

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

## AGENDA



**Tuesday 6 September 2022**

**at 4.00 pm**

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

MEMBERS: CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

Councillors Boddy, Groves, Harrison, Leedham, Lindridge, Little and Moore.

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 Buchan, 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 date 21 June 2022 (*previously circulated and published*).

**4. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS**

No items.

**CIVIC CENTRE EVACUATION AND ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE**

In the event of a fire alarm or a bomb alarm, please leave by the nearest emergency exit as directed by Council Officers. A Fire Alarm is a continuous ringing. A Bomb Alarm is a continuous tone.

The Assembly Point for everyone is Victory Square by the Cenotaph. If the meeting has to be evacuated, please proceed to the Assembly Point so that you can be safely accounted for.

**5. KEY DECISIONS**

No items.

**6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION**

- 6.1 Approval of Term Holiday Dates 2023-24 (*Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)
- 6.2 To Nominate a Local Authority Representative to serve on the Governing Body of High Tunstall College of Science (*Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

**7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

- 7.1 2021/2022 Annual Report of Adoption Tees Valley (*Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)
- 7.2 Annual Report of Children Social Care Complaints and Compliments 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 (*Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

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

FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting – Tuesday 11 October 2022 at 4.00pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.



# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

6 SEPTEMBER 2022



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

**Subject:** APPROVAL OF TERM AND HOLIDAY DATES 2023-24

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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 2023-2024 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 2023-2024 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 autumn /spring terms term 2021-2022 representatives from the Tees Valley region and a number of other north east representatives consulted on a pattern for 2023-2024 based on the guiding principles and agreed to consult on this pattern within their own authorities as shown in **Appendix1**. The proposed pattern enables schools to begin the academic year on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and end the year on Tuesday 23rd July 2024.
- 4.2 Following discussions, arrangements were made to consult all head teachers in Hartlepool and also the relevant associations / unions on the school year pattern for 2023-2024. On the completion of local consultation in the region, the general consensus from the local authorities within the Tees Valley and other regional authorities is to adopt the model attached as shown in **Appendix 1**.

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

None.

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

None.

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

None.

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

None.

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

None.

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

None.

## 11. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

None.

## 12. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 To approve the scheduled term dates and holiday dates for the academic year 2023-2024 for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools as shown in **Appendix 1**.
- 12.2 To recommend the scheduled of term and holiday dates for 2023-2024 to governing bodies of all Voluntary Aided, Foundation Schools and Academies in Hartlepool.

## 13. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposals seek to achieve common term dates across Yorkshire and the north east 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 Resources and Development ☒

Chief Solicitor ☒

HARTLEPOOL SCHOOL TERM DATES 2023-2024

6.1 Appendix 1

	AUGUST 2023	SEPTEMBER 2023	OCTOBER 2023	NOVEMBER 2023	DECEMBER 2023	JANUARY 2024
Monday	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29
Tuesday	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30
Wednesday	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24 31
Thursday	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25
Friday	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26
Saturday	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27
Sunday	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28

40

32

	FEBRUARY 2024	MARCH 2024	APRIL 2024	MAY 2024	JUNE 2024	JULY 2024
Monday	5 12 19 26	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29
Tuesday	6 13 20 27	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30
Wednesday	7 14 21 28	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31
Thursday	1 8 15 22 29	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25
Friday	2 9 16 23	1 8 15 22 29	5 12 19 26	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26
Saturday	3 10 17 24	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27
Sunday	4 11 18 25	3 10 17 24 31	7 14 21 28	5 12 19 26	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28

33

24

29

37

Bank Holiday	
School Holiday	
PD Days	

40

32

33

24

29

37

195

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

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

6<sup>th</sup> September 2022



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

**Subject:** TO NOMINATE A LOCAL AUTHORITY REPRESENTATIVE TO SERVE ON THE GOVERNING BODY OF HIGH TUNSTALL COLLEGE OF SCIENCE

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## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 Non Key decision.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To consider a nomination for the Local Authority Governor position on the governing body of High Tunstall College of Science.

## 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 vacant position at the above school, details of which are set out in **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. PROPOSALS

4.1 The report seeks the committee's decision on the application for nomination as Local Authority Governor on the governing body of High Tunstall College of Science.

**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 The governing body undertakes regular audits and reviews of governor skills to identify where there may be gaps in the overall skills set of the governing body. They use this information in recruiting new governors to fill vacancies on the governing body. Discussions have taken place between the applicant, headteacher and chair of governors around the skills the applicant can contribute to the governing body. In their opinion the applicant has skills that will help strengthen the governing body.

**9. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY (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 or 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. ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS**

13.1 There are no environment, sustainability and climate change considerations.

**14. RECOMMENDATIONS**

14.1 The committee gives consideration to application for nomination as Local Authority Governor as set out in **Appendix B**.

**15. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

15.1 To ensure that the identified governing body can appoint a Local Authority Governor who is able to contribute to the effectiveness of governance at the school.

**16. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

16.1 There are no background papers.

**17. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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Sign Off:-

Director of Resources and Development ☒

Chief Solicitor ☒

## VACANCIES FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY GOVERNORS ON SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES

SCHOOL	VACANCY	APPLICATION RECEIVED	NOMINEE RECOMMENDED FOR CONSIDERATION AND APPOINTMENT BY GOVERNING BODY
<p><b>HIGH TUNSTALL COLLEGE OF SCIENCE</b></p> <p>The applicant is a serving Headteacher at a Pupil Referral Unit from outside of Hartlepool but is a local resident and former pupil of High Tunstall College of Science (HTCS). The applicant has a strong background in dealing with challenging pupils and those with behaviour issues and this is an area which the governing body of HTCS has identified to strengthen its knowledge and experience in order to be able to offer challenge and support to the College leadership team. This would also help build on a recent Ofsted recommendation relating to the College's on-site behaviour unit. As an Inclusion Quality Mark Assessor, the applicant's skills set would also be helpful in supporting HTCS's Inclusion agenda. The headteacher and chair of governors have held discussions with the candidate and they have indicated their support to the appointment of the applicant.</p>	One vacancy	One application has been received	The applicant is recommended for appointment

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# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

6 September 2022



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

**Subject:** 2021/2022 ANNUAL REPORT OF ADOPTION TEES VALLEY

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## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

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 Adoption Service for the April 2021 - March 2022 (**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 Since 2018, Adoption Tees Valley has been the organization that fulfils the role of the adoption agency for the five local authorities in Tees Valley. Adoption Tees Valley is a shared service, hosted by Stockton Borough Council.
- 3.2 Adoption Tees Valley is overseen by a governance board made up of Local Authority Directors and non-executive members who are adoptive parents. 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 and 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. **PROPOSAL**

- 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. The Annual Report at **Appendix 1** provides a comprehensive overview of the work of ATV throughout 2021/22

## **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. Adoption Tees Valley operates within the legal framework of the Adoption and Children Act 2004, the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 and Care Standards Act 2000.

## **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. The Annual Report includes feedback directly from adopters and adopted children.

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

- 9.1 There are no specific child and family poverty considerations arising from this report.

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

- 10.1 There are no specific 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. ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 13.1 There are no specific environment, sustainability and climate change considerations.

### **14. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 14.1 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 2021/22.

### **15. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 15.1 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.
- 15.2 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.

### **16. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 16.1 None.

### **17. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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# Adoption Tees Valley

## Annual Report 2021-22



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

Transform a child's life...

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## Glossary

ADM- agency decision maker /Agency Decision  
PO- Placement Order  
RAA- Regional Adoption Agency  
VAA- Voluntary Adoption Agency  
AO- Adoption Order  
ASF- Adoption Support Fund  
VSH- Virtual School Head



## **1. Introduction**

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

This Annual Report covers the period of 1.4.21 - 31.3.2022.

## **2. Executive Summary**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **3. Governance**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **4. Somerset Ruling**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Actions:

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

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

## **5. National Adoption Development -Regional Context**

The Government issued the National Adoption Strategy in 2021 [Adoption strategy: achieving excellence everywhere - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/95421/adoption_strategy_achieving_excellence_everywhere.pdf), which sets out an overarching strategic vision for adoption, aiming for a consistent England wide offer to children, and families by way of adoption services and support. The RAA Leaders forum is highlighted as the central group for change and development in thematic elements of the strategy. Through the strategic vision, focus is brought to areas of recruitment of adopters; effective timely matching for children; early permanence; adoption support.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **6. Adoption Activity**

### **6.1 Marketing Campaigns**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 6.2 Recruitment and Assessment of Adopters

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

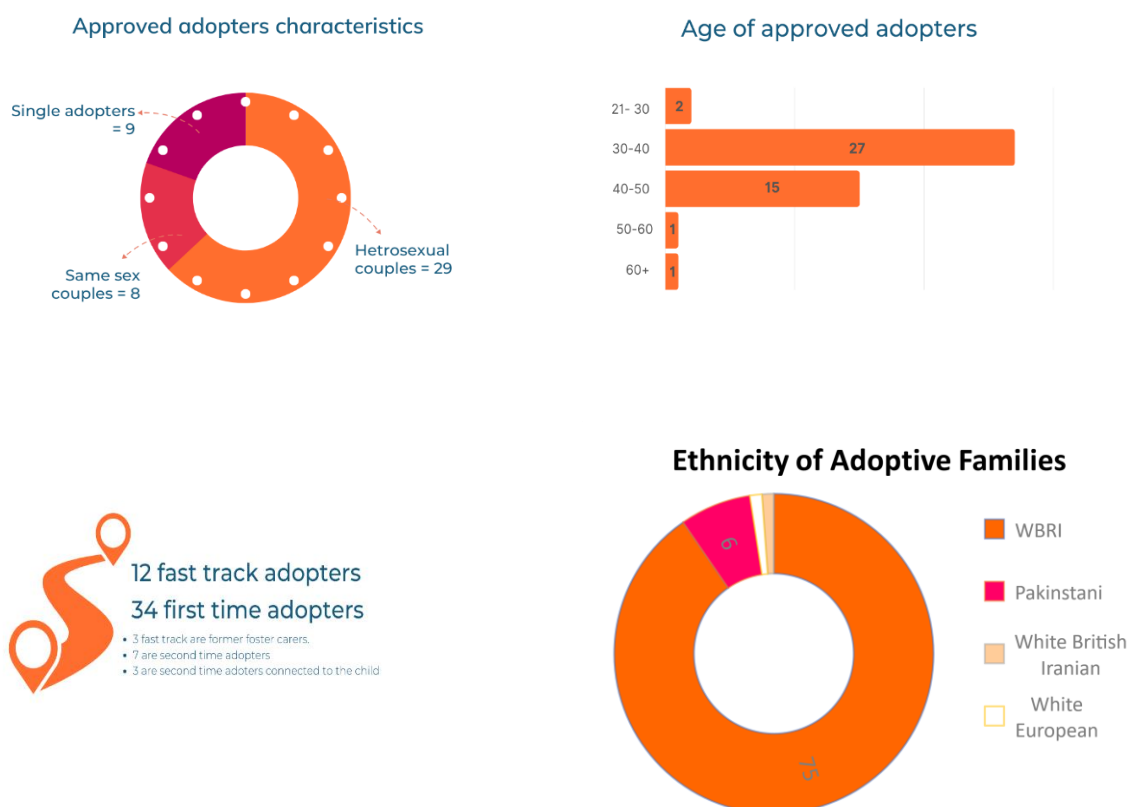
There was a reduction in numbers of adopters waiting to be matched with children during this year, with more progressing to match. Of the approved adopters waiting many have been readily available, and matched with Tees Valley children, resulting in a reduced pressure on the external agency budget at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

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

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

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

### Demographics of adopters approved



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

### Key successes:

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

### Key Challenges

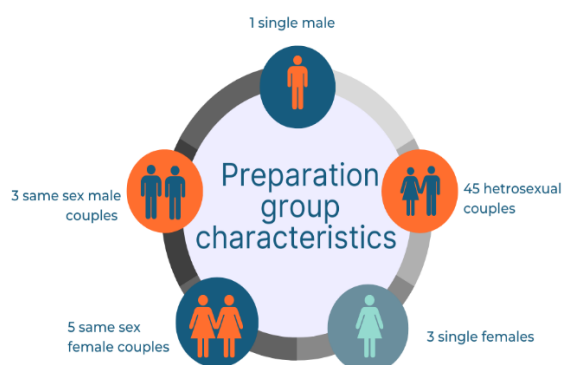
- Adopter approval numbers have reduced this year, and more are required to meet Tees Valley children's needs.
- Work with GP practices has been challenging.
- Timescales for assessment have therefore been impacted.

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

### 6.3 Preparation to Adopt Training

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

A total of 57 family units attended preparation training.



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

#### *Early Permanence preparation training*

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

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

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

#### *Friends and Family Training*

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

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

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

*Some feedback from attendees:*

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

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

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

## 6.4 Children Referred

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

## 6.5 Referrals by Local Authority

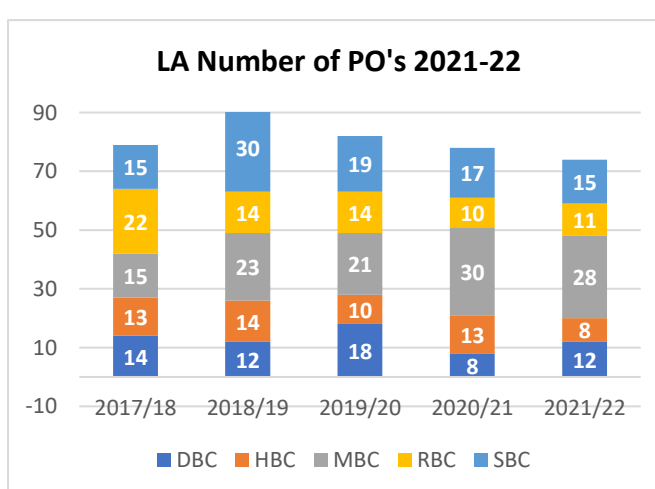
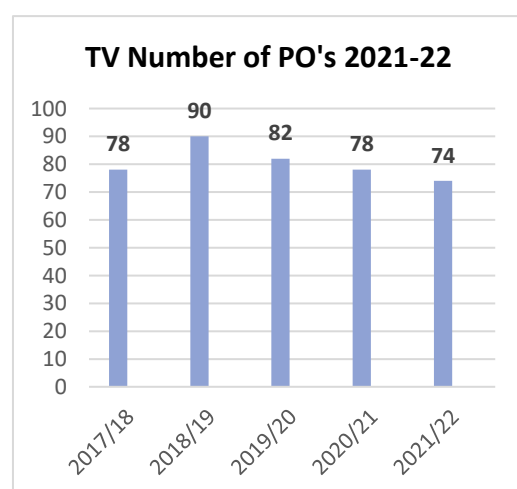
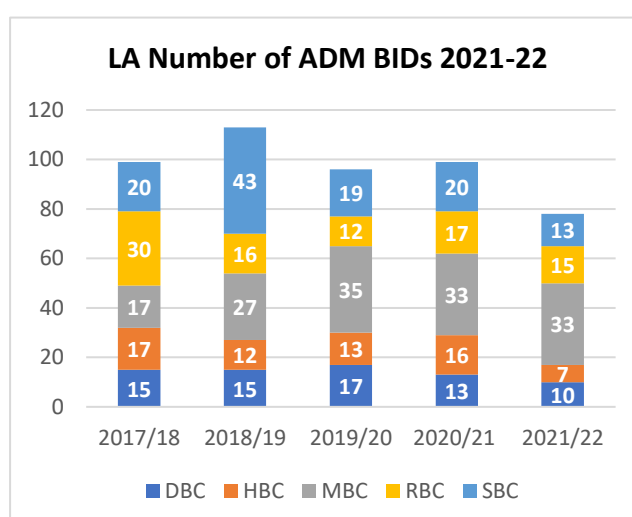
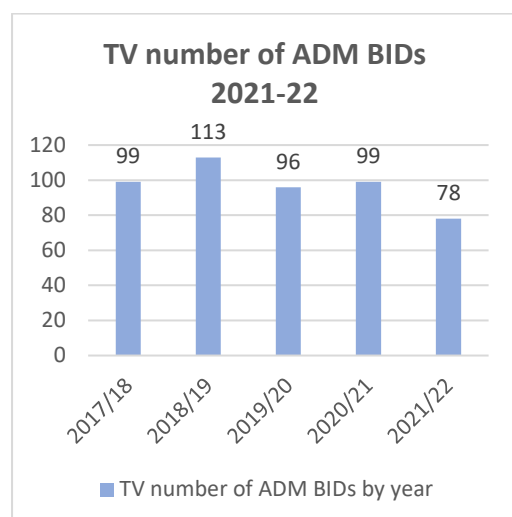
Year	DBC	HBC	MBC	R&CBC	SBC	TV
2020-21	26	28	58	31	52	195
2021-22	27	15	61	37	39	179

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

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

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

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

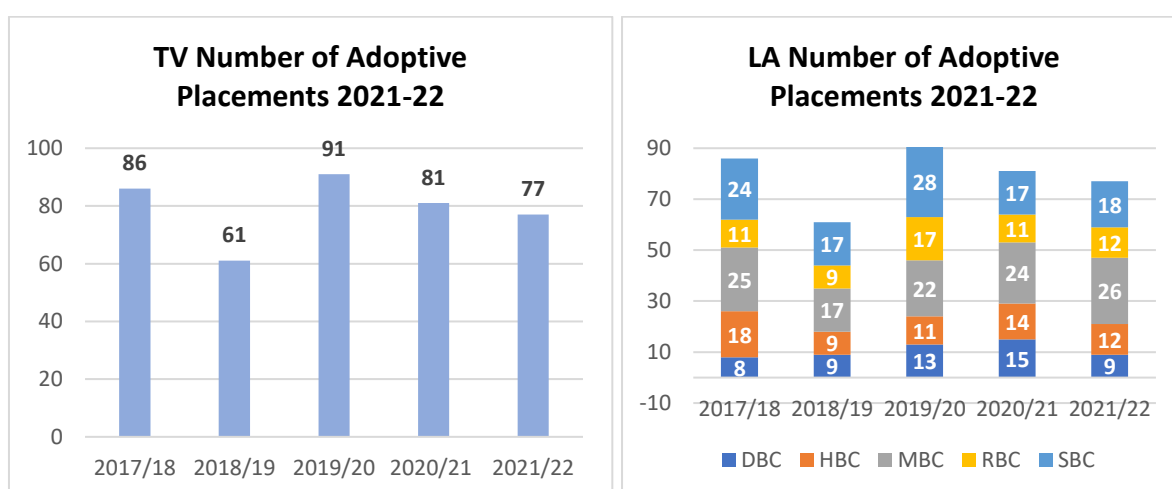


Agency Decisions that adoption is the child's plan, and Placement Orders granted, decreased both nationally, and regionally, compared with the

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

## 6.7 Children Matched and Placed

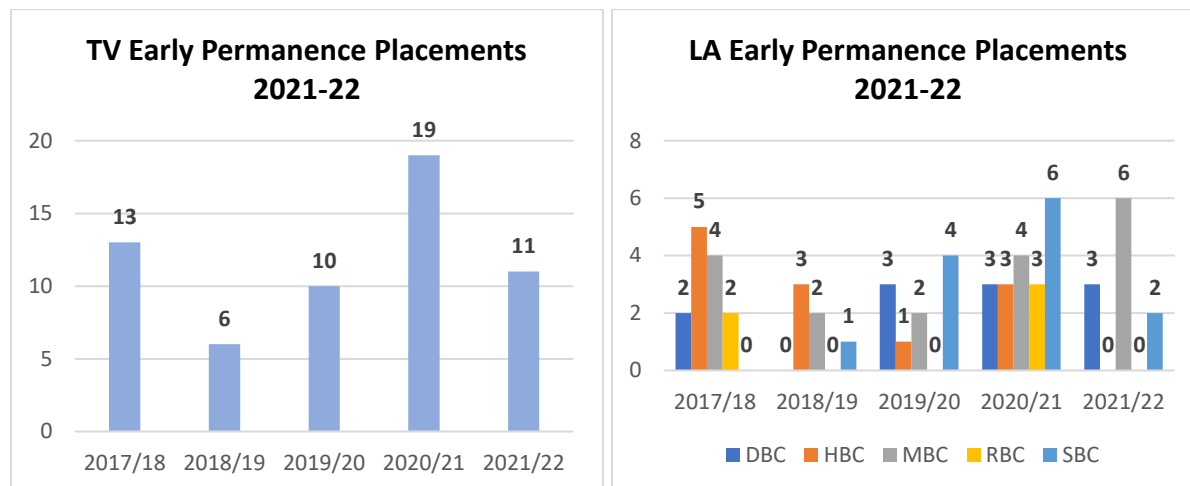
	Totals 2020-21	2021-22 Q1 and Q2	2021-22 Q2 and Q3	2021-22 Totals
ATV children placed with ATV adopters	52	44	14	58
ATV Children placed with external adopters	30	12	7	19
External children placed with ATV adopters	2	0	0	0
Total ATV children placed	<b>82</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>77</b>
Total placements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



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

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

## 6.8 Early Permanence



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

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

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

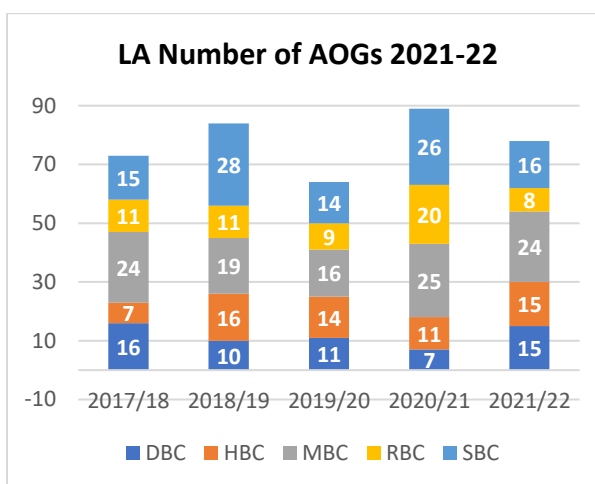
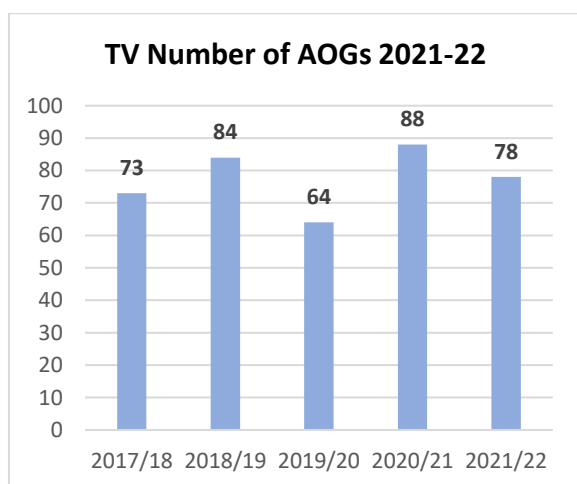
The regional EP Sufficiency project is tasked with addressing EP support to carers across the region.

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

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

## 6.9 Adoption Orders Granted

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



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



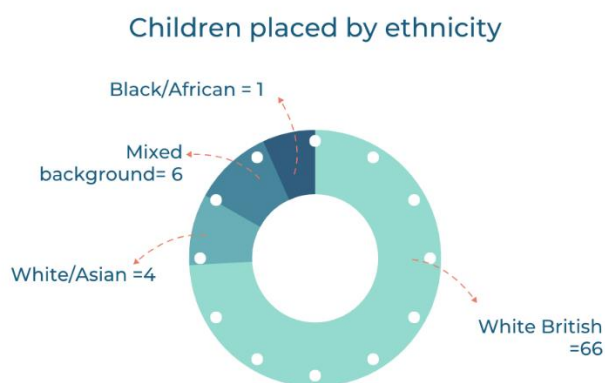
## 6.10 Characteristics of children

### *Age at the time of moving in with the adoptive family*

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

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

### *Ethnicity of Children Placed*

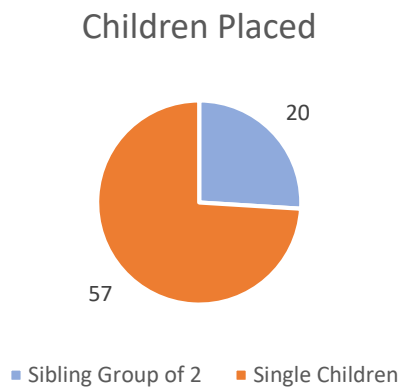


86 % of children who have moved into their adoptive family are of white British backgrounds. Of children with minority ethnic heritage, there is a range of backgrounds, with no predominant minority ethnic group for children requiring adoption.

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

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

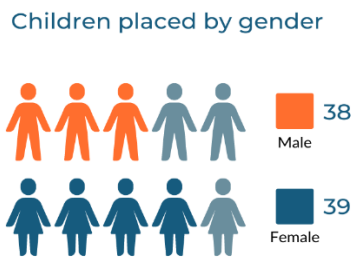
### *Siblings/Additional needs*



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

Gender

38 children placed were male, and 39 were female



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

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

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

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

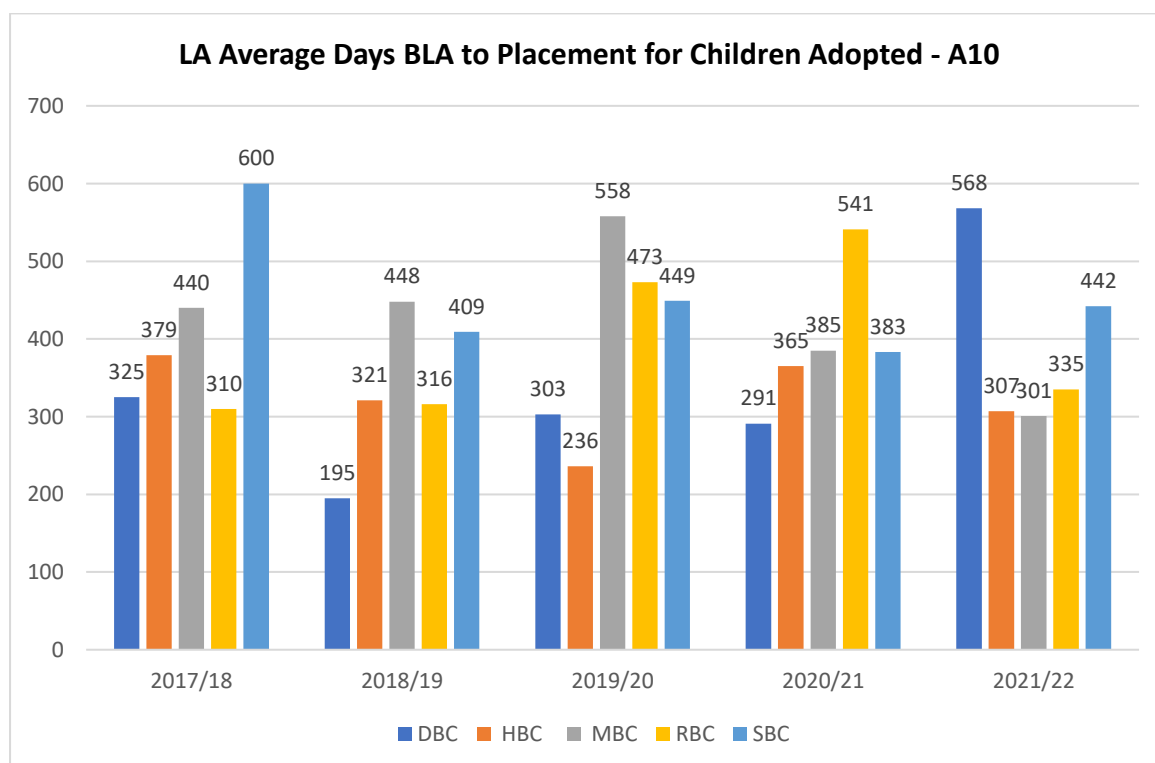
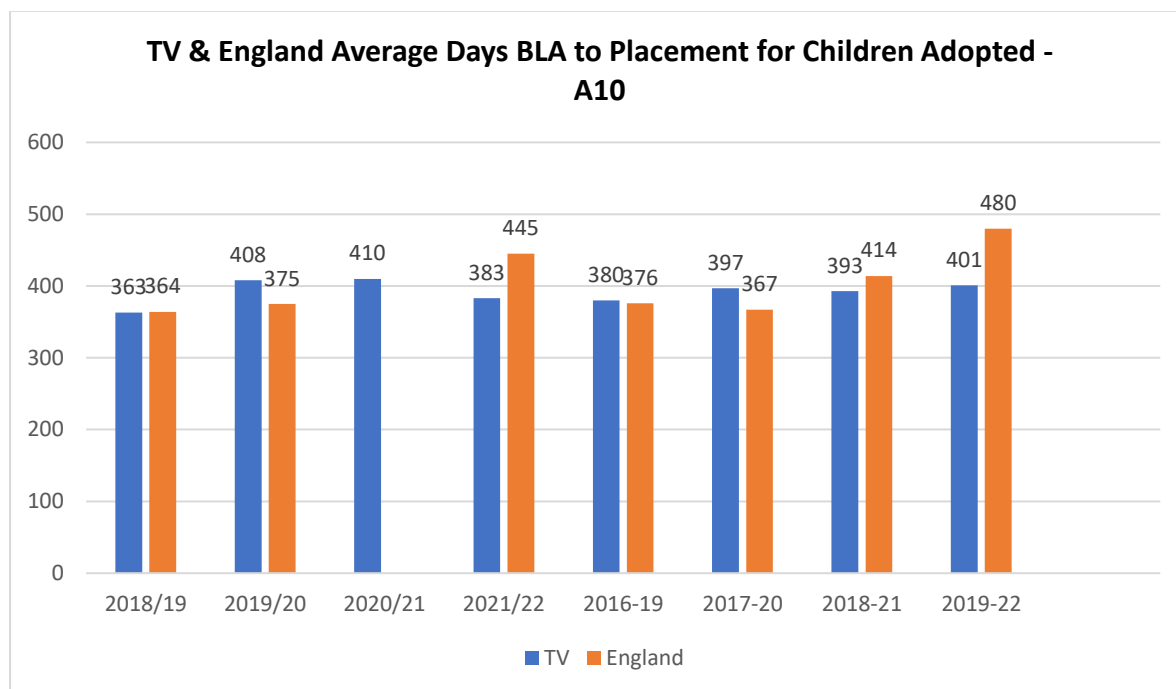
1 child was unlinked.

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

## 6.12 Children's timescales for adoption

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

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



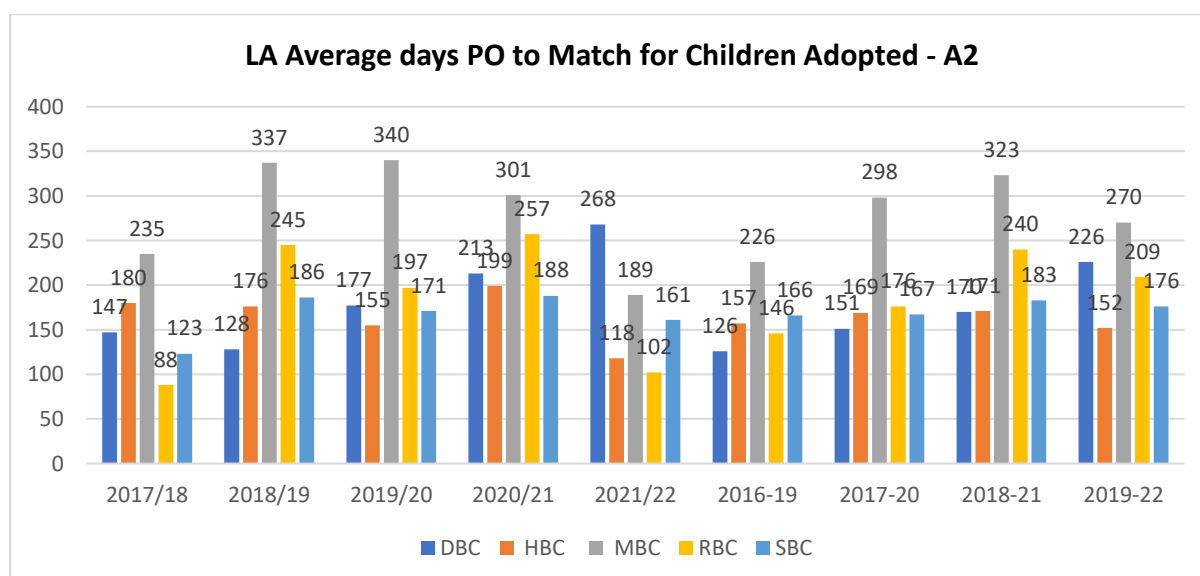
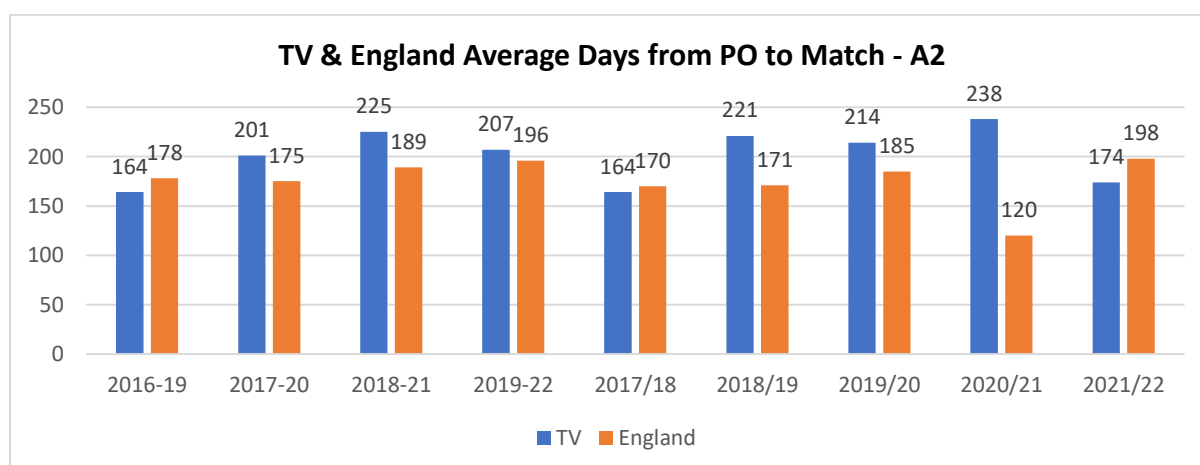
Timeliness for children to find and move in with their adoptive family has significantly improved this year, and ATV is performing well ahead of the

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

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

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

### Placement Order to Match (A2) (days)



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

### **6.13 Disruptions**

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

## **7. Adoption Panel**

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

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

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

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

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

The chair reports as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Strengths**

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

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

### **Areas for Development**

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

## **8. Adoption Support**

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

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

**Tier 1** is universal support which includes:

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

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

- Therapeutic Parenting courses, as detailed below



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

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

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

## 8.1 Adoption Support Audit

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

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

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

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

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

### **Future National Strategic Developments in Adoption Support**

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

## **8.2 Developments in Adoption Support ATV**

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

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

Development over this period:

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

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

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

### 8.3 Adoption Support -Referrals and Assessments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### *Adopter Hub*

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

#### *Newsletter and ATV Facebook*

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

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

### **8.4 Therapeutic Providers- Commissioned services**

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

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

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

### **8.5 Therapeutic parenting and Supporting the Sensory needs of children**

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

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

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

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

## **8.6 Education Support**

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

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

Leanne Albeson, Education Support Worker highlights:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 9. Non-Agency Adoptions

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

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

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

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

## 10. Staffing

ATV had the following organisational structure, within the year:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Staff Engagement*

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

### *Staff Training*

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

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

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

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

### *Staff Absence*

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

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

### *Staff Turnover*

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

## **11. Quality Assurance**

National Minimum Standard 25.

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

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

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

- The Adoption Panel Chairs meet with the Service Manager and provide a report bi-annually to the Service Manager, which will be presented to the Board; Panel; and to the team, for learning and improvement where required.
- Staff performance is monitored via supervision, which is monthly for all staff.
- A case practice audit tool has been developed. Case practice audits were undertaken, across a sample of case records, with managers independent of that case, and the worker. These was collated into a thematic audit report for board to consider.
- Most staff, and all managers have had an annual appraisal.
- Most central List members and Panel Chairs have an annual appraisal. Panel chairs now request that the agency collates themes from appraisal for the annual report. Panel training has been delivered to panel members arising from feedback from panel appraisals.
- Team meetings take place monthly, and are used to convey policy and practice information, involve staff in developments and any quality improvements that are required.
- Adopter feedback has been sought via a survey.
- The Service Manager, and Team Manager, post adoption support, have reviewed and monitored work undertaken by external agencies for post adoption support, to ensure that work supports outcomes and delivers best value.

## 12. Finance

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

### **2021/22 Financial Year End Position**

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

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

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

### **Interagency Fees**

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

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

Key areas of overspend:

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

### **New Funding Formula from 1.4.22**

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

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

The future split from 1.4.22 will be as follows:

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

### 13. Development Plan for ATV

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

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

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

Vicky Davidson Boyd

Service Manager

Adoption Tees Valley 22.7.22





# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

6<sup>th</sup> September 2022



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

**Subject:** ANNUAL REPORT OF CHILDREN SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS 1 APRIL 2021 – 31 MARCH 2022

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## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For information.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To present to members the Annual Report of Children Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2021/22

## 3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Annual Complaints and Compliments Report provides information on the complaints for children's social care and public health. It summarises information in relation to complaints that have been received and responded to, as well as compliments received during the reporting period.

## 4. PROPOSALS

4.1 The report is attached as **Appendix 1** and provides an analysis of complaints and compliments during the reporting period. The report outlines where learning has occurred from complaints and actions implemented as a result.

4.2 The report includes:

- Complaints and compliments received in 2021/22
- Outcomes of complaints;
- Actions undertaken following findings; and
- Complaints considered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2021/22.

## **5. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE COMPLIMENTS/ COMPLAINTS**

- 5.1 During 2021/22, 29 compliments have been recorded relating to children's social care. These range from an expression of thanks and appreciation in the form of a thank-you card to written communication. The number of compliments reported to and recorded by the Quality and Review Team has decreased by 17 compliments compared to 2020/21.
- 5.2 A total of 61 complaints were received in 2021/22. The number of complaints received has increased by 21 from the previous year.
- 5.3 Of the 61 complaints received in 2021/22, 25 complaints were not considered further leaving 36 complaints for investigation. This is an increase of 16 complaints investigated in 2021/22 than the previous year.
- 5.4 Details of the different stages of investigation are included within the annual report (**Appendix A**)

## **6. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no risk implications identified.

## **7. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no financial considerations identified.

## **8. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no legal considerations identified.

## **9. CONSULTATION**

- 9.1 There is no consultation required in relation to this issue.

## **10. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY**

- 10.1 There are no child and family poverty considerations identified.

## **11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no equality and diversity considerations identified.

## **12. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS**

- 12.1 There are no staff considerations identified.

## **13. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 13.1 There are no asset management considerations identified.

## **14. ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 14.1 There are no environment, sustainability or climate change considerations.

## **15. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 15.1 That members of Children's Services Committee note the contents of the Annual Report of Complaints and Compliments 2021/22 and note that the report will be published online.

## **16. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 16.1 It is a requirement that an Annual Report regarding complaints is prepared and presented to the relevant Policy Committee and published on the Council's website.

## **17. CONTACT OFFICER**

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# Children's and Joint Commissioning Services Annual Complaint Report 2021-2022



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## Appendices

**A:** Examples of compliments received in children's social care services

**B:** Examples of actions taken in complaints about children's social care services

## 1. Introduction

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Welcome to Hartlepool Borough Council's Children's and Joint Commissioning Services Complaints, Compliments and Representations Annual Report. The report covers statutory complaints and compliments received for children's social care services and public health functions for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

The report outlines:

- Details of the complaints and compliments received over the reporting period;
- Performance in relation to handling of complaints;
- Actions implemented, any lessons learned and resulting improvements following enquiry into complaints.

## 2. Background

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Complaints and compliments are valued as an important source of feedback on the quality of services. Each complaint is investigated and, where appropriate, redress made. Equally important is the work to learn lessons to prevent a repeat of failure in service quality and continually improve services.

### 2.1. What is a complaint?

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about a service that is being delivered, or the failure to deliver a service. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman define a complaint as *"an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or on its behalf by a contractor or partner) that requires a response."*

A complaint can be made in person, in writing, by telephone or email or through the council's website. It can be made at any office. Every effort is made to assist people in making their complaint and any member of staff can take a complaint.

## 2.2. Who can complain?

A complaint can be made by:

- A child or young person
- A parent or carer
- Special Guardians
- Anyone who is or is likely to be affected by the actions, decisions or omissions of the service that is the subject of a complaint.

## 3. Children's Social Care Complaint Framework

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### 3.1. Complaint management arrangements

The statutory complaint function for children's social care sits within Quality and Review under the management of the Head of Service (Quality and Review).

The remit of the Complaints Manager's function is:

- Managing, developing and administering the complaint procedure.
- Providing assistance and advice to those who wish to complain.
- Overseeing the investigation of complaints that cannot be managed at source.
- Supporting and training staff.
- Monitoring and reporting on complaints activity.

### 3.2. The complaint regulations and procedure

The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 came into force from 1 September 2006. This procedure is for representations received from children and young people, their parents, foster carers or other qualifying adults about social care services provided or commissioned by children's social care. The full detail of the complaints procedure is available on the Council's website at:

[https://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/info/20004/council\\_and\\_democracy/429/complaints\\_comments\\_and\\_compliments](https://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/info/20004/council_and_democracy/429/complaints_comments_and_compliments)

The Regulations and Statutory Guidance '*Getting the Best from Complaints*' are now fully embedded into the children's social care complaints system and

information derived from complaints is included in the annual monitoring of children's social care and made available to the public.

A child or young person who make a representation is allocated the services of an Advocate to enable their views to be effectively promoted.

There are three stages to the procedure.

#### » Stage 1

**Local Resolution:** The aim of stage 1 is to sort out the matter as quickly as possible. The complaint will be allocated to a manager who will contact the complainant to discuss the complaint. Stage 1 of the complaints procedure should be completed within 10 working days but if there are a number of issues to look into, this can be extended up to 20 working days. The complainant will receive a response to the complaint in writing.

#### » Stage 2

**Investigation:** This part of the procedure is used when the complainant remains unhappy after their complaint has been responded to at Stage 1 or the complaint is sufficiently serious enough to warrant a more formal investigation. Investigations are conducted by an Investigating Officer who must be independent of the service area and/or decision making being complained about. Sometimes, an Investigating Officer external to the Council is appointed when the issues complained about are complex, have a number of elements to them or there is sufficient justification to appoint an external Investigating Officer. An Independent Person is also appointed at Stage 2. This is a statutory role and the Independent Person (who is external to the Council) works alongside the Investigating Officer with a remit to ensure that the process is open, transparent and fair.

Reports completed by the Investigating Officer and Independent Person are submitted to an Adjudicating Officer (usually the Assistant Director) for response.

The investigation and adjudication process should be concluded within 65 working days.



### » Stage 3

**Independent Complaint Review Panel:** If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2, they may request that the issues are taken to a Complaint Review Panel (Stage 3). The Panel consists of an Independent Chair and two independent panel members. The Panel considers the complaint and can make recommendations to the Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services within 5 working days of the Panel meeting.

The Director is required to make a formal response to any findings and recommendations of the Review Panel within 15 working days of receiving the Panel's report.

### 3.3. Referral to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

If, at the end of the complaints procedure, the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome or the way in which their complaint has been handled, they may ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) to investigate their complaint. Complainants may also approach the LGSCO directly without accessing the complaints process. In these cases it is usual for the LGSCO to refer them back to the Council for their complaint to be examined through the relevant complaints process before they intervene.

## 4. Public Health Complaint Framework

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### 4.1. The complaint regulations

The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012 cover the statutory complaint handling arrangements relating to public health functions of a Local Authority. These regulations also cover the provision of services by a service provider where the complaint relates to public health functions for which the Local Authority Director of Public Health has responsibility for.

## 4.2. Complaint management arrangements

The statutory complaint function for public health also sits within the Quality and Review Service under the management of the Head of Service (Quality and Review).

## 5. Principles and outcomes

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Good handling of complaints and representations involves:

- Keeping the complainant at the centre of the complaints process;
- Being open and accountable;
- Responding to complainants in a way that is fair;
- Being committed to try to get things right when they go wrong;
- Seeking to continually improve services.

Statutory complaints are underpinned by the following:

- A procedure that aims to be fair, clear, robust and accessible;
- Support being available to those wishing to make a complaint;
- Timely resolution following enquiry into complaints/representations;
- Lessons learnt following complaints and services improved;
- Monitoring being used as a means of improving performance.

## 6. Public information

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Information about the complaints and representations framework is accessible via the Council's public access points and also the Council's website at: [https://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/info/20004/council\\_and\\_democracy/429/complaints\\_comments\\_and\\_compliments](https://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/info/20004/council_and_democracy/429/complaints_comments_and_compliments)

Children, young people and their carers are provided with factsheets explaining the procedure.

Information in other formats such as large print or Braille or translation in languages other than English are made available upon request.

## 7. Summary of representations

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### 7.1. Compliments

Compliments are generally recognised to be an indicator of good outcomes for children, young people and their families. They also serve to provide wider lessons regarding the quality of services.

During 2021/22, 29 compliments have been recorded relating to children's social care. These range from an expression of thanks and appreciation in the form of a thank-you card to written communication. The number of compliments reported to and recorded by the Quality and Review Team has decreased by 17 compliments compared to 2020/21. The decrease in compliments recorded may partly relate to the workforce not forwarding on the compliment they have received to the Quality and Review Team. The Quality and Review Team will continue to remind and reinforce the importance of forwarding expressions of thanks and appreciation from children and their families on to the Quality and Review Team for recording and reporting purposes. Appendix A provides some examples of compliments received during the period.

### 7.2. Complaints received in 2021/22 – Children's social care

A total of 61 complaints were received in 2021/22. The number of complaints received has increased by 21 from the previous year. Actions implemented to improve services as a result of complaints are outlined in Appendix B. There were 3 complaints carried forward to 2021/22 from 2020/21. Of these:

- 1 complainant, whose complaint was first responded to at Stage 1, progressed their complaint onto Stage 2 investigation. The complainant did not progress their complaint on to Stage 3 Complaint Review Panel following the conclusion of the Stage 2 process.
- 1 complainant, whose complaint progressed straight to Stage 2, progressed their complaint onto Stage 3 Complaint Review Panel.

The complainant was satisfied following the conclusion of the Stage 3 process and did not progress their complaint onto the LGSCO.

- 1 complainant, whose complaint was first responded to at Stage 1 and investigated at Stage 2, progressed their complaint onto Stage 3 Complaint Review Panel. It is not known whether the complainant will progress their complaint onto the LGSCO.

Of the 61 complaints received in 2021/22, 25 complaints were not considered further leaving 36 complaints for investigation. This is an increase of 16 complaints investigated in 2021/22 than the previous year.

Of the 25 complaints not considered further, this was because:

- 15 complaints related to ongoing or concluded court proceedings. Any dissatisfaction about legal proceedings cannot be considered within the complaints framework. These should be raised during the court proceedings before decisions are reached by a Judge or, in the case of disagreement with decisions made within proceedings, via the legal appeal process. The complainant was informed that their representation could not be considered under the complaints procedure together with the reason(s) why and signposted to the LGSCO if they remained unhappy with the decision not to accept or investigate their complaint.
- 4 complaints were withdrawn by the complainant who had decided they no longer wished for their dissatisfaction to be addressed within the complaints framework.
- 2 complaints related to subject matters which had happened more than 12 months ago. Statutory complaint regulations stipulate that Councils do not need to consider complaints made more than one year after the grounds for the representation arose but they can exercise discretion to accept and investigate a complaint made after the 12 month timescale in certain circumstances. Having considered the detail of the complaint and whether there were any exceptional circumstances or good reasons why the complaint could not have

made within 12 months of the date of the subject matter giving rise to the complaint, the complainant was informed that their representation would not be accepted for investigation together with the reason(s) why and signposted to the LGSCO if they remained unhappy with the Council's decision not to accept and investigate their complaint.

- 2 complaints received related to another organisation. The Council outlined why it could not investigate the complaint and signposted the complainant to the relevant organisation responsible for the subject matter being complained about.
- 1 complaint received related to dissatisfaction with the outcome of an assessment. However, the assessment was not concluded. The complainant was notified the complaint made was premature and advised they could resubmit their complaint if they still remained unhappy once the assessment had been concluded.
- 1 complaint was withdrawn by the Council when the complainant did not communicate further despite repeated efforts by the Council to engage with the complainant.

Of the 61 complaints received:

- 46 complaints were received from a parent;
- 7 complaints were received from a grandparent;
- 3 complaints were received from another family relative of the child;
- 3 complaints were received from a child/young person;
- 1 complaint was received from an adopter; and
- 1 complaint was received from a foster carer.

Of the 36 complaints investigated:

- 34 complaints were responded to at Stage 1 in the first instance; and
- 2 complaints proceeded directly to Stage 2 investigation without being first considered at Stage 1.

- Of the 34 complaints responded to at Stage 1:
  - 26 complaints were resolved; and
  - 8 complaints progressed to Stage 2 investigation.
- Of the 10 complaints investigated at Stage 2:
  - 1 complaint was withdrawn at Stage 2 by the Council when the complainant did not engage despite repeated efforts made by the Investigating Officer (overseen by an Independent Person) to engage the complainant;
  - 2 complaints concluded following the completion of the Stage 2 investigation process; and
  - 7 complaints remain ongoing at Stage 2 investigation.

### **7.3. Advocacy services**

Of the 61 complaints received, 2 of the 3 complaints received from a child/young person chose to have an advocate support them during the complaint process. In the case of the 1 remaining complaint received from a child/young person, they chose to discuss their wishes and feelings with their Social Worker rather than an Advocate.

### **7.4. Complaints considered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in 2021/22**

There were 4 complainants who approached the LGSCO about their complaint during 2021/22. Of these:

- 3 complaints were from the 15 complaints which were not considered further and related to ongoing or concluded court proceedings. In each complaint, the LGSCO decided that they have no power to investigate the complaint because the substance of the complaint related to a Social Worker's report and/or their evidence given to Court. The LGSCO cannot investigate what happened in Court; and
- 1 complaint was from the 2 complaints which were not considered further because they related to another organisation. The LGSCO decided it could not investigate the complaint because the matters being complained about did not relate to the Council and were outside of the Council's and LGSCO's jurisdiction to investigate.

### **7.5. Complaints carried forward to 2022/23**

A total of 7 complaints from 2021/22 remain at Stage 2 investigation and will be carried forward to 2022/23.

### **7.6. Complaints in 2021/22 – Public Health Functions**

There was 1 complaint received in relation to public health functions during 2021/22 which was partly upheld and resolved following investigation.

## **8. Actions taken following complaints**

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Actions implemented following the conclusion of a complaint are an important aspect of the complaints framework. Appendix B outlines the context of some actions that have been put in place to improve services as a direct result of complaints and representations received in children's social care.

## **9. Conclusions and way forward**

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### **9.1. Going forward**

We continue to ensure that a person-centred approach is adopted for the handling and investigation of each complaint. We will continue to focus on ensuring we monitor that: complainants receive appropriate and timely feedback on complaints; appropriate apologies are offered; and any service improvement recommendations are delivered.

### **9.2. Action plan**

Actions for 2022/23 are as follows:

- Develop a dedicated toolkit for those managers allocated to investigate children's social care complaints.
- Review the training needs of managers and commission training for those managers who are allocated complaints to investigate.
- Continue to raise awareness of lessons learnt from complaints by ensuring:
  - they are collated on a quarterly basis for discussion to inform learning at the continuous improvement group;

- any workforce development needs are identified and training implemented; and
  - the electronic practice manual is updated to reflect any changes to policies and procedures.
- Continue to remind and encourage the workforce to inform the Quality and Review Team when expressions of thanks have been received for recording and reporting purposes. These provide an indication of satisfaction with services and should be recorded and reported.



## Appendix A: Examples of compliments received across Children's Social Care Services

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*"I want to say how impressed I have been at what you've achieved with the family since you got involved. You've made more positive difference to H's life in that short space of time than any other professionals they've ever met, and it's been really nice to be able to hear in your voice how much it matters to you."*

From another professional about a Social Worker's work with a family

*"B's knowledge of this case was exemplary, she was child focused and very balanced in her approach. The support offered to mum and the carers has been fantastic. B's verbal evidence was outstanding – her passion and knowledge was evident."*

From a Children's Guardian about a Social Worker

*"Thanks again for everything you've done for L, your care, support and patience will not be forgotten."*

From a parent about a Social Worker

*"Just want to say a massive thank you for everything you have done for all of us through all of this you have been amazing and have gone above and beyond. Thank you so much."*

From a child's family about a Social Worker

*"T has been fantastic. T has taught me how to be a real dad. He's planted a seed in my head and it's grown and grown."*

From a parent about a Social Worker

*"Just wannsay thanks for everything you've done for me, it was all for the best and without your support I deffo wouldn't be where I am good luck for your next plan. You made me cry when you said you're proud of me."*

From a young person about a Social Worker

*"I felt compelled to email you to thank you and A for the amazing support you have given us. A has been incredibly thorough and understanding about our needs and has given us the support and advice we have needed and above all else has listened with compassion and professionalism. I am well aware of the pressure and workload social services teams are under and thus to receive the support and guidance we needed in a very timely way is something my wife and I are very grateful for."*

From a parent about a Social Worker

*"I just wanted to say I was very impressed with the planning of the placement and introductions for the girls. I was previously LA SW for looked after children and the focus on planning with intention to place for permanency is fantastic."*

From another professional about the Fostering and Placement Team

## Appendix B: Examples of actions taken in complaints about Children's Social Care Services

Details of complaint/Outcome	Actions following findings
<p>The complainant was unhappy that a Social Worker had shared incorrect information with the Emergency Duty Team and expressed that the Social Worker had not visited the children whilst they were in her care in accordance with relevant procedures and timescales.</p> <p><b>Concluded at Stage 1</b></p>	<p>The Team Manager looked into the matters raised and was able to resolve these with the complainant. The Team Manager apologised for incorrect information being shared and reminded the Social Worker concerned of the need to thoroughly check information being shared to ensure it is accurately reported.</p> <p>Additionally, as the children resided across multiple households, it was agreed planned and unannounced visits would alternate between the households so the children could be seen in all their environments.</p>
<p>The complainant was unhappy that her child had been denied an assessment for a specialist bed.</p> <p><b>Concluded at Stage 1</b></p>	<p>A Team Manager explored the issue raised in conjunction with Occupational Therapy (OT) and found that an OT assessment had been completed but a specialist assessment from CAMHS was required before any further OT recommendations could be made. This was explained to the complainant and a proposal on how the matter could be moved forward was offered to the complainant.</p>

Details of complaint/Outcome	Actions following findings
<p>The complainant (a young person supported by an Advocate) expressed that her Social Worker was unreliable and she was unhappy about this.</p> <p><b>Concluded at Stage 1</b></p>	<p>The Head of Service visited the complainant who had pre-prepared some examples and her reasons why she believed the Social Worker was unreliable to discuss with the Head of Service and asked for a new Social Worker. The Head of Service agreed to allocate another Social Worker and expressed that she was sorry to hear the Social Worker had made her unhappy. The name of the new Social Worker was confirmed to the complainant in writing who was happy with the outcome of her complaint.</p>
<p>The complainant expressed concerns that the Social Worker was arriving late for planned appointments sometimes close to the children's bedtime.</p> <p><b>Concluded at Stage 1</b></p>	<p>The Team Manager assured the complainant that the Social Worker will send a message to let her know if she is going to be delayed and will seek to avoid visits late in the day so as not to disrupt the children's bedtime arrangements.</p>
<p>The complainant (a young person) expressed that he had been asking for a new placement for a long time but nothing had been done and was unhappy about this.</p> <p><b>Concluded at Stage 1</b></p>	<p>The Social Worker talked to the complainant about his wishes and feelings together with what he was unhappy about with his placement. The complainant was able to express his frustrations and later confirmed that he wanted to stay in his existing placement to finish his education.</p> <p>The complainant expressed he was happy to talk to his Social Worker and felt much happier.</p> <p>The Team Manager sent a letter to the complainant about what was discussed and agreed in relation to his complaint.</p>

Details of complaint/Outcome	Actions following findings
<p>The complainant was unhappy about her child's respite provision and expressed she had not informed this would stop or why it had been stopped.</p> <p><b>Concluded at Stage 1</b></p>	<p>The Team Manager looked into what had happened and although it was found the complainant had been informed together with the reason why within meetings, the written plans and minutes had not been shared with the complainant as they should have been.</p> <p>The Team Manager apologised for this and copies were provided to the complainant. The Social Worker also offered to meet the complainant to apologise in person for not sharing the plans and minutes in a timely way and explain the process again given the complainant may not have fully understood this.</p>
<p>The complainant was unhappy with the actions of a foster carer who she believed had breached HM Government's Covid guidance around isolation and, as a consequence, placed another family at risk.</p> <p><b>Concluded at Stage 1</b></p>	<p>Although the Team Manager found Covid guidance around isolation had been breached, there was no reason to believe there had been deliberate intent to cause harm but simply the foster carer had not wanted to disappoint the children.</p> <p>All foster carers were reminded of their duty to abide by HM Government Covid guidance around isolation and the foster carer provided an apology to the complainant.</p>