dates and holiday dates will provide the best opportunity for maintaining continuity of education and support for children, and particularly vulnerable children, in catching up of any lost education from the academic year 2020-21.
- 13.2 The pattern of school holidays for 2021-22 will achieve common term dates across the north east and Yorkshire based on guiding principles enabling continuity for parents, carers, other schools, local authority staff and other agencies.

### **14. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 14.1 None

### **15. CONTACT OFFICER**

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Sign Off:-

Director of Finance and Policy ☒

Chief Solicitor ☒

## APPENDIX 1 SCHOOL TERM DATES 2021-22

2021	AUGUST 2021	SEPTEMBER 2021	OCTOBER 2021	NOVEMBER 2021	DECEMBER 2021
Monday	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27
Tuesday	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28
Wednesday	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29
Thursday	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30
Friday	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31
Saturday	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25
Sunday	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26

Bank Holiday	
School Holidays	

2022	JANUARY 2022	FEBRUARY 2022	MARCH 2022	APRIL 2022	MAY 2022	JUNE 2022
Monday	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27
Tuesday	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28
Wednesday	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29
Thursday	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30
Friday	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24
Saturday	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25
Sunday	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26

2022	JULY 2022
Monday	4 11 18 25
Tuesday	5 12 19 26
Wednesday	6 13 20 27
Thursday	7 14 21 28
Friday	1 8 15 22 29
Saturday	2 9 16 23 30
Sunday	3 10 17 24 31

The number of term days shown is 195. Up to five of these days will be used as professional development days for teaching staff; pupils will not attend these days. Each school determines when these will take place and will inform parents.

## Appendix 2 School Term Dates 2021-22

2021	AUGUST 2021	SEPTEMBER 2021	OCTOBER 2021	NOVEMBER 2021	DECEMBER 2021
Monday	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27
Tuesday	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28
Wednesday	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29
Thursday	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30
Friday	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31
Saturday	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25
Sunday	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26

Bank Holiday	
School Holidays	

2022	JANUARY 2022	FEBRUARY 2022	MARCH 2022	APRIL 2022	MAY 2022	JUNE 2022
Monday	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27
Tuesday	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28
Wednesday	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29
Thursday	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30
Friday	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24
Saturday	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25
Sunday	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26

2022	JULY 2022
Monday	4 11 18 25
Tuesday	5 12 19 26
Wednesday	6 13 20 27
Thursday	7 14 21 28
Friday	1 8 15 22 29
Saturday	2 9 16 23 30
Sunday	3 10 17 24 31

The number of term days shown is 195. Up to five of these days will be used as professional development days for teaching staff; pupils will not attend these days. Each school determines when these will take place and will inform parents.



## RESPONSE RECEIVED FROM SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES –TERM DATES 2021-22

### CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE 15<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2020

#### BREAKDOWN OF SCHOOLS /ACADEMIES

Community schools incl. Special Primary	11
Community schools incl Special Secondary	0
Voluntary Controlled Schools	1 Primary
Voluntary Aided schools -Primary *	6 -RC ,1-CE
Voluntary Aided Schools -Secondary *	1
Foundation schools	1 Secondary
Academies –Primary incl. Special	12
Academies –Secondary incl. Special	4

\*Six RC Schools will convert to an Academy during academic year 2020-21.

\*Anticipated conversion to an Academy

#### RESPONSE RECEIVED SUPPORTING APPENDIX 1

Community Primary Schools incl. Special Schools	4
Voluntary Controlled Schools	1
Voluntary Aided Schools –Primary	1
Voluntary Aided Schools-Secondary	0
Foundation Schools	0
Academies –Primary	1
Academies –Secondary	1

Comments received from Head teachers regarding Appendix 1 model

Six weeks holiday is enough

Seven week holiday not a good idea particularly in the current climate.

Want to maintain consistency with neighbouring local authorities

Staff travel in to town school from neighbouring authorities

A number of schools take five PD Days as twilight sessions and add five days to the Whit half term staff and parents have two week break.

Appendix 2 would have to give up two PD days.

May also restrict choice of days for other community schools.

**RESPONSE RECEIVED SUPPORTING APPENDIX 2**

Community Primary Schools incl. Special Schools	4
Voluntary Controlled Schools	0
Voluntary Aided Schools –Primary	6
Voluntary Aided Schools-Secondary	1
Foundation Schools	1
Academies –Primary	4
Academies –Secondary	2

Staff and children will be in school for full weeks before and after school holidays.

The term dates fit in with Trust term dates for 6 VA schools converting to Academies

Ann Turner 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

15 September 2020



**Report of:** Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

**Subject:** CHANGE OF NAME OF HARTLEPOOL PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT AND REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE, CONSTITUTION AND ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1. This is a Non Key decision.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To seek approval of the Children's Services Committee to a change of name of the Hartlepool Pupil Referral Unit to The Horizon School Hartlepool in accordance with The Education (Pupil Referral Units) (Management Committees etc) (England) Regulations 2007 and in accordance with The Pupil Referral Units (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 2.2 To note a review of the current constitution of the Management Committee.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Members of the current Management Committee of the Hartlepool Pupil Referral Unit, wish to change the name of the Pupil Referral Unit as part of the ongoing development of the unit in providing education for permanently excluded pupils and for other pupils who, because of illness or other reasons would not receive suitable education without such provision.
- 3.2 Members of the current Management Committee of the Hartlepool Pupil Referral Unit, have engaged a National Leader of Governance, to undertake a review of the current constitution of the committee, beginning in September 2020 in accordance with The Education (Pupil Referral Unit) (Management

Committees etc) (England) Regulations 2007, in accordance with The Pupil Referral Units (Miscellaneous Amendments)(England) Regulations and Guidance on Alternative Provision 2013. The review will look at members roles and responsibilities and current skills and knowledge held within the Management Committee. The key areas of focus are to ensure that the management Committee is able to effectively carry out its strategic role in monitoring the aims and objectives of the Unit; ensuring the safety and safeguarding needs of the pupils; maintaining continuity and raising the standards of attainment of pupils. The review will make recommendations on the size and constitution of the Management Committee.

#### **4. PROPOSAL**

- 4.1 A revised Instrument of Government which reflects the change of name of the Pupil Referral Unit to The Horizon School Hartlepool and sets out the full constitution of the current Management Committee is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report.

#### **5. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no risk implications.

#### **6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no financial considerations.

#### **7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no legal considerations.

#### **8. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no child and family considerations.

#### **9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no equality and diversity considerations.

#### **10. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no staff considerations.

**11. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no asset management considerations.

**12. RECOMMENDATION**

- 12.1 To formally approve the revised Instrument of Government to reflect the change of name of The Hartlepool Pupil Referral Unit to The Horizon School Hartlepool as attached **Appendix 1**.
- 12.2 To note a review of the current constitution of the management committee and responsibilities of the Management Committee, as set out in **Appendix 1**.

**13. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13.1 The change of name of the Hartlepool Pupil Referral Unit to The Horizon School Hartlepool will reflect the ongoing development of the Pupil Referral Unit in providing education for permanently excluded pupils and for other pupils who, because of illness or other reasons would not receive suitable education without such provision.

A review of the current membership, roles and responsibilities of the current Management Committee will improve the effectiveness in their strategic role in setting out and monitoring aims and objectives of the Unit, to ensure that children are safe, have their needs met and raise standards of attainment of pupils.

**14. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 14.1 There are no background papers.

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Sign Off:-

Director of Finance and Policy ☒

Chief Solicitor ☒



### **HARTLEPOOL PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT INSTRUMENT OF GOVERNMENT**

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1. The name of the school is: The Horizon School, Hartlepool
2. The DFE Number is: 1100
3. The name of the Management Committee is: "The Management Committee of The Horizon School, Hartlepool.
4. The Management Committee shall consist of:
  - a. 1 parent member
  - b. 2 Local Authority members
  - c. 2 Staff members
  - d. 6. Community members
- 5 Total number of members: 11
6. The term of office shall be for FOUR years except for Community Members whose term shall be TWO years.
7. This instrument of government comes into effect on: 15 September 2020
8. This instrument was made by order of Hartlepool Borough Council on 15 September 2020.
- 9 A copy of the instrument will be supplied to every member of the Management Committee and the Department for Education.

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

15<sup>th</sup> September 2020



**Report of:** Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

**Subject:** TO NOMINATE A LOCAL AUTHORITY REPRESENTATIVE TO SERVE ON THE GOVERNING BODY OF KINGSLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL.

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## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1. This is a Non Key decision.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To consider a nomination for the role of Local Authority Governor at Kingsley Community Primary School.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Under the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012 the process for appointing Local Authority Governors to school governing bodies requires the local authority to consider nominations to vacancies before they are presented to the relevant governing body for formal approval.

An application has been received for the position (**Appendix A**). **This item contains exempt information under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government), (Access to Information), (Variations Order 2006) namely, information relating to any individual (Para 1).**

## 4. PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The report seeks the committee's decision on the application form for nomination as Local Authority Governor at Kingsley Community Primary School.

**5. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no risk implications

**6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no financial considerations

**7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no legal considerations

**8. CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Discussions have taken place between the applicant, Chair of Governors and Head teacher regarding the skills the applicant can contribute to the Governing Body. The application received in respect of the vacancy is from a serving Governor on the Governing Body.

**9. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS (IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED AS APPROPRIATE.)**

- 9.1 There are no child and family considerations

**10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS (IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED AS APPROPRIATE.)**

- 10.1 There are no equality and diversity considerations.

**11. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no staff considerations

**12. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 12.1 There are no asset management considerations

**13. RECOMMENDATION**

- 13.1 The committee gives consideration to applicant as set out in **Appendix B** in respect of local authority nomination to Kingsley Primary School.



**14. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 14.1 To ensure that the nomination of a local authority governor will contribute to the effectiveness of the governing body to which they are appointed.

**15. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 15.1 There are no background papers

**16. CONTACT OFFICER**

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Sign Off:-

Director of Finance and Policy ☒

Chief Solicitor ☒

## VACANCIES FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY GOVERNORS ON SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES

SCHOOL	VACANCY	APPLICATION RECEIVED	NOMINEE RECOMMENDED FOR CONSIDERATION AND APPOINTMENT BY GOVERNING BODY
<b>KINGSLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL</b>  The applicant is currently a serving member of the governing body after having served as a Community and Coopted Governor for a number of years. The Governing Body has been without a Local Authority representative for almost three years. The applicant brings a range of skills to the governing body including, knowledge of the school and the community and is committed to their role as a governor of the school. The applicant contributes to various aspects of school governance as well as being a Link Governor for a number of curricular areas in the school.	One vacancy	One application has been received	The applicant is recommended for appointment

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# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

15 September 2020



**Report of:** Director of Children' and Joint Commissioning Services

**Subject:** SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP POLICY

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## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 Non key

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 Following a review of the Special Guardianship Policy & Procedures, this report will provide Committee with an overview of the Policy and Procedure and the actions undertaken to ensure the assessed needs of children/young people subject to a Special Guardianship Order are met and there is compliance with the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005.

2.2 In addition, the report also highlights the importance of providing a consistent and timely method of reviewing support and ensuring Special Guardians and children/young people, subject to a Special Guardianship Order, have the appropriate access to a wide range of services.

## 3. BACKGROUND

3.1 A review of adoption in 2000 identified that there was a significant group of children who did not wish to make the absolute legal break with their birth family that is associated with adoption. The review recognised that long term fostering lacked security and a proper sense of permanence in a family and did not suit all children. The review identified the need for an intermediate legal status between adoption and residence orders (now known as Child Arrangement Orders), which offered greater legal security for the child, but without absolute legal severance from the child's birth family. The Children Act 1989 was amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to create Special Guardianship Orders into the range of private law orders which a court can make in respect of a child, either following an application, by a prospective special guardian, or at the conclusion of care proceedings.

- 3.2 Special Guardianship Orders are an important permanency option for children and, once in place, children are no longer looked after by the local authority. The vast majority of Special Guardianship Orders are made to family members of the child or young person, many of whom are their grandparents.
- 3.3 Special Guardianship Orders are accompanied by proper access to a full range of support services including, where appropriate, financial support. The legislation places a duty on each local authority to make arrangements for the provision of special guardianship support services, which means counselling, advice and information and other such services as are prescribed by the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005. The Regulations are supported by Statutory Guidance issued by the Department for Education.
- 3.4 Statutory Guidance (2017) states: “financial issues should not be the sole reason for a Special Guardianship arrangement failing to survive. The central principle is that financial support should be payable in accordance with the regulations to help secure a suitable Special Guardianship arrangement where such an arrangement cannot be readily made because of a financial obstacle.” The statutory guidance further states: “In determining the amount of any ongoing financial support, the local authority should have regard to the amount of fostering allowance which would have been payable if the child were fostered. The local authority’s core allowance plus any enhancement that would be payable in respect of the particular child, will make up the maximum payment the local authority could consider paying the family. Any means test carried out as appropriate to the circumstances would use this maximum payment as a basis.”
- 3.5 This principle has been firmly reinforced in a number of Local Government Ombudsman’s findings and case law, which confirm that the level of financial support if given must be based on the age related fostering allowance. In determining the provision of financial support, the authority will have regard to the specific need and costs associated with being a special guardian. There can be no “one size fits all” approach to financial assessment as all children, and their carers have their own unique needs. It should be recognised that the characteristics and needs of children living with Special Guardians can be very similar to, or the same as, those of children in foster care and that the costs of looking after a child in foster care can be higher than the costs of looking after a child born into the family. However, the local authority also recognises that there are cases in which children have not endured some of the harm ordinarily associated with looked after children and do not necessarily therefore have the same level of needs. Furthermore, pre-existing relationships between children and their prospective special guardian(s) can, in many cases, serve to alleviate many of the issues faced by looked after children when placed with unrelated foster carers and this can, in turn, reduce the amount of support that is required.
- 3.6 Whilst local authority foster carers cannot access child or any other state benefits for a child in their care, Special Guardians are eligible to access all benefits to which they are entitled, including for any child living with them. The regulations state that in determining the amount of financial support provided

to Special Guardians, the local authority must take account of any other grant, benefit, allowance or resource, which is available to the person in respect of his needs, as a result of becoming a Special Guardian. It is further highlighted that it is important to ensure that Special Guardians are helped to access benefits to which they are entitled and local authorities should endeavour to ensure that the Special Guardian is aware and taking advantage of all benefits and tax credits available to them. Financial support paid under these Regulations cannot duplicate any other payment available to the Special Guardian. Even if the Special Guardian would prefer not to claim benefits, the local authority must take into account benefits, which would be available to the Special Guardian, if they chose to claim them.

#### **4. PROPOSALS**

- 4.1 All prospective Special Guardian receive an assessment of their support needs and a support plan of how the local authority proposes to meet these needs will be produced. Support can range from access to universal services, to the provision of specialist support (please see **Appendix 1** of the policy). Special Guardianship support is wide ranging and can include, amongst other things, mediation services, therapeutic services, respite provision, advice and guidance, counselling etc. It can also include the provision of financial support as outlined in paragraph 3.5 above. Where financial support is provided, it is crucial that full details of the purpose, amount and duration of support are recorded and shared with the Special Guardian.
- 4.2 Payments made to Special Guardians can be either a one off payment for a specific purpose, such as to purchase necessary items in order to be able to care for the child, or to contribute to the expenditure necessary for the purpose of accommodating and maintaining the child. The provision of financial support is to cover not just the cost of food and clothing, but also the cost of transport, maintaining a larger car, a share of household costs, including wear and tear and the cost of having and maintaining an additional bedroom.
- 4.3 The Special Guardianship policy and procedure has been recently reviewed and updated and is attached for Members consideration.

#### **5. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Failure to provide services to Special Guardians and the children in their care could impact upon the progress and outcomes for children and young people and in some cases mean that they would need to become looked after.
- 5.2 Special Guardianship regulations place a statutory responsibility upon local authorities to provide support services and failure to do so could lead to judicial review.

## **6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 Since April 2017 the budget for Special Guardianship (SGO) and Child Arrangement Orders (CAO) has increased to reflect the increased number of children subject to an SGO/CAO and is funded from the MTFS as part of the looked after children budget pressures each year.
- 6.2 The budget is based on the current number of children under such orders and levels of agreed financial support already in place. Although there are no direct financial implications arising from the updated policy, if the number of children subject to such Orders continues to increase and/or the required financial support needs of new or existing carers increase then further budget pressures are likely. The budget will be closely monitored and any additional pressures will be included within future MTFS reports.

## **7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 The local authority has statutory responsibility to provide assess and support special guardians in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005.

## **8. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY (IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED AS APPROPRIATE.)**

- 8.1 There are no specific child and family poverty considerations arising from this report. The provision of support, including financial support, to children subject to Special Guardianship orders ensures that these children are not at risk of living in poverty.

## **9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS (IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED AS APPROPRIATE.)**

- 9.1 There are no equality and diversity considerations arising from this report. The policy applies to all children subject to a Special Guardianship Order and their Special Guardians, regardless of any protected characteristics.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 Members are asked to approve the Special Guardianship Policy and Procedures 2020.

## 11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 This policy has been reviewed and amended in line with changes in legislation, case law and ombudsman recommendations, it therefore ensures the authority is compliant in this area

## 12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1 Adoption and Children Act 2002  
Special Guardianship Regulation 2005

## 13. CONTACT OFFICERS

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Sign Off:-

Director of Finance and Policy ☒

Chief Solicitor ☒

# **Special Guardianship Policy**

**Children's and Joint Commissioning Services**



**Author: Jane Young, July 2020**

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**The policy sets out the arrangements of Hartlepool Borough Council in relation to Special Guardianship Orders and the support that is available for children and their special guardians. This document should also be read in conjunction with departmental policy on Permanence, Connected Care and Child Arrangement Orders.**

### **POLICY**

Where appropriate Hartlepool Borough Council promotes Special Guardianship Orders as a positive option to provide permanence within a family, for a child who may otherwise need to be looked after or remain looked after. Hartlepool Borough Council supports the right of each child to experience normal family life. The department will encourage and support relatives and significant others to make applications for Special Guardianship Orders as a possible alternative the child becoming or remaining looked after so long as this is consistent with the child's welfare, having regard to his/her wishes and feelings.

This policy aims to facilitate a child's sense of belonging within a family, free from the constraints and interference by the state. The principle underpinning this policy is that permanency for children is the paramount objective and this should be achieved by the order that best meets the individual needs of a child and their family through the least intrusive means available.

The department will consider, at all key stages of involvement, whether a child's welfare will be best promoted by arranging for his/her early discharge from local authority accommodation or care. In many instances, this will be best achieved by facilitating a child's return to parental care. Where this is not possible, the authority will give urgent and ongoing consideration to whether the child or young person's welfare may be best safeguarded and promoted by their discharge from accommodation via the making of an Adoption Order, a Special Guardianship Order, a Child Arrangement Order or other alternative permanent arrangement.

The department will seek to identify, during the course of planning for a child who is at significant risk of becoming looked after, whether there is a relative or other appropriate person who could apply for a Special Guardianship Order.

The decision to support and encourage alternative carers to make applications for Special Guardianship in respect of children who are at risk of becoming looked after will be based on an assessment of the child's needs and carer's ability to meet those assessed needs, taking into account the child and his/her parent's wishes and any alternative courses of action that are available.

## PROCEDURE AND GUIDANCE

### 1 Legal framework

- 1.1 Special Guardianship was introduced in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and has been available through the courts since December 2005. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 has been subject to amendments within the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 and statutory guidance for Local authorities on the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005, as amended by the Special Guardianship (Amended) Regulations 2016 (published in 2017).
- 1.2 Special Guardianship is to be treated as a permanence option for children who are unable to live with their birth parents. It is therefore a key element in the planning for children in care proceedings and in permanence planning for children looked after when taking decisions to do with his/her upbringing. A child subject to Special Guardianship will no longer be looked after by a local authority.
- 1.3 Special Guardianship is designed to offer greater security than long term fostering but without the absolute legal severance from the birth family that stems from adoption. Special Guardianship:
  - Gives the carer clear responsibility for all aspects of caring for the child;
  - Provides a firm foundation upon which to build a lifelong permanent relationship between the child and their carer;
  - Is legally secure;
  - Preserves the basic link between the child and their birth family;
  - Is accompanied by access to a full range of support services including, where appropriate, financial support.
- 1.4 Prospective carers from minority ethnic groups may wish to offer a child a permanent family but have religious and cultural difficulties with adoption as it is set out in law. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children also need secure permanent homes but have strong attachments to their families abroad. Special Guardianship may assist children in these circumstances.

### 2 KEY FEATURES OF SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP

2.1 A Court may make a Special Guardianship Order in respect of the child on the application of:

- Any guardian of the child;
- A local authority foster carer with whom the child has lived for one year immediately preceding the application;
- Anyone who holds a Residence Order/ Child Arrangement Order with respect to a child or has the consent of all those in whose favour a Residence Order is in force;
- Anyone with whom the child has lived for three out of the past five years;
- Where the child is in the care of the local authority, any person who has the consent of the local authority;
- Anyone who has the consent of all those with parental responsibility;
- Any person, including the child, who has the leave of the court to apply;
- A relative can apply for a special guardianship order without the permission of the court after caring for a child for one year (previously 3 years).

### 3 PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

3.1 A Special Guardianship Order gives the special guardian parental responsibility for the child. The birth parents retain parental responsibility though their ability to exercise this is limited. A special guardian may exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of all others with parental responsibility. However, a special guardian is unable (without consent of all other holders of PR or leave of the court):

- To cause the child to be known by a different surname;

- To remove the child from the United Kingdom for more than 3 months;
- To act unilaterally where the law provides that consent of more than one person with parental responsibility is required.

#### **4 APPLICATIONS TO THE COURT**

- 4.1 Applications for Special Guardianship are private law applications and there is no 'agency approval' of special guardians as there is of foster carers and adopters. The suitability of a person applying for an order will arise in the course of assessing, planning and reviewing a child's case and upon completion of an assessment of the applicants to be special guardians.
- 4.2 Any person who wishes to apply for a Special Guardianship Order must give three months written notice to the local authority of their intention to apply. The only exceptions to the three-month notice period are when the court orders otherwise within existing family proceedings.
- 4.3 A Special Guardianship Order can be varied or discharged by the court. Birth parents may only apply for a variation or discharge of the Order with the leave of the Court and will be expected to demonstrate that a significant change in circumstances has taken place since the order was made or since any previous application.
- 4.4 The Court may make, vary or discharge a Special Guardianship Order in any family proceedings regardless of whether an application has been made. Where a local authority has applied to discharge a Care Order, the Court may make a Special Guardianship Order of its own volition; however the Court cannot make an order until it has received a local authority report.

#### **5 REPORTS TO THE COURT**

- 5.1 The local authority, on notice of the application or at the request of the Court, must investigate and prepare a report about the suitability of the applicants to be special guardians or arrange for someone else to do this on their behalf. The

information to be contained in the report is set out in the Special Guardianship Regulations 2016 and is attached as Appendix 1 to this document. The report covers the necessary information about the child, the child's family, the wishes and feelings of the child, details of the prospective special guardian, and information about the local authority that completed the report and recommendations about whether an Order should be made and contact arrangements.

- 5.2 As part of the assessment of the suitability of the prospective special guardians, and in addition to those matters referred to in Appendix 1 the local authority must ensure that an enhanced level DBS certificate is obtained to confirm that the prospective special guardians (or any person over the age of 18 living in their home) are suitable.

## **6 SUPPORT SERVICES**

- 6.1 Local authorities are required to have in place arrangements for the provision of special guardianship support services including counselling, advice and information and , where applicable, financial support. ( please see Special Guardianship Support Offer appendix 2)

## **7 LEAVING CARE SERVICES**

- 7.1 Children who were looked after immediately before the making of the Special Guardianship Order will qualify for leaving care advice and assistance under Section 24 (1a) the Children Act 1989 as amended. The Council should make arrangements for children who meet the criteria to receive advice and assistance in the same way as for any other child who qualifies for leaving care services. The relevant local authority is the last one that looked after the child.

## 8 DECISION MAKING

### Children Looked After

- 8.1 Special Guardianship offers the child permanence with an identified carer and, depending on assessed needs, ongoing support. It is the policy of Hartlepool Borough Council to promote permanence and stability for looked after children and to this end, the option of special guardianship should be positively explored for those children where no reunification with birth family is anticipated.
- 8.2 Special Guardianship, where appropriate and in the child's best interest, should be considered as part of the permanence planning process for children in care proceedings and routinely at statutory reviews of children looked after in long term stable foster placements. If it appears that Special Guardianship is in the child's best interests and the foster carer is interested in pursuing an Order, the social worker should consult with legal services on the merits of applying for a discharge of the Care Order and at the same time, inviting the court to make a Special Guardianship Order.
- 8.3 Making recommendations for special guardianship must be viewed in light of the welfare checklist with the child's welfare being the paramount consideration. In determining whether a Special Guardianship Order is in the child's interests, the following issues must always be considered:
- The views and wishes of the child, whether they fully understand the nature of a Special Guardianship Order and why this may be the preferred permanency option for them;
  - The views and wishes of the carers and their suitability. This should include an assessment of whether they fully understand their roles as special guardians and how they view taking responsibility for making decisions about the child's upbringing without the involvement of the local authority.
  - The suitability of future plans for contact between the child and his/her birth parents.

- 8.4 Social workers for children looked after and supervising social workers for the foster carers should discuss the option of special guardianship with foster carers and offer advice and information on the Order. Where a child looked after is placed with an independent foster agency, the social worker should notify the agency of the intention to discuss special guardianship with the carer prior to undertaking any discussion with the foster carer.
- 8.5 Where a child is looked after and a prospective special guardian gives notice of their intention to make an application, the preparation of the report is the responsibility of the child's social worker. Where the prospective special guardian is a foster carer registered by Hartlepool Borough Council, the fostering team will be responsible for the relevant sections of the Court report.
- 8.6 Any application to the Court for a Special Guardianship Order in relation to a child looked after must be presented to the Special Guardianship Panel. All decisions to support the application to the Court for Special Guardianship Order in relation to a child looked after, or any child not looked after were additional support (including financial) will be sought from the Council, must be endorsed by the Special Guardianship Panel. Upon completion of the report for Court, the social worker should submit the report and relevant documents (e.g. Special Guardianship support assessment and plan) to the Panel and attend a meeting in respect of the proposals.
- 8.7 If the child is looked after by another authority and resident in Hartlepool, any notice of intention to make an application should be directed to the child's home authority. Equally, children looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council but placed in another authority area remain the responsibility of Hartlepool Borough Council in the event of a Special Guardianship application.

### **Children who are not looked after**

- 8.8 Where a child is not looked after, the local authority has the same responsibility for reporting to the court on an application for a Special Guardianship Order. As with looked after children, every effort will be made to consider fully with the prospective applicants and the child, the reasons for making an application,



whether it is advisable to do so and what other options could be explored. The prospective applicants should be advised of the role of the local authority in reporting and making recommendations to the court including their duty to consider and report on what other options the court may wish to consider.

- 8.9 Where the application is made in respect to a child currently receiving social work support, it would be expected that the child's social worker will prepare the report for the court or completion of the report be undertaken by another member of the team who would work closely with the allocated worker. If the child is not an open case, the case will be allocated to a Social Worker in order to prepare a report for Court. It should be noted that the expectation of the statutory guidance is that the social worker should be suitably qualified and experienced; where this cannot be achieved, social workers who do not have suitable experience will be supervised by someone who is suitably qualified. Any application to the Court for a Special Guardianship Order in relation to a child who is not looked after but for whom support (including financial) is being sought must be presented to the Special Guardianship Panel. All decisions to support in principle the application to the Court for Special Guardianship Order in relation to a child looked after, or any child not looked after but for whom an allowance will be sought from the Council, must be endorsed by the Special Guardianship Panel. Upon completion of the report for Court the social worker should submit the report and relevant documents (e.g. Special Guardianship support assessment and plan) to the panel and attend a meeting in respect of the proposals.

## **9. ASSESSMENT AND PROVISION OF SUPPORT SERVICES**

- 9.1 Local Authorities must make provision for the support services to special guardians (Regulation 3, Special guardianship regulations 2016). Local authorities are required to make a range of support services available in their area to meet the needs of people affected by special guardianship.

Special guardianship support services are defined as;

- financial support (regulation 3(1)(a))

- services to enable groups of children for whom a special guardianship order is in force or in respect of whom is being formally considered, special guardians and prospective special guardians, and parents of the child to discuss matters relating to special guardianship (regulation 3(1)(b))
- assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between the child and their parents or relatives or any other person with whom the child has a relationship that the local authority considers to be beneficial to the welfare of the child (regulation 3(1)(c))
- therapeutic services for the child (regulation 3(1)(d)) support is available through the Adoption Support Fund
- assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between the child and his special guardian or prospective special guardian, including training for the special guardian or prospective special guardian to meet any special needs of the child; respite care; and mediation in relation to matters relating to special guardianship orders (regulation 3(1)(e)), and
- counselling, advice and information (section 14F(1)(a) of the Act)

### Assessment

- 9.2 The assessment for support services should reflect the domains and dimensions, which are considered in assessments carried out under the Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families recognising that the context is different from that for birth families and detailed within the Special Guardianship report presented to court ( Appendix 2 )

Where it is intended that a looked after child will become the subject of Special Guardianship Order, those who must receive an assessment for special guardianship support services at their request are:

- The child;
- The special guardian or prospective special guardian;
- The child's parent.

The regulations state that other people may be offered an assessment of their needs for Special Guardianship support services at the discretion of the local authority.

- 9.3 It is important that children who were not previously looked after are not unfairly disadvantaged by this approach. In many cases, the only reason a child is not looked after is that relatives stepped in quickly to take on the responsibility for the child when the parent could no longer do so. In such cases, it is appropriate to undertake an initial assessment to establish if the child is 'in need'. This may provide the basis for short-term support or longer-term support if necessary to prevent the child becoming looked after.
- 9.4 The outcome of the assessment and the decision about the provision of support services should be notified to the person making the request in writing.

## 10. PLANNING AND REVIEW

- 10.1 A plan must be prepared if the local authority proposes to provide Special Guardianship support services that are not limited to provision of advice and information. The plan should be completed in accordance with Hartlepool Borough Council's assessment planning and review procedures and produced on the appropriate documentation. (Appendix 2).

### **The plan should set out:**

- The services to be provided;
  - The objectives and criteria for evaluating success;
  - Timescales for provision;
  - Procedures for review;
  - The names of the people responsible for the implementation of the plan.
- 10.2 Where Special Guardianship support services are provided for a child, the provision of services must be reviewed:

- In the event of any change in the person's circumstances which may affect the provision of special guardianship support services;
- At such stage in the implementation of the plan as considered appropriate;
- In any event, at least annually.

10.3 Where a child looked after by another authority but resident in Hartlepool becomes subject of a Special Guardianship Order, the council will become responsible for the provision of support services (other than financial support) three years after the order was made.

## **11. PROVISION OF AND ASSESSMENT FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

11.1 The regulations state that financial issues should not be the sole reason for precluding a Special Guardianship arrangement and support should be provided where this is necessary to ensure that the arrangements for the Special Guardianship Order can be secured. As Special Guardianship is available to a wider group of children than those formerly looked after, a discretionary, needs led approach to assessing for financial support is recommended.

11.2 It is important to ensure that special guardians are helped to access benefits to which they are entitled. Hartlepool will therefore endeavour to ensure that the special guardian or prospective special guardian is aware of, and taking advantage of, all benefits and tax credits available to them. Financial support paid under these Regulations cannot duplicate any other payment available to the special guardian or prospective special guardian and regulation 13 provides that in determining the amount of any financial support, the local authority must take account of any other grant, benefit, allowance or resource which is available to the person in respect of his needs as a result of becoming a special guardian of the child. The local authority cannot compel an unwilling special guardian to apply for benefits but it must nevertheless deduct an amount equal to the benefits that are available to them in any assessment.

- 11.3 In determining the provision of financial support, the social worker should have regard to the specific need and costs associated with being a special guardian.
- 11.4 There can be no “one size fits all” approach to financial assessment as all children, and their carers have their own unique needs. Hartlepool Borough Council accepts that the characteristics and needs of children living with Special Guardians can be very similar to, or the same as, those of children in foster care and that the costs of looking after a child in foster care can be higher than the costs of looking after a natural child born into the family. However, the local authority also recognises that there are cases in which children have not endured some of the harm ordinarily associated with looked after children and do not therefore have the same level of needs. Furthermore, pre-existing relationships between children and their prospective special guardian(s) can, in many cases serve to alleviate many of the issues faced by looked after children when placed in stranger foster care and this can, in turn, reduce the amount of financial support that is required.
- 11.5 When considering providing financial support the local authority will normally consider the special guardian or prospective special guardian’s means and regulation 13 requires that the local authority consider:
- The special guardian or prospective special guardian’s financial resources (which should include any earned income i.e. from work, benefits, investments, pensions etc.) including any tax credit or benefit, which would be available to him if the child lived with him. This is consistent with the fact that financial support for special guardians is disregarded for the purpose of calculating income related benefits and tax credits
  - the amount required by the special guardian or prospective special guardian in respect of his reasonable outgoings and commitments, e.g. housing and transport costs, and daily living expenses (but not outgoings in respect of the child)
  - the financial needs that relate to the child (e.g. because of special diet or need for replacement bedding) and the resources of the child (e.g. a trust fund)
  - Hartlepool Borough Council disregard means when they are considering providing financial support in respect of legal costs, including fees payable to a

court. This applies where a special guardianship order is applied for in respect of a child who is looked after by the local authority, and the authority support the making of that order, or an application is made to vary or discharge a special guardianship order in respect of that child.

- Hartlepool Borough Council will not meet the legal costs of a special guardianship order where they oppose an application in respect of a child they previously looked after or in a non-looked after case.

11.6 Financial support will only be paid if the circumstances meet the following criteria, based upon the assessment of the social worker;

- Is financial support necessary to meet any special care needs, including ongoing or long-term emotional or behavioural difficulties due to past abuse or neglect. If so what is the nature and duration of this need?
- Is financial support necessary to ensure a sibling group of three or more children, who need to remain together, do remain together. If so how will financial support facilitate this and what is the nature and duration of the financial support?
- Is financial support necessary to facilitate the child's placement with a family member/foster carer who without the additional resources would require the child remain looked after. If so how will financial support facilitate this and what is the nature and duration of the financial support?
- Is financial support necessary to contribute to expenditure necessary to accommodate and maintain the child, e.g. alterations to the home, If so what is the nature and extent of such support. If such support is required the local authority may consider making an up-front advance payment of any agreed allowance which would then be repaid by the special guardian via deductions from any agreed financial payment. For alterations to property the local authority would seek a legal charge to be placed on the special guardian's property which would be time limited ending when the repayment of the advance was complete. This is a requirement to minimise the risk to the local authority should there be a breakdown in the placement.

- 11.7 When considering the provision of financial assistance the local authority will therefore have regard to the amount of fostering allowance which would have been payable if the child were fostered. The local authority's core allowance plus any enhancements that would be payable in respect of the particular child, will make up the maximum payment the local authority could consider paying the family. Benefits (not ordinarily available to foster carers) will be deducted from this amount and the standardised means test (based on the DfE approved model) will be applied. In the absence of any exceptional circumstances this figure will represent the maximum level of financial support to be provided to the special guardian. This figure is to cover not just the cost of food and clothing, but also the cost of transport, maintaining a larger car, a share of household costs, including wear and tear and the cost of having and maintaining an additional bedroom.
- 11.8 The local authority accepts that the application of the standardized means tests results in some special guardians (those with a higher level of disposable income) potentially receiving less by way of an allowance than they would receive if they were foster carers. Attempts to negotiate this figure or disapply the means test must be resisted as this results in inconsistency of approach and unfairness to those carers with fewer financial resources. The local authority must maintain its focus upon the legal order which best meets the needs of the child as opposed to the order that offers the highest level of financial support.
- 11.9 In some cases the needs of the child and the relationship with the special guardian are such that there is no assessed need for additional financial support. In others the maximum level of financial support is necessary. It is for the special guardianship assessment to assess the needs of the child and determine the level of support that is required.
- 11.10 The provision of financial support is not an entitlement or a benefit that is automatically applied to all special guardians. Financial support is an allowance provided at the discretion of the local authority to assist the carers in meeting the assessed needs of the child. The nature of special guardianship is akin to adoption and alongside assuming all other aspects of parental responsibility it is to be expected that a special guardian also assumes financial responsibility for

the child. In many cases therefore the duration of any financial support may be time limited to assist with the transition from local authority care to the care of the special guardian. A two year period for this purpose has been found to be appropriate in many cases.

11.11 The assessment of need will also consider whether any financial support will need to increase, reduce or remain static over time. In cases where a child has not been exposed to significant levels of harm and where the relationship with the carer is established then the financial support may be structured to reflect the reducing needs that are expected to run alongside the settling in period. Conversely the assessment may conclude that financial support payments need to keep apace with age band related fostering allowances.

11.12 Ahead of the start of each financial year the local authority will contact the special guardian who will be required to complete and supply the local authority with an annual statement as to the following matters:-

- Whether the child still resides with the carer(s)
- Whether there has been any changes to the special guardians financial circumstances;
- Whether there have been any changes to the financial needs and resources of the child;

The financial payment will be reviewed annually so that any changes in earned income, benefits (eg. increases in child benefit) or expenditure can be accounted for and the calculation of the payment adjusted accordingly. This review will also consider any other conditions attached to the payment, including the timescale within which, and purposes for which, any payment of financial support was made. Failure to engage with this process will result in the payments being suspended.

It is the responsibility of the special guardian to notify the local authority should their needs and/or the needs of the child change to the extent that a further full assessment of need is required. It is imperative that any such request is made in



a timely fashion as any assessment and support package will not be applied retrospectively.

In receiving payment of special guardianship allowances the (prospective) special guardian agrees to the following conditions: That s/he will inform the local authority immediately if:

- S/he changes address;
- The child dies;
- There is a change in his financial circumstances or financial needs or resources of the child which may affect the amount of financial support payable.

11.13 Financial support ceases to be payable to a special guardian if:

- The child ceases to live with the special guardian;
- The child ceases full time education or training and commences employment;
- The child qualifies for income support or job seekers allowance in his/her own right;
- The child attains the age of 18 unless s/he continues in full time education or training when it may continue until the end of the academic year after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

11.14 The ability of any parent or other person with parental responsibility to contribute to the care of the child will be subject to an assessment and contribution may require to be paid if they have sufficient means.

## 12 WRITTEN AGREEMENTS

All arrangements will be set out in a written agreement (see appendix 6). The written agreement will include a requirement for carers to notify the department of any relevant changes in their circumstance.

### **13 SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SUPPORT PLAN**

- 13.1 The local authority will prepare a support plan clearly outlining what support will be available to children and their special guardians. The plan should set out:
- the services to be provided
  - the objectives and criteria for evaluating success
  - time-scales for provision
  - procedures for review
  - the name of the person nominated to monitor the provision of services in accordance with the plan.
- 13.2 On the completion of the assessment and the proposed support plan, the social worker will present the assessment (including financial) and support plan to the Special Guardianship Panel, so that the local authority can consider whether or not it should exercise its discretion and provide such services<sup>1</sup>.

The perspective special guardian should have been consulted prior to the support plan to panel and will require at normally a minimum 7 days' notice prior to the plan being presented to the court, any representation that are made should return to Special Guardianship Panel for consideration.

### **14 Appeal process**

In the event of dissatisfaction/disagreement about decisions to pay or terminate the payment of allowances, the applicant may engage the Children's Social Care Representations and Complaints Procedure.

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<sup>1</sup> S14F(5) Children Act 1989

## Appendix 1

### SCHEDULE TO SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP (Amendment ) REGULATIONS 2016

Regulation 21: Matters to be dealt with in the report for the Court.

The following matters are prescribed for the purposes of section 14A(8)(b) of the Children Act 1989.

**1. In respect of the child—**

- (a) name, sex, date and place of birth and address including local authority area;
- (b) a photograph and physical description;
- (c) nationality (and immigration status where appropriate);
- (d) racial origin and cultural and linguistic background;
- (e) religious persuasion (including details of baptism, confirmation or equivalent ceremonies);
- (f) details of any siblings including their dates of birth;
- (g) the extent of the child's contact with his relatives and any other person the local authority consider relevant;

**(ga) Any harm which the child has suffered:**

**(gb) any risk of future harm to the child posed by the child's parents, relatives or any person the local authority considers relevant:**

- (h) whether the child is or has been looked after by a local authority or is or has been provided with accommodation by a voluntary organisation and details (including dates) of placements by the authority or organisation;
- (i) whether the prospective special guardian is a local authority foster parent of the child;
- (j) a description of the child's personality, his social development and his emotional and behavioural development and any related **current or likely future** needs;
- (k) Details of the child's interests, likes and dislikes;
- (l) A health history and a description of the state of the child's health which shall include any treatment the child is receiving;
- (m) names, addresses and types of nurseries or schools attended with dates;
- (n) the child's educational attainments;
- (o) whether the child has an Education, Health and Care Plan and
- (p) details of any order made by a court with respect to the child under the Act including—
  - (i) the name of the court;
  - (ii) the order made; and
  - (iii) the date on which the order was made.

**2. In respect of the child's family—**

- (a) name, date and place of birth and address (and the date on which their last address was confirmed) including local authority area of each parent of the child and his siblings under the age of 18;
- (b) a photograph, if available, and physical description of each parent;
- (c) nationality (and immigration status where appropriate) of each parent;
- (d) racial origin and cultural and linguistic background of each parent;

- (e) whether the child's parents were married to each other at the time of the child's birth or have subsequently married and whether they are divorced or separated;
- (f) where the child's parents have been previously married or formed a civil partnership, the date of the marriage or civil partnership;
- (g) where the child's parents are not married, whether the father has parental responsibility and, if so, how it was acquired;
- (h) if the identity or whereabouts of the father are not known, the information about him that has been ascertained and from whom, and the steps that have been taken to establish paternity;
- (i) the past and present relationship of the child's parents;
- (j) where available, the following information in respect of each parent—
  - (i) health history, including details of any serious physical or mental illness, any hereditary disease or disorder or disability;
  - (ii) religious persuasion;
  - (iii) educational history;
  - (iv) employment history;
  - (v) personality and interests;
- (k) in respect of the child's siblings under the age of 18—
  - (i) the person with whom the sibling is living;
  - (ii) whether the sibling is looked after by a local authority or provided with accommodation by a voluntary organisation; and
  - (iii) details of any court order made with respect to the sibling under the Act, including the name of the court, the order made and the date on which the order was made.

**3. In respect of the wishes and feelings of the child and others—**

(a) 1996 (c.56). See section 324 of the 1996 Act.

- (a) an assessment of the child's wishes and feelings (considered in light of his age and understanding) regarding—
  - (i) special guardianship;
  - (ii) his religious and cultural upbringing; and
  - (iii) contact with his relatives and any other person the local authority consider relevant, and the date on which the child's wishes and feelings were last ascertained.
- (b) the wishes and feelings of each parent regarding—
  - (i) special guardianship;
  - (ii) the child's religious and cultural upbringing; and
  - (iii) contact with the child, and the date on which the wishes and feelings of each parent were last ascertained; and
- (c) the wishes and feelings of any of the child's relatives, or any other person the local authority consider relevant regarding the child and the dates on which those wishes and feelings were last ascertained.

**4. In respect of the prospective special guardian or, where two or more persons are jointly prospective special guardians, each of them—**

- (a) name, date and place of birth and address including local authority area;
- (b) a photograph and physical description;
- (c) nationality (and immigration status where appropriate);
- (d) racial origin and cultural and linguistic background;
- (e) if the prospective special guardian is—
  - (i) married, the date and place of marriage;
  - (ii) has formed a civil partnership, the date and place of registration of the civil partnership; or
  - (iii) has a partner, details of that relationship;

- (f) details of any previous marriage, civil partnership, or relationship;
- (g) where the prospective special guardians wish to apply jointly, the nature of their relationship and an assessment of the stability of that relationship;
- (h) if the prospective special guardian is a member of a couple and is applying alone for a special guardianship order, the reasons for this;
- (i) whether the prospective special guardian is a relative of the child;
- (j) An assessment of the nature of the prospective special guardian's current and past relationship with the child;
- (k) a health history of the prospective special guardian including details of any serious Physical or mental illness, any hereditary disease or disorder or disability;
- (l) a description of how the prospective special guardian relates to adults and children;
- (m) Previous experience of caring for children;
- (n) An assessment of the prospective special guardian's parenting capacity, including

- (i) Their understanding of and ability to meet the child's current and likely future needs, particularly any needs the child may have arising from the harm that the child has suffered
- (ii) Their understanding of, and ability to protect the child from any current or future risk of harm posed by the parents, relatives or any other person the local authority consider relevant, particularly in relation to contact between any such person and the child;
- (iii) Their ability and suitability to bring up the child until the child reaches the age of eighteen

(INCLUDE HERE THE OUTCOME OF THE DBS CHECK)

- (o) where there have been any past assessments as a prospective adopter, foster parent or special guardian, relevant details as appropriate;
- (p) details of income and expenditure;
- (q) information about the prospective special guardian's home and the neighbourhood in which he lives;
- (r) details of other members of the household and details of any children of the prospective special guardian even if not resident in the household (INCLUDE HERE THE OUTCOME OF THE DBS CHECKS REGARDING MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD OVER 18 YEARS OF AGE);
- (s) details of the parents and any siblings of the prospective special guardian, with their ages or ages at death;
- (t) the following information—
  - (i) religious persuasion;
  - (ii) educational history;
  - (iii) employment history; and
  - (iv) personality and interests;
- (u) details of any previous family court proceedings in which the prospective special guardian has been involved (which have not been referred to elsewhere in this report);
- (v) a report of each of the interviews with the three persons nominated by the prospective special guardian to provide personal references for him;
- (w) whether the prospective special guardian is willing to follow any wishes of the child or his parents in respect of the child's religious and cultural upbringing;
- (x) the views of other members of the prospective special guardian's household and wider family in relation to the proposed special guardianship order;
- (y) an assessment of the child's current and future relationship with the family of the prospective special guardian;

(z) reasons for applying for a special guardianship order and extent of understanding of the nature and effect of special guardianship and whether the prospective special guardian has discussed special guardianship with the child;

(aa) any hopes and expectations the prospective special guardian has for the child's future; and

(bb) the prospective special guardian's wishes and feelings in relation to contact between the child and his relatives or any other person the local authority considers relevant.

**5.** In respect of the local authority which completed the report—

(a) name and address;

(b) details of any past involvement of the local authority with the prospective special guardian, including any past preparation for that person to be a local authority foster parent or adoptive parent or special guardian;

(c) where section 14A(7)(a) of the Act applies and the prospective special guardian lives in the area of another local authority, details of the local authority's enquiries of that other local authority about the prospective special guardian;

(d) a summary of any special guardianship support services provided by the authority for the prospective special guardian, the child or the child's parent and the period for which those services are to be provided; and

(e) where the local authority has decided not to provide special guardianship support services, the reasons why.

**6.** A summary prepared by the medical professional who provided the information referred to in paragraphs 1(l) and 4(k).

**7.** The implications of the making of a special guardianship order for—

(a) the child;

(b) the child's parent;

(c) the prospective special guardian and his family; and

(d) any other person the local authority considers relevant.

**8.** The relative merits of special guardianship and other orders which may be made under the Act or the Adoption and Children Act 2002 with an assessment of whether the child's long term interests would be best met by a special guardianship order.

**9.** A recommendation as to whether or not the special guardianship order sought should be made in respect of the child and, if not, any alternative proposal in respect of the child.

**10.** A recommendation as to what arrangements there should be for contact between the child and his relatives or any person the local authority consider relevant.

## Appendix 2

### ASSESSMENT OF PROSPECTIVE SPECIAL GUARDIAN'S NEED FOR SUPPORT SERVICES

Name of Child:		
Date of Birth:		
Family members in the household:		
Name:	Date of Birth:	Relationship:
Individual members of the family may have particular Special Guardianship support needs. Please give brief details, referring to each person individually, outlining the particular need and how this will be met:		
Family Member:	Identified support needs:	
Informal family and community supports available to the family:		
Financial considerations:		
Has advice been given to the prospective special guardian(s) regarding		

financial support post order?	
Has advice been given to the special guardian(s) regarding tax credits and benefits for which they may be eligible?	



## Matching Grid

Areas considered in matching	Description of child's identified needs	Any current support being provided to meet this need	Prospective Special Guardians potential to meet the child's needs	Are future support needs identified and included in the SGO support plan?
<b>Health</b> , including mental health and disability				
<b>Education</b>				
<b>Emotional and behavioural development</b>				

<b>Identity</b> including ethnicity, religion, culture and language				
<b>Family and social relationships</b>				
<b>Social presentation,</b> inc interests and hobbies				
<b>Self-care skills</b>				
<b>Contact</b>				
<b>Consideration of child's and birth parents' views</b>				
<b>Potential vulnerabilities/risks to placement, e.g. geography, and how</b>				

<b>these will be addressed</b>	
<b>Any other information the agency considers relevant</b>	
<b>Decision to proceed with match – to include date of decision, who made the decision and if this was as a result of a meeting, who was present.</b>	
<b>strengths and reasons for proposing the match</b>	

## SPECIAL GUARDANSHIP SUPPORT PLAN

### THE CHILD

HEALTH (to include any special needs which a disabled child may have)				
Support needs of child and prospective special guardian	Services identified to meet the needs	Name of person/agency responsible for providing the service	Timescale for delivery of service	Planned outcome and review arrangements
EDUCATION				
Support needs of child and prospective special guardian	Services to be provided	Person/agency responsible	Frequency, duration and starting date	Planned outcome and plans for review

<b>EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DEVELOPMENT</b>				
Support needs of child and prospective special guardian	Services to be provided	Person/agency responsible	Frequency, duration and starting date	Planned outcome and plans for review
<b>IDENTITY</b>				
Support needs of child and prospective special guardian	Services to be provided	Person/agency responsible	Frequency, duration and starting date	Planned outcome and plans for review
<b>FAMILY AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS</b>				
Support needs of child and prospective special guardian	Services to be provided	Person/agency responsible	Frequency, duration and starting date	Planned outcome and plans for review

<b>SOCIAL PRESENTATION</b>				
Support needs of child and prospective special guardian	Services to be provided	Person/agency responsible	Frequency, duration and starting date	Planned outcome and plans for review
<b>SELF-CARE SKILLS</b>				
Support needs of child and prospective special guardian	Services to be provided	Person/agency responsible	Frequency, duration and starting date	Planned outcome and plans for review

<b>CONTACT</b> (arrangements planned after placement)				
Name of person and relationship to child	Type of contact (e.g. letterbox, face-to-face)	Frequency, duration, venue and starting date	Support to contact – including travel costs, supervision	Purpose of this contact
<b>THERPY NEEDS</b> (planned after placement) <i>Specific Support Plan to promote needs (include access to the adoption support fund (criteria - the child was in care and “looked after” before the making of the Special Guardianship Order).</i>				
Name of person and relationship to child	Type of contact (e.g. letterbox, face-to-face)	Frequency, duration, venue and starting date	Support to contact – including travel costs, supervision	Purpose of this contact

**LEAVING CARE ENTITLEMENT** (arrangements planned after placement) *Specific Support Plan to promote needs (include informing the SGO carer that the child aged 16+ will be entitled to request support as a Qualifying child under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, and they will be entitled to request an assessment to identify their potential needs via the Through Care Team service )*

Name of person and relationship to child	Type of contact (e.g. letterbox, face-to-face)	Frequency, duration, venue and starting date	Support to contact – including travel costs, supervision	Purpose of this contact

**Please confirm the carer has received a copy of the current Special Guardianship Policy and include the date it was provided**

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## SUPPORT PLAN

DATE:

\_\_\_\_\_

### FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Section 11 of the Council's Special Guardianship Policy outlines the potential financial support available to Special Guardian(s). Details of any financial support and the rationale for determining such support is outlined below:-

*Please tick*

	Yes	No
Is the child part of a sibling group who need to remain together?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the child have ongoing or long term emotional or behavioural difficulties due to past abuse or neglect?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the child placed with a family member and without additional resources would the child remain on a Care Order?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the child have any special needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a full financial needs assessment been undertaken to determine the additional financial impact of an Order being granted?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the Special Guardian(s) been given advice to ensure that all benefits are maximised and received?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a financial means test been undertaken to calculate the maximum payment allowable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you recommending any financial support?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If no, what is the basis for this decision? <i>Provide Details</i>		

If Financial Support is recommended, is this support to be:-

One-Off/Lump Sum to fund something specific?		
To be paid on an on-going regular basis?		
Time Limited for a specific reason? <i>Please provide details</i>		
Time limited payment for a specific reason?		

What level of financial support is requested?	£		
What is the maximum allowance payable ie. fostering allowance less benefits less mens tested income (where applicable)?	£		
Reason/rationale for calculation of requested financial support:-			
Has proposed financial support (including any future payments, uplifts, reductions, changes etc) been discussed and agreed with Special Guardian(s)?	Yes		No
Frequency of Payments ie. one-off or 4-weekly?			
Payment End Date? (Where applicable)			
Is payment to be fixed or annually updated in line with fostering and age related uplifts? <i>Please provide details</i>			

Date approved at Special Guardianship Panel	
Payment Review Date? (Where applicable)	

**SUPPORT PLAN**  

---

DATE:

**Signatures**

Prospective Special Guardianship Carer	
Signed	
Date	

Child's social worker	
Signed	
Date	

Team manager	
Signed	
Date	

Assistant Director	
Signed	
Date	

## **Appendix 3**

### **Financial Support - Information Sheet for Special Guardians**

As stated in Section 11 of the Policy:-

- a discretionary, needs led approach to assessing for financial support is recommended.
- In determining the provision of financial support, the social worker should have regard to the specific need and costs associated with being a special guardian.
- There can be no “one size fits all” approach to financial assessment as all children, and their carers have their own unique needs.
- Financial support will only be paid if the circumstances meet the set criteria, based upon the assessment of the social worker;
- When considering the provision of financial assistance the local authority will therefore have regard to the amount of fostering allowance which would have been payable if the child were fostered
- Special Guardians will be expected to claim all child related benefits which will be deducted from any agreed payments so as not to duplicate financial support
- A standardised (DFE approved) means tested model will be used alongside the financial assessment to determine the maximum allowance payable
- The maximum allowance payable will be the fostering allowance less child related benefits and means tested income
- In some cases the needs of the child and the relationship with the special guardian are such that there is no assessed need for additional financial support. In others the maximum level of financial support is necessary. It is for the special guardianship assessment to assess the needs of the child and determine the level of support that is required. The provision of financial support is not an entitlement or a benefit that is automatically applied to all special guardians. Financial support is an allowance provided at the discretion of the local authority to assist the carers in meeting the assessed needs of the child.
- The assessment of need will also consider whether any financial support will need to increase, reduce or remain static over time. In cases where a child has not been exposed to significant levels of harm and where the relationship with the carer is established then the financial support may be structured to reflect the

reducing needs that are expected to run alongside the settling in period. Conversely the assessment may conclude that financial support payments need to keep apace with age band related fostering allowances.

Hartlepool Borough Council, where appropriate, provides financial support to special guardians in accordance with the requirements of the Special Guardianship Regulations 2016. One of these requirements is that we carry out an assessment of the special guardian's need for financial support, and that this assessment takes into account their financial resources together with reasonable outgoings and commitments. The form, which is attached as Appendix 4, is designed to gather the information we need to carry out the necessary assessment.

Once you have completed the form and returned it to us, our Finance Section will complete the assessment which will help inform the level of any proposed financial support.

If it is agreed that financial support will be paid on a regular basis, there will be some terms and conditions attached to this. Many of these are specific requirements of the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 and they are summarised below.

You will have to agree to certain conditions before any allowance can be paid. The main conditions are:

- that you inform us if you change your address;
- that you inform us if the child dies;
- that you inform us if there is a change in your financial circumstances or the financial needs or resources of the child;
- that you complete and supply us with an annual statement of your financial circumstances, the financial needs and resources of the child, your address and whether the child still has a home with you. We will use this statement to carry out an annual review of your financial support. We will send you a reminder of the need for this annual statement and if you do not provide this within a given timescale, we have the right to suspend any further payments until it is received.

Financial support will cease to be paid:

- Dependent upon the outcome of the annual review and/or at a date agreed;
- If the child no longer has a home with you;
- If the child leaves full-time education or training and starts employment;
- If the child qualifies for Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance;

- When the child reaches the age of 18 (unless still in full-time education)
- You are required to inform us if any of the above situations occur.

This information is provided as an initial summary of the most important conditions, which apply in respect of regular payments to special guardians. Further information will be available at later stages of the process.

Please now detach this sheet and retain it for your records, then complete the form and return it to Hartlepool Borough Council Childrens and Joint Commissioning Service.

## FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT FORM

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

### CHILD AND ADULT SERVICES NEW ACCOUNT DETAILS FORM

Request to set up new Integra Account for a Childrens Services Finance client paid by BACS.

Date:

Name:	
House Number/Street:	
Area:	
Town:	
Postcode:	
Name of Bank:	
Address of Bank:	
Name of Account Holder:	
Bank Account Number:	
Bank Sort Code:	

Person account is for

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Dated \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to Alison Smith, Childrens Finance Team.

## Appendix 5

**Sally Robinson, Director**

*Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*

Chatham House

Tel: 01429 405584

29 Chatham Road

[www.hartlepool.gov.uk](http://www.hartlepool.gov.uk)

Hartlepool

DX 60669 Hartlepool - 1

TS24 8QG



Contact Officer: Karen Douglas-Weir

Our Ref:

Email: [karen.douglas-weir@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:karen.douglas-weir@hartlepool.gov.uk) Your Ref:

Date

When telephoning,  
please ask for:

Name

Dear Name

Re: Special Guardianship Order

I am writing to inform you that we have agreed that child d.o.b.        is eligible for financial support.

I can confirm that following a financial assessment we agreed to pay the amount of £???? per week.  
This will be paid from ?????? to be reviewed annually.

I can confirm that following a financial assessment we agreed to pay the amount of £???? per week.



Initial weekly payment of:

Allowance (e.g.) £

Less Child Benefit (£20.70) or £13.70 for subsequent children

Total £

Child Related Benefit (e.g.) £

After a period of 6 weeks it will be assumed that you have claimed any benefit that you are entitled to their the allowance will be reduced by:

£

*I can confirm that following a financial assessment, we agreed to pay the amount of £*

*, which consists of an allowance of £ , less Child Benefit of £20.70. The initial allowance will be paid for a maximum of 6 weeks. Your allowance will then be reduced to £ 0, which takes into account Child Related Benefits which you will then be in receipt of.*

This will be paid from ?????? to be reviewed annually.

It is your responsibility to complete an annual update of your circumstances and notify the authority of any changes of circumstances to prevent overpayments occurring.

It is your responsibility to complete an annual update of your circumstances and notify the authority of any changes of circumstances to prevent overpayments occurring.

If you have any queries regarding this proposal please contact your Social Worker, ..... on telephone number .....

Yours sincerely,

## Head of Services for Looked After Children & Care Leavers

“

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020



**Report of:** Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

**Subject:** FOSTERING SERVICE INTERIM REPORT  
1st April 2020 – 30th June 2020

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## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For information.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Children Service's Committee with information relating to the activity of the Fostering Service for the first quarter of the 2020/21 year. The Fostering Service is a regulated service and as such there is a requirement to provide the executive side of the Council with performance information.

## 3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The work of the Fostering Service is subject to National Minimum Standards applicable to the provision of Foster Care for children looked after. The National Minimum Standards, together with regulations for fostering and the placement of children looked after, form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of Fostering Agencies.

3.2 The report provides details of the staffing arrangements in the service, training received by both staff and Foster Carers, the constitution of the Fostering Panel, activity in relation to the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective Foster Carers and progress in relation to the priorities set out in the Fostering Annual Report.

3.3 The Fostering Services Minimum Standard 25.7 requires Fostering Services to ensure that the Executive of the Local Authority:

- Receives a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency once every 3 months;
- Monitors the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and achieving good outcomes for children;
- Satisfies themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration.

#### **4. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION (as of June 2020)**

- 4.1 The fostering team continues to recruit and assess prospective Foster Carers to limit the Authority's dependence upon more costly, external provision for children.
- 4.2 There are currently 144 Foster Carers (an increase of 6 households since 31st March 2020) of whom 41 are approved as Connected Carers (an increase of 4 households since 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020). These Carers provide placements for 225 children and young people in total, 176 in 'Mainstream' provision and 49 children/young people are with Connected Foster Carers. There are 14 young people in Staying Put placements, which is for post 18 care leavers.
- 4.3 Of the 144 approved Fostering households, there were 4 which were 'on hold' due to, either, the individual circumstances of the Carer, or to issues in respect of their performance. This equated to 6 placements. There are a small number of placements that cannot be used due to the specific matching needs of the children/young people already in that foster placement.
- 4.4 The most significant influence upon the Fostering service in this quarter has clearly been the COVID pandemic. Children's services anticipated that the demand for placements may increase disproportionately to the increase in resource and, using the flexibility the government announced to related regulations, there was a 'call out' to staff with relevant experience and DBS checks to offer themselves as emergency Carers. Four families stepped up and commenced (self) assessment, under Regulation 24. The assessment would (and in one instance so far, has) then continued in the event that they needed to be used.
- 4.5 Additionally, approved Carers were asked to consider taking children outside of their ordinary terms of approval in order that Hartlepool children did not need to be placed with an external, out of area provider. Characteristically, several Carers have stepped up to do this – meaning that we have kept our children close to home whilst limiting the additional cost of commissioning independent placements.
- 4.6 Staff and Foster Carers have made major adjustments to the 'normal' way of working and whilst some important elements of support - such as Foster

Care Training - has not gone ahead in the usual way, we have found other means of communicating key information and ensuring that the Foster Care 'family' is supported, informed and heard.

- 4.7 Regular communications have gone out to Foster Carers from the Fostering Service (**Appendix 1**) and the Virtual School (**Appendix 2**). The Fostering Team asked, in depth, about the Carers coping mechanisms, worries for them and our children and any needs arising from the lock down situation. A summary of their responses is attached (**Appendix 3**).
- 4.8 The Carers and staff have coped remarkably well with the situation in this period. We have seen innovations arising from necessity and the need to continue with the core business to make and maintain safe placements. Nothing has stopped, rather continued in a different way. Some examples;
- Panel has met as many times as planned, virtually;
  - Assessments of prospective Carers have commenced with a 'self-assessment' – in a bid to minimize the delay created by being unable to visit in some instances; \*\*
  - Agreement reached with the IRO service around a process for holding a Foster Care review to ensure terms of approval are changed in a timely way;
  - A general increase in confidence (Staff and Carers) about the use of technology such as facetime, zoom, Skype to ensure carers are seen and children have their family time without compromising its safety or quality; and
  - Close working relationships with Adoption Tees Valley have been the vehicle for enabling our children to move onto their adoptive placements safely and with minimum delay. Foster Carers have aided children's transitions so imaginatively eg using a 'summer house' as the main base for introductions to avoid transmission of disease whilst providing a homely environment for baby and new parents.
- 4.9 The above \*\* (assessment) practice will continue post COVID because we have found that **some** families (Connected Carers) came to an earlier realization that the fostering task is not for them – meaning we can plan in a more timely way for children. Other applicants have spent great time and care reflecting on their lives and potential as Carers prior to the physical meeting with their assessing Social Worker, giving us a more in depth understanding of them and them a greater understanding of the task ahead.
- 4.10 Between 2017 and 2019 there was an 11.5% increase in the number of children becoming cared for and, whilst the service surpassed its target of approving an additional 10 Carers in that year (we approved 18), in 2019/20 that increase of children needing care had risen again by a further 12.68%. The need to grow our Foster Care Resource has, therefore, become greater still.

4. 11 Barnardo's published research in June which stated that, during lockdown, the number of children becoming cared for was up by 44%, whilst the number of enquiries from the public to become Foster Carers was down by about 50%. Whilst we are unsure of the source of Barnardo's information, Hartlepool has seen that trend of a rise in the first and a dip in the second *towards the end of this quarter*, so great effort is needed to redress the balance and to prepare for continued demand and pressure. Interestingly, though enquiries slowed, there were still slightly more as compared with same period last year.
- 4.12 The table below provides details of the impact of recruitment activity, which has taken place in first quarter of 2020/21.

Initial Enquiries – including survey of where did people hear about the service	9 (one more than '19/20) 2 x Not known 1x repeat enquiry (no external prompt) 1x Advert 1x word of mouth 1 x TV Commercial ! x Poster 1 x item on the news
Information packs sent	7
Initial Visits (Virtual due to COVID) How many proceeded	5 4
Preparation Groups	No Skills to Foster Groups were held this quarter – however the service has equipped itself to deliver virtual training to a larger group of applicants in the coming months.
How many prospective Carers are in the assessment process?	13 Connected Carers 12 'Mainstream' Carers

## 5. FOSTERING PANEL

- 5.1 In this quarter, the Fostering Panel has met on five occasions (the same number as in the same quarter last year) and made recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker on the following fostering matters:
- Two 'mainstream' Foster Carer approvals
  - One approval of a new partner of a 'mainstream' carer
  - Four Connected Carer approvals
  - The match of a brother and sister with long term Foster Carers (IFA)
  - The match of one little boy with long term Foster Carer (Hartlepool BC)

- No 'best interest' decisions
- Four Foster Care reviews.
- No Foster Care Resignations.

5.2 There are effective processes in place for the recommendations made by Panel to be considered by the Agency Decision Maker and the timescale for this is within five working days of the Panel meeting taking place.

## 6. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 In this quarter (from May 2020) two team members have begun a year's maternity leave. One post was back-filled, the other has been left vacant for four months so that a member of staff (who is currently covering the maternity leave of a third team member) can continue in post on that member's return (in August). She will then remain in post until the second (May's maternity - leaver) returns in May 2021. The team's Placement Support Worker has spent this quarter working outside of the team, to support a family in the community, creating a further reduction in staffing – though for the 'greater good' in terms of services to children.
- 6.2 Whilst the reduction in staffing has placed increased demand on the team because they are each supporting additional Foster Carers, there has not (thus far) been a detrimental impact on performance or outcomes for children. Through 2019/20 Children's Services had managed to place and retain 72% of its children with Hartlepool Fostering families and also improved its performance in terms of keeping children within 20 miles of Hartlepool – previously 9% were outside this boundary, whereas only 7% were in 2019/20.
- 6.3 In addition to the above, the hard work, commitment and flexibility that Carers have shown during lockdown – coupled with the imaginative work of Supervising Social Workers - has resulted in there being NO increase in the use of Independent Fostering Agencies in this quarter. There were 36 children in IFA placements as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and the same number at 30<sup>th</sup> June. However, it needs to be noted that there remain very few Foster Placements as a result and we must recognize that Foster Carers taking on children over and above what they ordinarily would is what can lead to disrupted placements. Creating stability for children is our number one priority, therefore we need to get the team up to capacity and increase Foster Care numbers to avoid that situation.
- 6.4 The Fostering Team retains the role of a designated 'Family Finder' who drives the search for permanent placements for those children and young people in for whom Long Term Foster Care is the agreed plan. In this quarter the number of children seeking permanence has increased (inevitably, given the overall rise in children becoming looked after) so there is a proportionate likelihood that the use of independent agencies will increase, as our existing Foster Carers literally have little to no room left. The

team is currently progressing 23 assessments, and if all are approved this will help, however, to maintain this momentum and growth, the team's capacity will need to increase.

## **7. SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS**

- 7.1 Prior to this year's events, one would have assumed that the pandemic, lockdown and inability to be physically present with people as we usually would, might fetter development. However – as described in sections 4 to 6 – necessity has been the mother of invention and work has carried on with some interesting innovation and practice which will outlive this disease. The service has a target of approving 18 new Fostering resources in the year 2020/21 and will continue to work on the retention of its Foster Carers.
- 7.2 Foster Care training will be delivered online for the foreseeable future. Fostering Network has developed a digital edition of the Skills to Foster preparation Group for our use with new applicants. This will run in September 2020 - by which time in the year, we would have, ordinarily, run two courses – but it will capture all those applicants currently in assessment.

## **8. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Increasing demand and the implication this has for Hartlepool being able to care for its own children and young people continues to be a risk. This would also put greater pressure on budgets should the impact mean an increased use of independent provision. This would be mitigated by increasing capacity in terms of staffing (beyond solely the return to work of those on maternity leave) which means greater 'availability' to carers who need the best support possible to keep our children safe and stable.

## **9. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no specific financial considerations within this report.

## **10. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no specific legal considerations within this report.

## **11. CONSULTATION**

- 11.1 Foster carers are supported by their supervising social worker and the social workers make contact with them regularly. Their views are heard and responded to. In addition to this, there has been Foster Care Survey in relation to the current pandemic which has helped the service to support



Carers and children and to better understand how to offer support going forward.

## **12. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 12.1 The Fostering service ensures that it supports all Foster Carers to enable them to support our children and young people.

## **13. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 13.1 The service continues to recruit and assess prospective Foster Carers to provide placement choice with a range of Fostering Families which reflect the needs of the children we care for. In this quarter, the Local Authority has communicated with staff and Carers in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter movement. The Fostering Team recognized that our children and young people may be asking questions about the issues being seen in the media and, as part of its COVID communications to Carers, included information and useful tools for carers to explain the situation to our children.

## **14. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS**

- 14.1 There are no staff considerations for Hartlepool Borough Council employees.

## **15. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 15.1 There are no asset management considerations.

## **16. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 16.1 The Children's Service Committee is asked to note the report in relation to the work of the Fostering Service.

## **17. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 17.1 The Fostering Service is required to fulfill its statutory responsibilities to children looked after by the local authority and provide regular reports to the Children Services Committee to enable the Committee to satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.
- 17.2 Children's Services Committee has an important role in scrutinising the activities of the Fostering Service to ensure that performance in this area is robust.

## 18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Fostering National Minimum Standards Services 2011;
- Fostering Regulations 2011;
- Fostering Annual Report 2019/20
- DfE Coronavirus (COVID19):guidance for children's care services

## 19. CONTACT OFFICERS

19.1 Karen Douglas-Weir,  
Head of Services for Looked After Children and Care Leavers,  
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Sign Off:-

Director of Finance and Policy



Chief Solicitor



**Appendix 1****CORONOVIRUS PLAN in relation to HBC Foster Carers****29<sup>th</sup> June 2020 (6)****Checking in – tell us what you need**

Hartlepool Borough Council will prioritise the health and well-being of children and young people it cares for and that of their Carers, by following all government and public health advice and guidance issued on the current COVID-19 outbreak. Key information relating to services impacted by the virus will be shared with all HBC Foster Carers and staff.

The plan will be reviewed as new information is made available.

Fostering Team Manager, Jane Wilson, remains responsible for service delivery and contingency plans and will be the main point of contact.

HBC is assessing the risk to service delivery, to the children and young people it is responsible for, its staff and Carers and reviewing that risk on a daily basis. Regular communication (and arrangements which come out of that) aim to ensure that children and young people experience safety and stability with their Foster Carers during this COVID-19 outbreak.

**Hello everyone – how are you doing?**

We want to say a big thank you to you again - for continuing to step up by offering over and above what you already offer to our children, during this tricky time. Many of you have opened your homes to children in emergency situations and used your imaginations to accommodate more than you normally would and this has helped our Hartlepool community enormously, keeping children close to home.

**Barnardo's research**

You may have seen in the national news that requests for children to be placed in Foster Care has increased by 44% during lockdown - against a nearly 50% drop in enquiries from the public to become foster carers. If we are honest, we are not sure where Barnardo's got their information but, as a service, we can confirm that we are feeling that trend of more children needing care and fewer people calling us to become carers, which is why we are grateful for - and proud of - your support during this time.

## What can we do?

Jane Young (our AD), self and Karen (HoS) met to consider Hartlepool's 'sufficiency' in terms of placements for children in both Foster Care and Children's Homes. To boost interest in becoming a Foster Carer we have asked the media team to run a 'campaign' based around how you carers have responded to need during the pandemic. Several of you have offered to help with this (THANK YOU) so be prepared to see colleagues featured in press releases! The Fostering Team is also stepping up to work additional hours so that assessments can be completed and carers approved swiftly and safely. Well done to them, too. **Don't forget - if you introduce someone to the Fostering role for Hartlepool and they become approved - you will receive a £100 'thank you'**

## Other stuff

The pandemic has thrown a light on lots of things which will help us to continue to improve the service - one being our Foster Care 'profiles'. These are the leaflets we have (or not!) to hand for children who literally don't know, when they are moving from someone they love, where it is they are going, what that looks like, who the people are. Scary stuff. Some of you might recognise the attached as you have already created your family profile - if you don't - here's some lockdown fun for all the family! Create your own profile - pick a template (one of these, or develop one more suited to you) and let's get something together which we will hold on your record ready to share with children who are coming to live with you - to take even a little bit of their worry away.

For those (of us) who are technosaurs....ask the children to help, they will have you one whipped up in no time. Connected Carers and those offering solely permanent care may not see the need - everyone else - can we have them back by the end of July latest???



Foster Carer Profile  
- Option 1.docx



Foster Carer Profile  
- Option 2.pub

## Black lives matter

Needs no pre-amble from me - we have all seen it, we have all been horrified. As a council it has made us think, are we helping each other to eradicate this - what do we understand, how do we help our children to understand? With that in mind here is a link to help us (the adults) understand the key issues so that

we can help our children to make sense of what is in the news and to think about racism and how to tackle it. Show Racism the Red Card has some really useful information and tools to help - have a look;

[Visit their website](#)

When we are able to meet again, we will be running training on equality and diversity as part of our schedule of training - for us to refresh, we staff included.

### **'Being a Parent' - support coming to us directly from its founder**

Dr Crispin Day is reaching out, nationwide, to offer support to families during the pandemic - he says the aim is "to offer realistic, compassionate, evidence-based parenting information that raises awareness, supports family resilience and promotes coping"

I have attached the links below - many of you (who have already completed the Being a Training Parent training) will be pleased to know it is being adapted to roll out to Foster Carers - delivered by Foster Carers - so look out for that too.

<https://www.facebook.com/Centre-for-Parent-and-Child-Support-CPCS-100276281421476/>

Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/cpcs\\_official/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/cpcs_official/?hl=en)

### **Foster Care - your - Recording**

Please remember to keep up with your recording. Now more than ever, what you record on a daily and weekly basis about our children's progress is fundamental to their Social Worker and your Supervising Social Worker understanding need. We are going to be running refresher sessions on 'quality recording' for every carer in the coming weeks - watch this space to book your slot.

## **Stay safe and keep in touch**

Jane and the Fostering Team

## Appendix 2

### Virtual School update 15.05.2020

In the week where the Government announced the possible planned return to school for key year groups we wanted to give some information in relation to this.

The Prime Minister announced that from 1 June at the earliest, primary pupils may be able to begin going back into school in stages, beginning with Reception, year 1 and year 6. The Government's ambition is that secondary pupils facing exams next year will get some time with their teachers before the summer holidays.

All schools are different, and it is not possible for government to set specific national guidelines that could be universally applicable. Instead, they have created a framework to help school leaders and academy trusts to start thinking through the steps they might need to take to enable them to open their schools for more pupils.

Educational settings should continue to offer places to priority groups. In particular, as per the existing guidance on supporting vulnerable children and young people during the coronavirus outbreak, vulnerable children of all year groups, including children looked after, continue to be expected and encouraged to attend educational provision where it is appropriate for them to do so.

We would encourage children looked after to attend school however we would make all decisions taking into account the carer's view and would hope we could make a collective decision that meets the needs to children and their foster family.

Guidance for parents and carers can be found at  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

If you want to discuss any of these matters please do not hesitate to contact The Virtual School

Emma Rutherford

Virtual School Head Teacher

## Appendix 3

### COVID 19 – FOSTER CARER FEEDBACK

#### WHAT'S WORKING WELL?

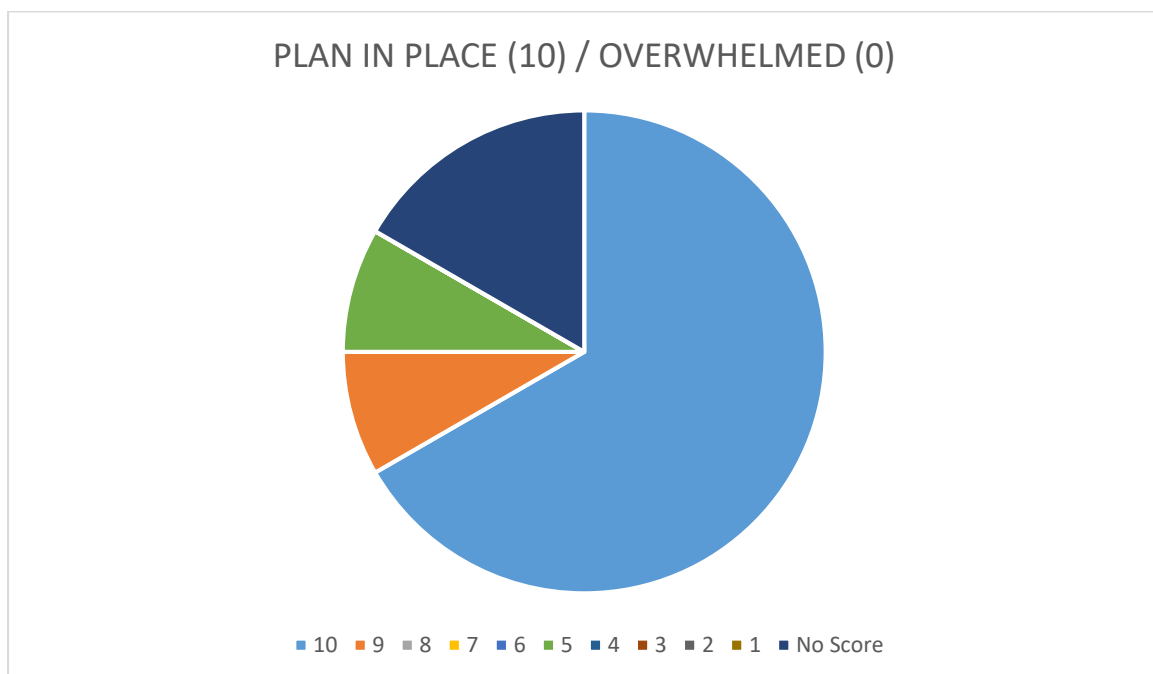
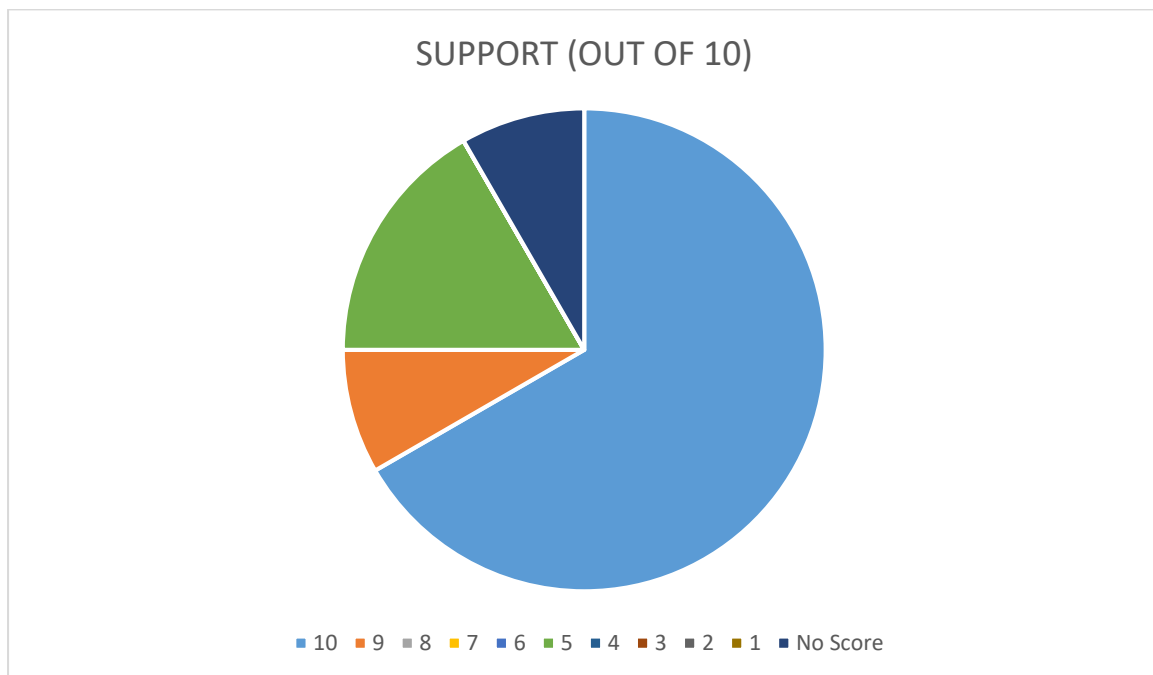
Foster carers feel that they and the children in their care benefit most from keeping existing routines and structures in place as far as possible. 'Talking together, providing a structure within the day and keeping things as normal as possible' is the watchword for many. Several carers continue to have a 'school day' at home but with longer breaks ('No technology in normal school hours') and many have timetables that include things like Joe Wicks' online PE classes and other activities throughout the day. Families who foster are almost unanimously grateful for the extra time they are able to spend with the children and young people in their care and with their families as a whole. Most families enjoy walking, going on bike rides, baking, movie nights and even some DIY and gardening. Quiz nights via Zoom are now a regular weekly activity for most.

Above all foster carers are overwhelmingly proud of the way that children and young people have responded to the COVID 19 pandemic and the huge changes this has brought to their lives. Many have also been struck by new qualities, skills and resolve in their children that they hadn't seen before. One foster carer commented: 'They have shown...persistence with tasks or games that would usually last for a short time'. Others have noticed 'a growth in confidence they were lacking in school'. This is also true of their own children: 'My son cannot sit through twenty minutes in front of a screen. But somehow he is managing to do his home schooling work online.' This foster carer goes on to describe how his birth children and foster child help each other with their homework.

The majority of carers feel they are able to cope with the support they have and rely on their existing networks of family and friends. Some have reached out to others they haven't spoken to for some time: having the opportunity to work more mindfully and reconnect with old friends brought one of our carers 'incredible joy and happiness'. Those who are married or foster as a couple often describe taking turns to give each other time out and identify each other as their major source of support. Most say that while they don't feel they need any particular support at the moment, they are reassured that children's social workers and supervising social workers are there for them should they need them. Regular phone calls 'to vent any frustrations we have' are sufficient and a number of carers express their gratitude to their social workers and health professionals for their advice, for the briefings that have been circulated so far, and for the work they do more generally. One carer also mentioned peer support: 'I speak to other foster carers on our Facebook page. It works well.'

When asked to rate the support they have received from agencies and wider networks, the majority of those carers who answered indicated they were very happy with their current level of support (with 0 being no support and 10 all the support we need). Most commented that while they hadn't needed any, they knew where to find help and would approach their

network. When asked to rate the extent to which they felt overwhelmed or, conversely, that there was a solid plan in place for the next 30 days (0 being overwhelmed and 10 meaning a solid plan in place) the majority chose the latter:





## WHAT'S NOT WORKING WELL?

Carers who gave their support networks a lower rating commented that they had 'recently seen an increase in support when arranging the new placement, however previously I have seen limited support'. Another described 'Not really getting any support but don't feel we need it.' Those carers who tended to rate lower for the presence of a plan did so 'due to not being supplied any information on what such a plan should include. However, should I need additional support in a reactive situation, then I would contact my own worker for guidance.'

Sadly some carers and their families have been touched directly by COVID 19 and have lost family members as a result. One foster carer noted that they had struggled most when 'Finding out our parents are seriously ill'. Their commitment to their role and the consolation they have taken from having more time with their loved ones is striking.

Not all children have been able to cope so well with the anxieties and constraints imposed by the virus. Some have struggled with their mental health and one carer mentions that they have seen 'regressing behaviour' from the child in their care. Others have been allowed to spend longer in bed / on consoles on the understanding that 'he knows that this is not "normal" and will be curtailed when we do get back to normal.' However, a number of carers feel that the lockdown and the absence of other distractions and demands means they can devote more time to support the child with their troubling feelings.

Generally, respondents did not report having specific issues with children and young people running and missing or refusing to adhere to the lockdown and social distancing guidelines. One carer mentions having had to deal with a child running and missing in the past and getting 'Support firstly from family, then duty team and police both very helpful. Difficult situation to work through and felt a little isolated due to the lack of support (felt like I got more questions than answers).' In the main, carers are confident they would know how to deal with a young person who had failed to follow the government's recommendations, left the home and returned – ensuring the young person is kept isolated, encouraging regular hand washing, disinfecting surfaces and contacting social workers if there is a problem or a safeguarding concern.

Several carers report that family time over Facetime and Whatsapp has gone smoothly and certainly 'much better than envisaged'. Some have even been able to facilitate family time for special occasions while ensuring young people observe social distancing. However, others have concerns about being expected to supervise contact where previously support workers have had this role. One writes:

We feel the burden of managing contact time has now fallen to Foster carers without any support. Prior to lock down our responsibility was to ensure the children were collected on time after family time. Conversations between the children and the family member were all monitored and recorded by the supervising contact worker, who we imagine has under gone training. The

children have found it difficult to take part in face time via a device, losing concentration quickly and not wanting to engage. The question we have is should we step in and end the contact session rather than the child feeling guilty at doing this themselves, or should the parent take this responsibility and recognise the children are no longer wanting to continue with the session, ending the session at an apt time. This issue is further compounded for us as their father has a recognised special educational need himself and we don't know if he is able to acknowledge and has the mental capacity to recognise the children have had enough and therefore end the session.

In the last session... [the child]... left her dad and came across to me to ask if she could end the call. Her guilt over this on the drive home was very evident.

Anecdotally, this reflects comments from a number of carers that children struggle with the need to make conversation and 'chat' for as much as half an hour at a time when their ability and interest in doing so is limited. As a result family time begins to become stilted and strained, children lose patience, but some carers do not feel they are in a position to cut sessions short. While some carers have sought to prompt children and young people ahead of family time about things they can tell family members about and questions to ask them, others have clearly found this more difficult. This suggests that more support is required to help children and carers manage these issues in confidence.

## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS AND QUERIES**

'At the beginning of the lock down we were told they could go to school. However every day my husband took them he was met by a very rude member of staff who questioned him about why they were at school. One day they were the only 2 scheduled to be in school and they rang us to say they wouldn't open the school for them. We are not impressed with the way the school behaved so I am not sure how helpful it would be for the children to be in school if that's the negative attitude shown by the staff.'

'Is there any funds/plans to supply cheap laptops to kids so they can do more schoolwork at home? Kids' SW is looking into this for us but thinking on larger scale. HA has just reached correct levels after 5 years and we are a bit worried this might slip a bit as there's only so much we can do on paper.'

'Keep in touch and provide updates on any change in government and/or local guidance.'

'Possibly provide us with PPE if needed and classified as a key worker/function.'

'To continue to keep checking-in on K and I and each of the children, preferably by a phone call. *Or you can wave at the window if passing.*'

'We would like to know if we can call upon the Holiday fund or some other funding so we can buy them a bike or a scooter.'

'I like to talk to...[my worker] on a regular basis to share information.'

'Thank you for all the information and updates we are receiving. As foster carers it has been very reassuring to know that we have such great support through our SSW and the rest of the team that together we will get through this.'

**PAUL REYNOLDS**

**SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER**

**5<sup>th</sup> May 2020**



For all the latest information on the coronavirus outbreak and Hartlepool Borough Council's response to it please go to  
**[www.hartlepool.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/coronavirus)**

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

15 September 2020



**Report of:** Director, Children and Joint Commissioning Services

**Subject:** 2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT OF ADOPTION TEES VALLEY

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## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For information only.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Children Service's Committee with information relating to the activity of the Adoption Service for the April 2019-March 2020 (**Appendix 1**). The Adoption Service is ran by Adoption Tees Valley Regional Agency (ATV) and this is for Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Stockton and Redcar and Cleveland Councils. Stockton Borough Council is the host local authority.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 As reported to Children's Services Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017 the five Local Authorities made a successful bid to the Department of Education for funding to develop the Adoption Tees Valley Regional Agency (ATV). The ATV went live in April 2018.
- 3.2 Adoption Tees Valley is overseen by a governance board made up of Local Authority Directors, non-executive members who are adoptive parents, legal representation, voluntary adoption agencies and ATV. The board meet to support the running and oversight of ATV.
- 3.3 The 2011 Statutory Adoption Guidance and Adoption National Minimum Standards places a requirement upon adoption services to ensure that the Executive side of the Council receive an annual report which demonstrates the management and outcomes of the agency.

3.4 ATV is managed in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2004, the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 and Care Standards Act 2000.

3.5 The aim of ATV is to recruit, train and support adopters within the region to ensure our children can live locally with families who understand the children's individual backgrounds and can provide a good quality of life for our children. This is achieved through the following objectives:

- Ensuring that where children cannot remain in the care of their birth parent/s, they are placed with adoptive parent/s at the earliest opportunity;
- Providing robust assessment of and support to adoptive parents and children to meet identified needs;
- Providing advice and support to birth families;
- Managing and facilitating Post Box contact arrangements that support the exchange of information which meets the needs of the children, adoptive parent/s and birth parent/s;
- Fulfil the requirements in relation to the Adoption & Children Act 2004 for the adoption of a child by a step parent;
- Providing advice, support and guidance in relation to permanence planning and facilitate family finding for children;
- Ensure the Adoption Panel is supported to provide robust consideration and recommendations relating to the approval of adopters, and matching of children with their adoptive families;
- Providing support to the Agency Decision Maker in relation to consideration and decision making regarding plans for the adoption of children.
- Ensure the adopter and adoptee voices are heard and support shaping and developing the service. In turn this will support the improvement of the adopter and adoptee journey

#### **4. REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE**

4.1 The vision for Adoption Tees Valley is to be a centre of excellence and resource for adopted children and their families throughout the period of their childhood, and beyond where necessary. ATV know that there can be considerable support needs for children and families after the Adoption Order is granted, and sometimes even shortly after placement. Many adopted children have needs associated with early trauma; attachment difficulties; separation and loss; and may need some help with recovering and managing the long term impact of these issues.

- 4.2 The report sets out the achievements of ATV over the past year, this is presented by answering two main questions –
- Is there evidence that children are achieving permanence through adoption more quickly? Are more children who cannot return to birth family finding permanence through adoption?
  - What about adopters? Are those wishing to adopt children achieving their ambitions in a more timely way?
- 4.3 The adoption score card data results from the previous year 2018-2019 and compares this to the last year's data. There is positive performance relating to the reduction in the average time between a child entering care and moving in with the adoptive family, with the number of days this takes decreasing. There has been an increase in the number of adopters waiting, those not yet matched at the year's end has increased to 22, from seven previous year. The report offers a full analysis of the adoption score card which provides an overall positive picture around the adoption work.
- 4.4 ATV has a very detailed training menu for adopters and include, in their preparation training, why it is important for potential adopters to consider foster to adopt placements; this is to ensure early attachment and reducing the need for the child to move to new carers if the plan for adoption is agreed. The added benefit of foster to adopt placements are that the adopters are able to meet the birth family and work with them in the planning stages which then goes onto support the child with their greater sense of identity as the adopters have had a more meaningful relationship with the birth family
- 4.5 ATV has stepped up their recruitment activity, they are working with regional voluntary agencies to identifying carers from the region which means that more children can be placed in the North East region.
- 4.6 The number of children requiring a family via adoption has increased across the region, with 91 children being placed for adoption of those 14 Hartlepool children had their adoption orders granted in 2019/20.
- 4.7 ATV has reviewed their marketing strategy and changed their branding. The ATV website can now be accessed via a mobile phone which has supported accessibility. As a result more potential adopters are coming forward and when they do, their journey to become adopters has improved. The timescales from initial application to approval has also reduced
- 4.8 ATV has improved its adoption support offer to ensure that a robust adoption support package is provided within the first year of a child being adopted. The benefits of this are discussed and described in the annual report outlining that ATV view this as important to build on their relationship with adopters and ultimately this cements the adopters relationship with ATV.

- 4.9 One of the key priorities for ATV is to enhance the level of support available to adoptive families. ATV continues to operate and deliver a three tier model of adoption support, with tier one being available to all families, tier two being targeted at families who need some additional support and tier three being for those families and children with the greatest need for support.
- 4.10 ATV supports indirect contact between adopted children and their birth families, where letters and cards are exchanged. Over the year 1,620 post box transitions have taken place.
- 4.11 ATV facilitates a children's group and 10 children have participated this last year. This ensures that the views of children and young people support and shape the service for the future.
- 4.12 Almost all ATV adopters are taking children from the Tees Valley region, which is to be celebrated. This means children remain within the region of their birth identity and often important links with siblings are more easily maintained.
- 4.13 The impact of Covid 19 brought about amended regulations for adoption, under the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations, 2020 and despite the wide range of adjustments being necessary to continue to recruit adopters and place children in their adoptive families good practice has continued.
- 4.14 Throughout the year ATV has increased the number of adopters. During last year 49 potential adopters completed their preparation training to start their adoption journey. Due to the number of adopters and matches, the adoption panel met more times in 2019/20 than the previous year. ATV has extended the role of panel advisor, to assistant team managers to support the increase in activity.
- 4.15 The profile of a child being placed for adoption is mixed in terms of gender, 46 male and 45 females, 55 of these children are 0-1 years old. There has been three sibling groups of three, and sixteen sibling groups of two placed recognizing that it is always important to keep brothers and sisters together. For the year 2020-2021 ATV's campaign will be focused on finding families who wish to adopt sibling groups.
- 4.16 The 2019-2020 year has seen an increase in the number of requests for step-parent adoptions. ATV has allocated a worker to support this and ensure that families are prepared for this process as often birth families do not fully appreciate the impact of such decisions.

## **5. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 ATV work is vital to ensure children can enjoy permanence at the earliest opportunity which promotes their attachment to the adopters which supports increasing the child's life chances.

## **6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no specific financial considerations within this report.

## **7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no specific legal considerations within this report. Children's Committee have been updated about the changes in the adoption regulation during Covid19 and the use of these are detailed in the report.

## **8. CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Adopters and children who have been adopted are supported by the ATV to ensure their voices are heard, that they can shape the service and also be part of work that improves the adopter / adoptee journey.

## **9. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY (IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED AS APPROPRIATE.)**

- 9.1 There are no child and family poverty considerations

## **10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS (IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED AS APPROPRIATE.)**

- 10.1 There are no equality and diversity considerations.

## **11. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no staff considerations.

## **12. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 12.1 There are no staff considerations.

## **13. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13.1 Children's Services Committee is asked to note the annual report in relation to the work of the ATV Service and what it has achieved in 2019/20.



## 14. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 14.1 Adoption Tees Valley fulfils the council's statutory responsibilities to children requiring permanence through adoption and also the recruiting of adopters. This report is provided to Children Services Committee to enable the Committee to satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration and agreement.
- 14.2 Children's Services Committee has an important role in the scrutiny of activities of the ATV to ensure that performance in this area is of good quality, caring and robust.

## 15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 15.1 Annual Report April 2019- March 2020

## 16. CONTACT OFFICERS

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Sign Off:-

Director of Finance and Policy  
Chief Solicitor



# Annual Report 2019-2020



Transform a child's life...

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Glossary

ADM- agency decision maker

PO- Placement order

RAA- Regional Adoption Agency

VAA- Voluntary Adoption Agency

## **1. Introduction**

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

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

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

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

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

Pete, one of the new non-executive directors:

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

The information on timescales from Placement Order to Match have remained the same over the last year. There is variation in the timescales for children, and while many children are achieving timely matching, some children wait longer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The number of children who have been referred for an adoption placement remains high creating demand for placements. The number of children placed for adoption within the year has been the highest over recent years which has meant that although recruitment has been stepped up, there has been a rise in the number of placements with VAA's, and other RAA's over this last year.

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

The evidence would suggest that ATV is making impact on the journey of those wishing to adopt. Assessment timescales are improving, and once approved there has been a small reduction in the numbers of prospective adopters who wait more than 3 months before they are matched. Exploration into the 4th month beyond approval shows that around half of all approved adopters are matched by this point.

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

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

*Are adoptive families receiving timely and high quality adoption support?*

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

The vision for Adoption Tees Valley is to be a centre of excellence and resource for adopted children and their families throughout the period of their childhood, and beyond where necessary. We know that there can be considerable support needs for children and families after the Adoption Order is granted, and sometimes even shortly after placement. Many adopted children have needs associated with early trauma; attachment difficulties; separation and loss; and may need some help with recovering and managing the long term impact of these issues.

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

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

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

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

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

## **2. Covid 19**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The adoption work has continued throughout "lockdown".

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

- Adopter approvals have continued.



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

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

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

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

### **Key challenges**

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

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

#### **Hartlepool social worker says:**

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

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

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

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

Kath says:

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

#### 4. Benchmarking

Included within this section is information about adoption across the Tees Valley in previous years, and the half year position of ATV against some key performance and ASGLB scorecard indicators.

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

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

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

\*Data is provisional and will be verified in August 2020

Analysis of performance information within ATV:

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

## 5. Marketing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **6. Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Adopters**

*Louise Addison, Recruitment Manager, summarises:*

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

#### **“Pipeline” – Prospective Adopters in Assessment**

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

#### **Timescales for Assessments**

- The national target for assessments is 182 days.

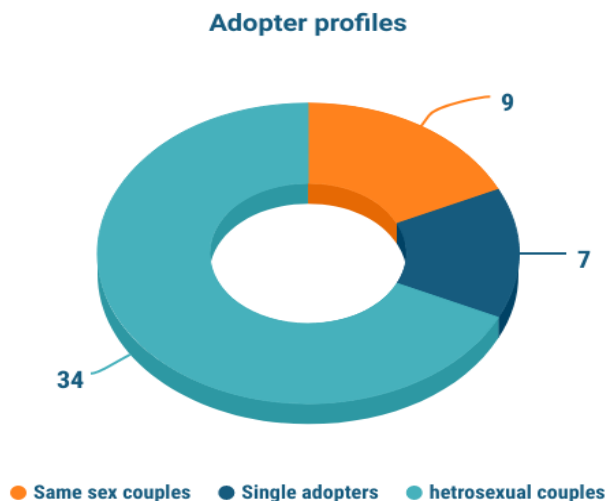
In ATV the average timescale for assessments completed is 202 days, which is outside of the government threshold.

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

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

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

## Characteristics of prospective adopters approved



1 family approved was of BAME heritage

34 families were first time adopters

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

9 were second time adopters

## Preparation Training Groups

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

Of the 49 families within this year,

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

1 family were of BAME ethnicity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An applicant on the session by a birth mother.

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

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

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

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

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

An applicant on the support offer provided by ATV.

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

## **7. Adoption Panel**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **8. Non-Agency Adoptions**

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

	Total
Enquiries	34
In progress/allocated	10
Waiting allocation	44

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

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

## **9. Referrals of Children**

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

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

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

### **Early Notifications to ATV**

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

## **10. Placements of Children for Adoption**

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

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

placed with ATV adopters				
Total ATV children placed	53	33	58	<b>91</b>
Total placements	67	34	59	93

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

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

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

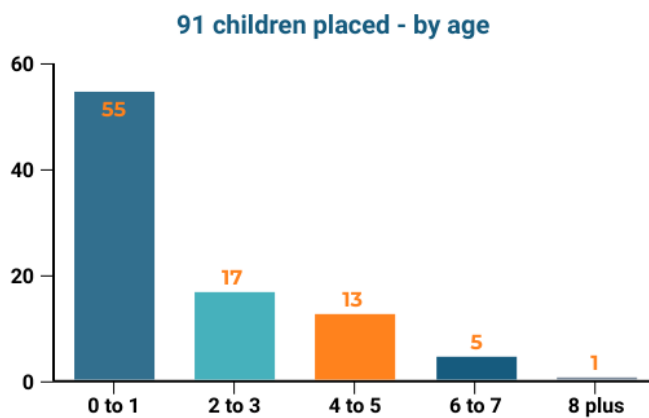
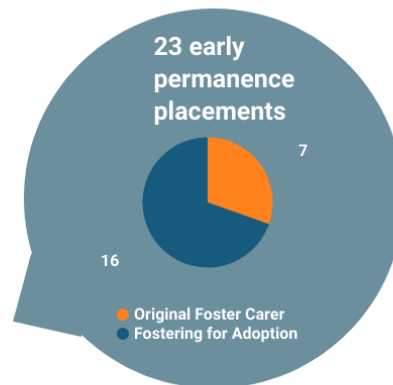
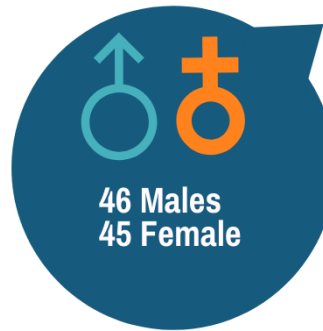
Prospective adopters consider carefully whether they wish to consider becoming early permanence carers, and therefore take a child through Fostering for Adoption. There are some risks that the Courts may not authorise a placement for adoption, through a Placement Order, and the child may be returned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

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

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



## Profile of Children Placed for Adoption



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

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

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

### **11. Disruptions**

There have been 3 disrupted placements this year.

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

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

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

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

### **12. Adoption Support**

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

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

*Lynne Cardwell, Adoption Support Team Manager summarises:*

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

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

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

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

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

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

On Services during Covid:

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

## Adoption Support: support services delivered

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

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

### The 3 Tier Model

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

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

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

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

### ***Education Support to Adopted Children, and their Families***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Children's Group**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Adopter Hub Membership (PACT UK)**

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

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

### **Therapeutic Parenting Training**

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

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

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

### **Framework of Preferred Therapeutic Providers**

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

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

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



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

#### Case Study 2- Adoption Support

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

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

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

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



### **Support for Birth Families and Adult Adoptees**

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

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

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

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

The services include:

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

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

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

Referrals have been as follows:

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total Hours
0	22	34	15	322

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

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

### **Post Box**

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

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

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

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

### **Life Story Books**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At the year end, the position is as follows:

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

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

### **13. Staffing**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **14. Quality Assurance**

National Minimum Standard 25.

The following mechanisms are in place for managing and monitoring the work of the agency, and the quality of work.

- Tracking systems to enable regular monitoring of children and adopter journey's; timeliness, and outcomes.
- A quarterly performance, assurance and challenge meeting (PAC) has been held with the senior adoption lead for each LA. All children for each LA have been tracked and monitored, and agreement about direction, or decisions signposted where applicable. Performance, and issues for improvement are discussed, specific to each LA.
- ASGLB is generated quarterly, and scorecard data is reviewed for evaluation of performance, and any areas for improvement, or focus.

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

### **15. Service Plans for 2020-21**

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

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