



Annual Report

2024-2025



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1. Executive Summary

Adoption Tees Valley has continued to thrive and develop as a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), with this year seeing a greater degree of pan-regional partnership working with our neighbouring North East RAA's- Adopt Coast to Coast and Adopt North East. Regional partnership working has enabled the RAA to draw funding from Adoption England for development and positive impact, aligned to the objectives in the National Adoption Strategy.

1.1 Adoption Nationally

Nationally, the numbers of children being placed for adoption and numbers adopted have been falling and adopter sufficiency remains a challenge. The numbers of adopters recruited in ATV has increased by 28% which has been very encouraging. We know nationally that adoption provides a stable and secure childhood for many children, however, there is an increasing awareness that adopted children have many complex long-term emotional, social, learning and health needs arising from early trauma, neglect, and harm. Their needs must be understood in the context of early care experience, and their adoptive parents need support to meet these needs and provide nurturing family life. Adoptive parents, and young people themselves, tell us they need services to provide continuing support, available as and when needed throughout childhood and into adulthood.

1.2 Culture Change in Adoption

Work has been underway to raise awareness of the need to modernize adoption practice across the Tees Valley. In November 2024 the Public Law Working Group published guidance based on Sir Andrew McFarlane's speech around the importance of maintaining lifelong links for adopted children. The report made numerous recommendations which has caused an impact on how contact plans are being considered and formulated.

We recognise the continued importance of the need to remain open to birth family contact, and investing our professional care, effort and resources into maintaining those relationships, whether directly, or indirectly. Through the research undertaken by UEA, and the Adoption Barometer (Adoption UK) we know that for adopted adults and young people there is a huge importance in understanding their families of origin, reasons for being adopted, and maintaining those lifelong links. ATV has engaged with the national programme and through discussion with the Board and partners, will be developing ethos

and culture which promotes a greater understanding and opportunity for maintaining significant relationships. ATV are working closely with its Local Authorities to consider the whole system change and identify workforce development needs.

1.3 Early Permanence

Early permanence in adoption continues to be a key priority nationally, and for the region and ATV. The EP project came to an end in March, however plans to continue the regional work are in place. ATV were proud to report a significant rise in EP placements across the year and reported a significant increase on the previous year's data from 8 to 27 placements. Work will continue to ensure the opportunity is created for more children to access an early permanence placement, however, there is good evidence over this year of significant strengthening of practice and understanding

1.4 Voice and Influence

The Voice and Influence group continues to build momentum and membership is consistent. The Adoptbats group held a movie premiere in November to launch their film *Its My Story*, aimed at helping adults and education staff understand what it is like to be adopted. Adoption England invited the group to open the annual adoption conference in April to showcase the work and to assist ATV social workers in running workshops as part of the event. This has been a landmark event for ATV and plans continue to evolve and strengthen the voice of young people.

1.5 Multi-Disciplinary Support to adopted children and families- MDASS

During this period Adoption Tees Valley has worked closely with Adopt North East, Adopt Coast to Coast and the NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) to establish the MDASS service, across the NE region. The model of support is Dyadic Developmental Psychology (DDP) which focusses on attachment, for children who have had early experience of trauma, neglect and harm.

The aim of MDASS will be to significantly strengthen the support to families, from a multi-disciplinary therapeutic perspective, providing access to psychological consultation, assessment and intervention, for children with multiple and complex needs. This service will be aimed at getting more quicker to deliver a therapeutic plan which will help children. It will aim to reduce the pressures of

children's needs, improve quality of family life and outcomes, and prevent family breakdown.

1.6 The work of ATV

Recruitment of prospective adopters has been a challenge for the agency over this year, a challenge also for many other regional and national RAA's. It is thought that the cost-of-living crisis, alongside the effects of the pandemic seeing a rise in adult mental ill health and increasing awareness of the complex needs of adopted children has impacted on the numbers of people wanting to consider adoption. We want to continue to show the public that ATV, and partners are there to support children and families in the short and longer term.

Adoption England released a mystery shopper report during this period. Adoption Tees Valley were cited in the report as an example of providing exceptional customer service and were ranked second in the country based on the criteria used breaking it down into key areas.

The numbers of children placed has been largely stable over this past year and is comparable with the previous year. However, we have seen a significant rise in the number of children who were placed with early permanence carers.

During this year, ATV has continued to develop specialist areas within the service which offers consistency and efficiency. Introducing an enquiry team model has assisted with the rise in adopter recruitment and the number of EP carers. Building on the success of the enquiry team there are plans to develop this team to incorporate all adoption related enquiries including adoption support, maintaining relationships, partner adoptions and duty. The fourth team will become the ATV Adoption Hub.

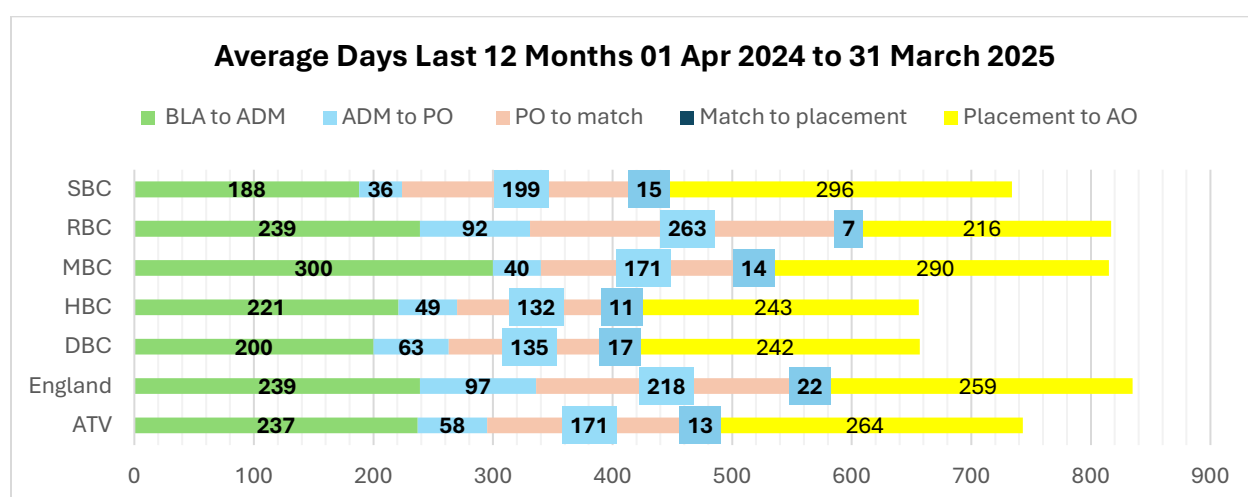
2. Governance

Adoption Tees Valley is overseen by the Board of Directors, which is comprised of Directors, or Assistant Directors of the 5 Local Authorities; an adoptive parent; a Virtual School Head. The ATV Service Manager attends all Board meetings. The ATV Board provides strategic direction, oversee finance and overall governance of the RAA.

Each LA Council oversees the work of the RAA through presentation of the Annual and Bi Annual reports at Scrutiny, and/or Corporate Parenting Boards, and in some cases, representation of elected members on the ATV Panel.

3. Key Performance Indicators for the period 1.4.24-31.3.25

Key Indicator	ATV 2022-23	ATV 2023-24	ATV 2024 -25	Current c/w previous	National Govt Target where applicable
Adopter Approvals	55	38	44	Inc 16%	N/A
Children referred to ATV	223	138	99	Dec 28%	N/A
Children with ADM -BID (Best interests' decision)	100	87	83	Dec 5%	N/A
PO	87	79	66	Dec 16%	N/A
Matches	81	75	67	Dec 11%	
Placed	76	78	65	Dec 16%	N/A
Early Permanence	11	8	27	Inc 237%	
Adoption Orders	84	76	64	Dec 16%	N/A
Disruptions – pre order	1	12	0	Improved	N/A
Timescale – A2 (PO to match)	146 days	130 days	171days	Inc 30%	121 days
Timescale A10 – BLA-Moved in with Adopters	411 days	392 days	385 days	Improved	421 days



The above data will be referred to in each section, to provide a base line for discussion and review of the year's performance.

Where applicable, data for each Local Authority will be detailed within the report.

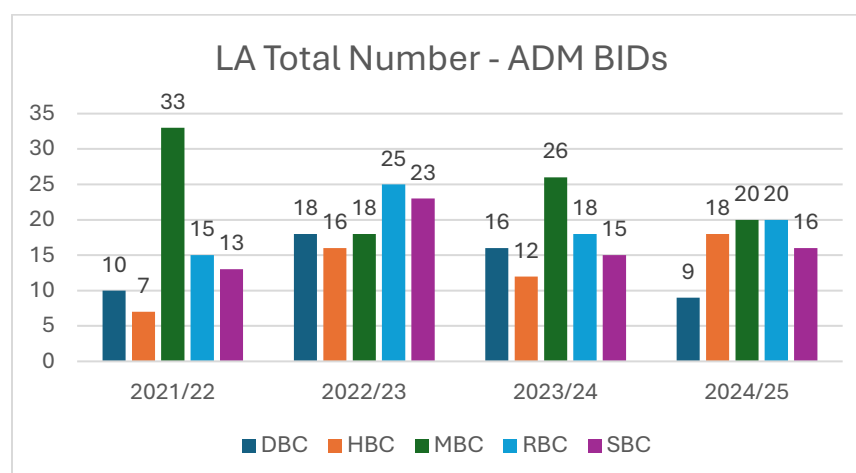
4. Children Referred, Permanence Planning, Matching and Placements

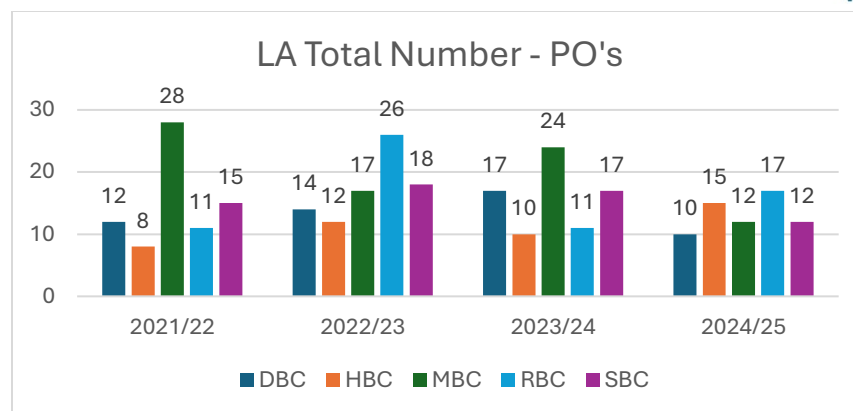
4.1 ATV and Local Authority Data

The numbers of children referred to ATV has continued to decrease within this period. The data does suggest that the LA's may be improving the earlier planning and referring children who are more likely to go on to an adoption plan.

In the previous year the conversion from referral to ADM was 63%, while in this year the conversion rate was 83%. This means the children referred are more likely to go on to have an adoption plan.

The numbers of children where the Local Authority has made a Best Interests plan of adoption (ADM BID) has decreased slightly to 83, and the numbers of children who have gone on to Placement Order (PO) is 66, a decrease of 16% on the previous year.



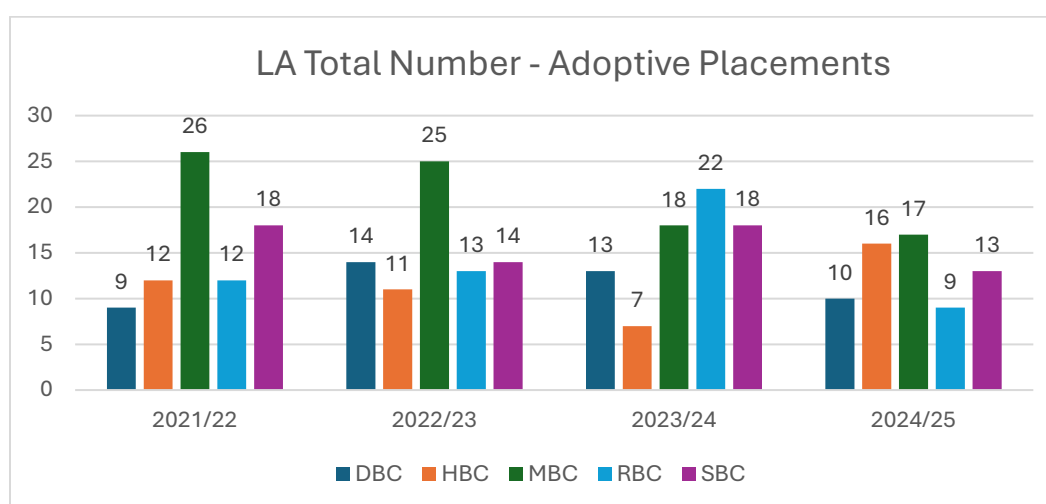


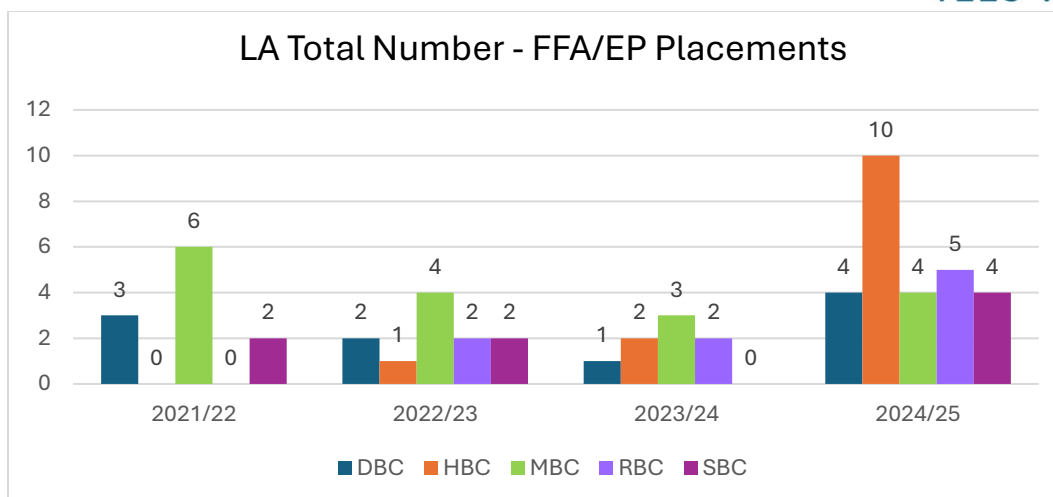
For individual Local Authorities, Middlesbrough has returned to the numbers of ADM's that is more consistent with previous years but had a significant drop in PO on previous years.

Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton have had marginal change to the numbers of ADM's compared with the previous year, and Redcar and Cleveland had a significant rise in Placement Orders, from 11, to 17.

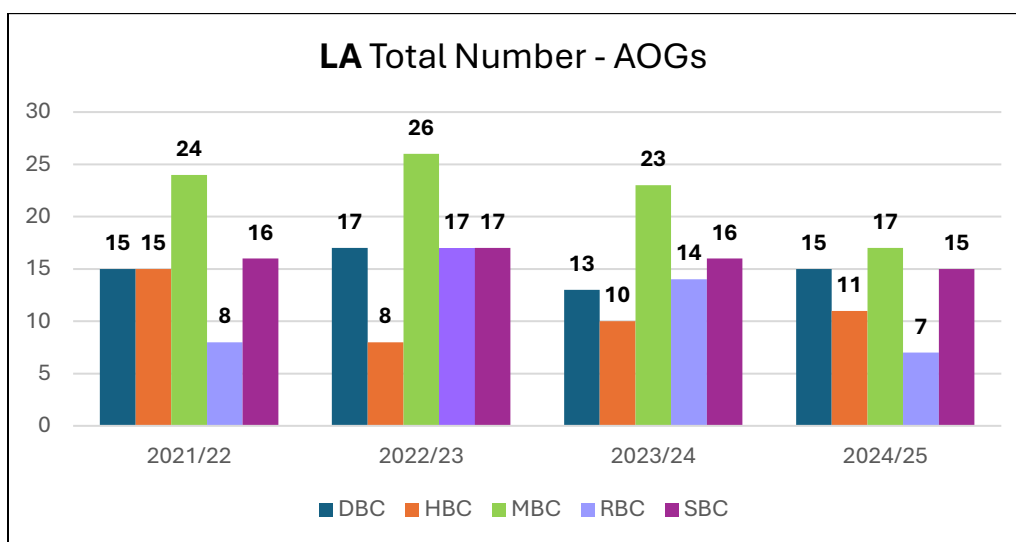
Hartlepool is seeing a year on year rise in the numbers of children with PO. Darlington is seeing a reduction in ADM's and PO which is in line with national trends.

The number of children placed for adoption has reduced, however, placements through early permanence have risen significantly from 8 to 27 since last year.





The numbers of adoption orders have decreased by 16% compared with the previous year.



4.2 Disrupted Placements prior to the Adoption Order

It is reassuring to report that the number of placement disruptions in this period was 0, which is significantly lower than the 12 placements reported in the previous year.

The ATV Board's agreement that increased access to assessment of children's therapeutic needs is required, when planning for adoption, and it is agreed that

such specialist assessments will be resourced in more cases, and especially for older children and sibling placements. Therefore having a greater understanding of children's needs ensures effective family finding and matching success.

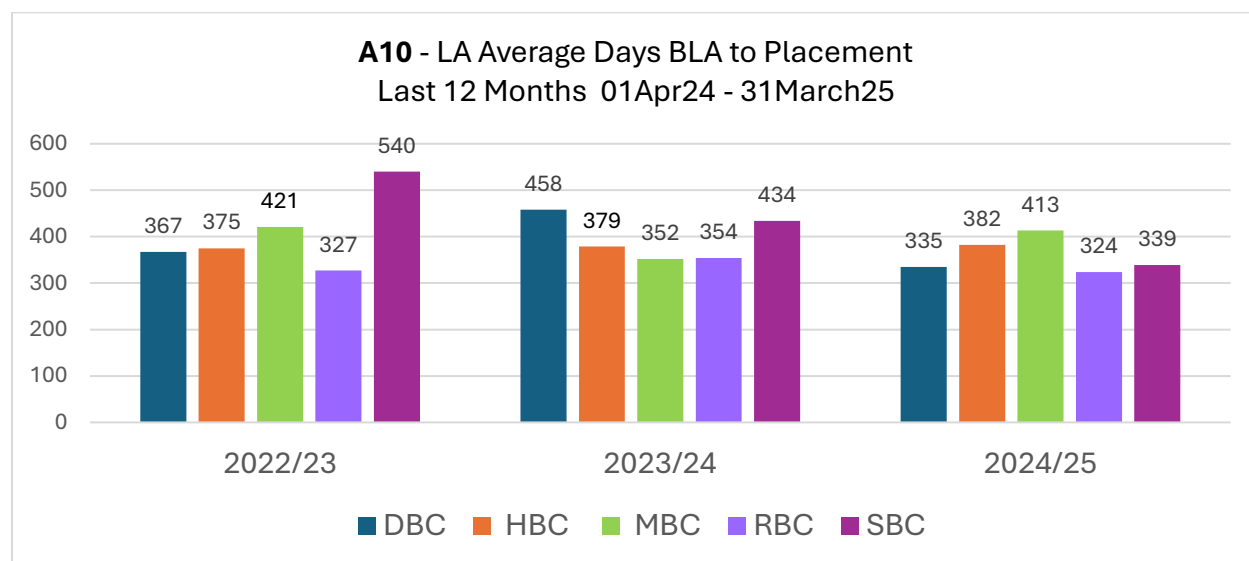
ATV are undertaking additional measures prior to placement to ensure the learning from previous years is embedded in the family finding practice. Additional scrutiny of external prospective adopters reports in relation to the agency, ensures all adopters considered for our children have experienced the same level of preparation as ATV's current practice.

4.3 Timescales for children for matching and moving in with their adoptive family

On average the timeliness of adoption for children has improved compared with the previous year, and ATV continues to find families and progress them to match and placement in good time, on average.

A10- became Child in Our care, to Moving in with Adopter

In adoption we focus most significantly on the time between the child becoming a child in our care and moving in with adoptive parents. This is the A10 timescale, and the government sets 421 days as its target.

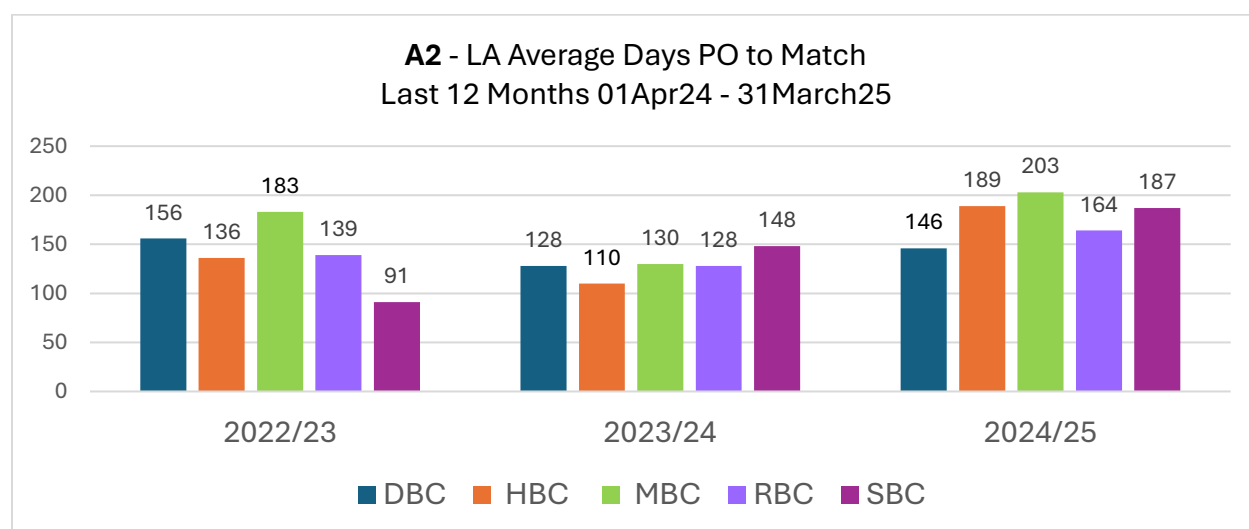


(Data based on children who have been adopted in this year).

ATV continues to perform well against national comparisons and has improved this year. There is an embedded process for early referral of children, and early consideration of potential families who may be linked to the child, in advance of the Placement Order being granted. It's important therefore to monitor the numbers of referrals to ensure that all children are considered at an early stage, even where adoption does not go on to be the final plan.

A2- Placement Order to Match

ATV also measures the time between Placement Order (PO) and matching a child for adoption, this being the time beyond Court decision to award a PO to confirming the match with a family. This is the A2 figure, and the government target timescale is 121 days.



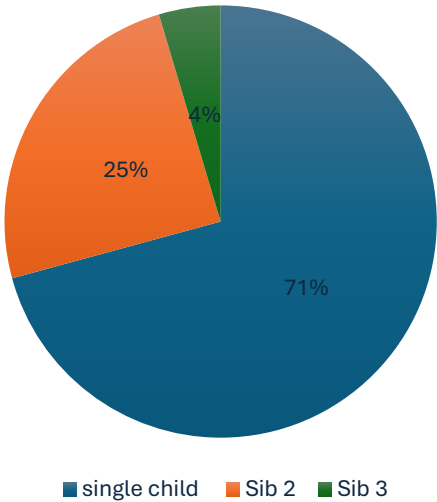
There is variation in the Local Authority performance around timescale over this year, and caution should be noted in that numbers in adoption are relatively small, therefore small changes in numbers can affect averages. The rise in A2 data is understood due to more children being placed initially through EP and the need for more specialist understanding of children's needs.

The data is based on the timescales for children who have been adopted in the year.

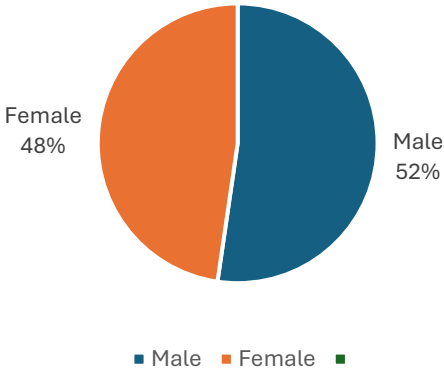
4.4 Needs of Children Placed and Children Waiting with Placement Order

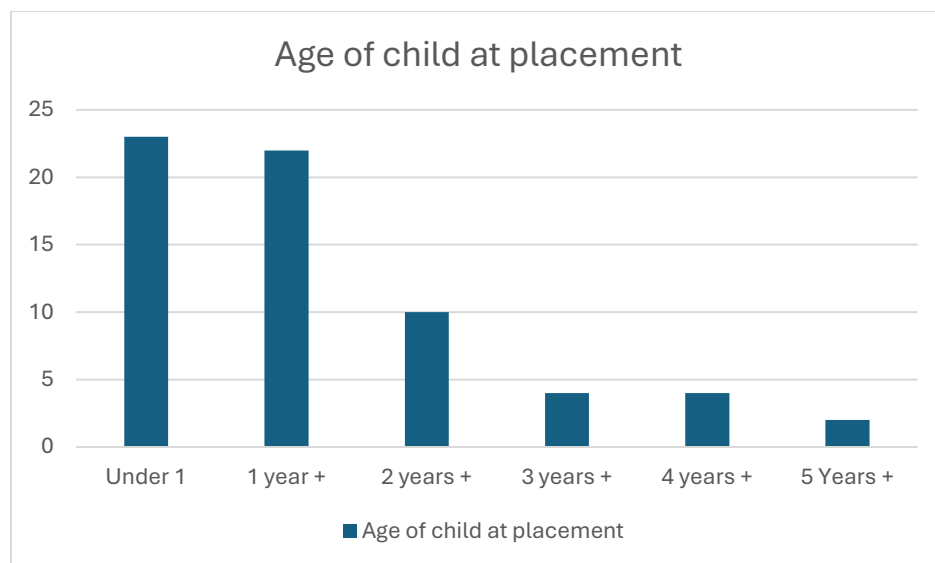
Children Placed

Children placed



Gender





While it continues to be the case that most children placed for adoption are aged under 1 year and aged 1-2 years the data shows that in this year 10 children were over 3 years. ATV has therefore been seeking to find suitable families for a high number of children who are considered harder to match due to age, and factoring in the older children in sibling groups, shows how there are greater risks of disruption, or of not finding suitable families.

The significant majority of children placed within this year have been of White British background. There were 9 children of White European, Asian ethnicity and dual heritage.

Children waiting with a Placement Order, not yet placed as of 31.3.25

There were 46 children with a Placement Order not yet formally placed for adoption on 31.3.25.

22 had active plans progressing to be adopted by an identified linked family, 15 had no link at that time, and a further 9 were children for whom the Local Authority had ceased active family finding, including children who had had a disruption.

4.5 Summary of the priority needs for children requiring adoption in Tees Valley

In summary, ATV is currently identifying a high number of children who have a plan of adoption, and with a Placement Order who:

- Are in sibling groups
- Are older children, aged 4 +
- Have additional complex needs associated with early health (FASD), trauma, attachment difficulties, and neurodivergent conditions.

Many of the older children have experience of living in harmful environments, with poor care, and have moved around the foster care system, prior to coming for a plan of adoption.

The implications for strategic planning, and assessment of these children's needs will be part of the forward planning priorities, and vision for ATV moving forward.

4.6 Finding Families for Tees Valley Children

The priority for seeking suitable families for Tees Valley children is internally approved ATV adopters.

Where it is clear no suitable family is available for a child with a progressing adoption plan, ATV uses the strong links established with regional Voluntary Adoption Agencies to seek a placement. The agency also seeks placement with other RAA's in the region.

Children are placed on Linkmaker, the data system for sharing details nationally of children needing families, and of approved adoptive families. Through Linkmaker families are identified across England who wish to express an interest in children waiting.

ATV has promoted children for adoption through Activity Days, funded nationally, and Activity Days held within the RAA's own centre. ATV have launched a new online family finding event. The event is hosted by the ATV website which provides secure access to adopters for a time-limited period of 3 days. This method is an alternative to the live Activity Days. Family Finders produce a profile on each child with video clips and voice over describing the individual needs and characteristics of children. The unique offer in this method is that adopters can take their time exploring and considering children from their own home without the pressures some describe attending the live events. The online events will continue to take place throughout the next year.

4.7 Internal – External Placements

Year	Internal ATV	External	Total
2021-22	58 (75%)	19 (25%)	77
2022-23	52 (67%)	25 (33%)	77
2023-24	51 (65%)	27 (35%)	78
2024-25	41 (62%)	25 (38%)	66

There has been an increased reliance on external VAA's for ATV placements over this year. This is due to lower numbers of approvals, and ATV adopters being unwilling to consider older children and older children in sibling groups. Adoption England recognize that the North East has challenges in recruitment of adopters and have offered funding to pilot an initiative to trial offering adoption grants. This pilot is expected to be launched late 2025.

5. Recruiting, Preparing and Approving Adopters

Recruitment of adopters has been challenging in this period, for reasons outlined in the Executive Summary.

Additionally, there have been some challenges with timescales for assessment, with stage 1 timescales having met significant delays in some cases due to a small number of factors:

- Delays associated with medical checks. There have been some delays in awaiting the Medical Advisor summary, and in turn the MA's awaiting GP reports. Where prospective adopters (PA) complex health needs, these require further understanding by the MA in stage 1, and this can take time, as the PA consultant is required to provide their opinion.

To address delays, ATV has now worked with the ICB to introduce an additional MA, who will have responsibility for all adult health reports and working with regional GP's.

- Delays associated with worker absence or change of worker.

	Total 2022-23	Total 2023-24	Total 2024-25	Current c/w previous	England 2023-24 where applicable

Initial contacts/enquiries	309	232	282	Inc 22%	
Initial Visits to prospective Adopters	106	92	90	Dec 2%	
Stage 1 Starts	58	60	50	Dec 16%	
Stage 2 Starts	51	50	46	Dec 8%	
Adopter Approvals	55	38	44	Inc 16%	
Carers approved who can do early permanence	10	6	20	increase	
Numbers in assessment at the end of the period	38	41	39	Dec 5%	
Numbers waiting to be matched at end of period	29	22	26	Inc 18%	
Timescale S1 (Govt target 60 days)		101	124	Improved	134
Timescale S2 (Govt target 121 days)	156	139	143	Improved	150

The key challenge is achieving adoptive parents in this region for the needs of children who require adoption. The high numbers of children who have had a disruption to placements, almost all of which were out of area, indicates that we need to find more people in this region who can offer permanence via adoption to our children.

The numbers of prospective adopters who want to do early permanence has reduced this year, which is a downturn from the previous year, and goes against the national trend, which is an increase.

6. Early Permanence

6.1 Support to Early Permanence carers.

The following supports are available to early permanence carers:

- Dedicated adoption social workers throughout the process
- Training and preparation for early permanence- a 2 day course
- Social Worker led EP support group- STEP
- Additional training and preparation around the fostering role.
- Peer buddy system
- Allocated supervising social worker from the Fostering Service
- Fostering allowance during the fostering period

6.2 EP Children's Care Plan Outcomes

In this period 3 of the children were reunified to a birth family member, and 24 children placed under early permanence have continued with an adoption plan.

6.3 Working in Partnership with LAs and other agencies

Following national learning, ATV has worked with the 5 LA's to implement the practice of an ATV worker attending all Legal Gateway meetings. This means early permanence is discussed before the LA initiates care proceedings.

We know we need to influence wider stakeholders to understand and feel confident in planning for early permanence, including understanding it is not a plan of adoption until the PO is granted, and that EP carers are well prepared for this.

A pan regional conference was held in October 2024, aimed at wider stakeholders in LA's, CAFCASS and the Judiciary to promote a shared understanding of EP. The event was successful in relation to promoting the key messages of the benefits EP placements offer children. In addition to this the Adoption Subcommittee of the Local Family Justice Board has been created, to ensure wider stakeholder engagement with early permanence.

7. Adoption Support

Adoption Tees Valley continues to offer a 3 tier Adoption Support Offer.

Tier 1 Universal
• Allocated Social Worker until 12 months post adoption order • Adoption Support Plan in all cases • Young People's Group, exclusively for adopted children within a local youth club venue (age 7-16) • Play and Stay group weekly in ATV, providing support and relationships for adoptive parents and younger children (age up to 5) • Access to CATCH • Loud and Clear music group, run by the Sage within ATV • Family and Friends Network training • Parties and activity days within ATV • Support to Keep In Touch (formally Letterbox) – for children, birth parents, and adoptive parents.
Tier 2 Targeted
• Therapeutic parenting support training • Future Stars • Nurturing Attachments • Non-Violent Resistance • Education Support from ATV Education Support Worker
Tier 3 Therapy
• Therapeutic services provided commissioned services, and funded through the Adoption Support Fund and MDASS. • Specialist assessment, where needed, through commissioned services • Allocated social worker, for assessment of adoption support needs, and development of an adoption support plan to meet needs.

7.1 Assessment of Adoption Support Needs

ATV has implemented a different process for beginning the assessment of adoption support needs when this is requested by an adoptive parent. There is now an early duty response and a booked telephone session to commence the assessment.

In this period, there were 162 assessments of adoption support needs completed, compared with 127 in 2023-24.

The average timescale from enquiry to allocation to a social worker was 11 days.

The number of applications to the Adoption Support Fund was 255. In many cases the applications are repeated applications and have not had a new assessment of adoption support needs. In 2023-24, this was 289.

The value of applications submitted was £930,116 compared with £943,112.35 in the previous year.

While there were many positive examples of how adoption support assessments have helped children and families, we know some families still feel they wait too long. We aim to increase early access to a social worker where needed and reduce waiting times. The case allocation system has been reviewed and the creation of the 4th Enquiry Hub Team will ensure families are receiving the right support at the earliest point possible.

We are introducing a new set of national measures through our case management system to help us improve the quality of data and management oversight of cases, and of timeliness of completion of assessments.

7.2 Stay and Play

The group continues to run weekly within ATV and is well attended by adoptive parents and children in the pre school years. The groups tend to be attended while parents are on adoption leave.

On average 8 parents and their children attend the Play and Stay group each week.

21 families have accessed this support group over the year.

We will continue to run our weekly Stay and Play sessions, which we know is great source of peer support, and early help for families.

7.3 Education Support

Post-adoption education support continues to be funded via the partnership of the Virtual Schools within the 5 Local Authorities of ATV. The current Education Support Worker (ESW) joined ATV in January 2025 and has previously worked for

25 years in a range of senior leadership roles within schools including being a qualified SENCO. The ESW works with both families and schools to ensure that the needs of adopted children are met within the education environment. This can range from supporting in school meetings, advising on the content of personal education plans, supporting EHCP and funding applications, guidance on effective use of Pupil Premium budgets, to providing in school coaching and training. The ESW delivers bespoke training in schools to meet the training needs of staff on topics such as; Attachment and Developmental Trauma, PACE, Theraplay Theory, and Basic Sensory Integration for the Classroom. The ESW also provides facts sheets and recorded presentations for adoptive parents on key educational 'pinch points' such as transition between key stages and is aiming to further develop this into more formal training modules in the near future. This is in line with a redesign of the education pages on the ATV website that will provide enhanced signposting for both parents and schools to supporting organisations and resources. The ESW works closely with Local Authority SEND Teams and takes advantage of SEND CPD offered to ensure their personal knowledge base is consistent and up to date.

The dedicated Education Support Worker within ATV since January 2025 has worked with 101 children.

The breakdown by the Local Authority is set out below.

DBC	21	HBC	7	MBC	17	R&CBC	25	SBC	31
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Parent Feedback

'Thank you for yesterday, you were brilliant and really got across how complex things are for X. It's just really helpful having the teachers understand her more.'

'.....massive thanks to you too, for supporting me, preparing me and speaking up about the post 16 issues I'd not even considered.'

School Feedback

'Thank you so much for coming in yesterday; the session was very informative and the teachers all commented on how engaged they were and how interesting it was. Thank you for the resources, I will share these with the teachers.'

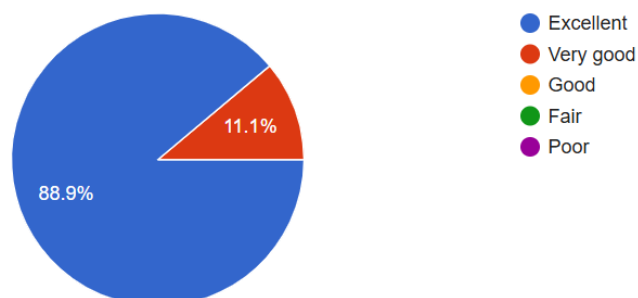
'Today's training was extremely informative and ESW gave us lots of strategies to use within class. The training was engaging and lots of staff commented on how interesting it was. Thank you'

'Thank you for your time after the session and for providing some practical ideas to support me with a new LAC child who has joined my class.'

'Great training, dynamic delivery'

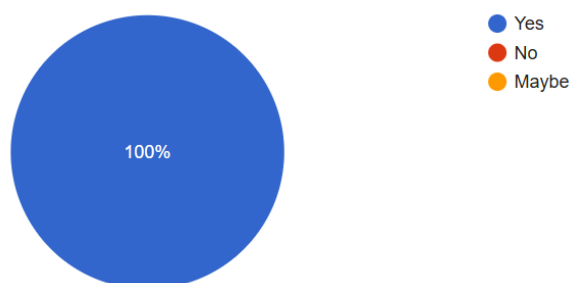
How would you rate the quality of the training today?

9 responses



Do you feel that today's session will have an impact on your approach to adopted children going forward?

9 responses



7.5 Birth Parent Support and Access to Records

ATV has commenced a new contract for these 2 elements of adoption support, following a re-tendering process, supported by Stockton BC Procurement team.

The contract was awarded to Arc Adoption NE, having previously been delivered by Adoption Matters. Arc Adoption NE provided the best value in tendering and offers significant expertise in the specialist adoption arena.

The contract commenced on 1.4.23 and is a 2 year contract.

Birth Parent Support

Arc Adoption NE provides the statutory independent birth parent support through counselling advice and information, from the time at which adoption is the local Authority plan for the child. This service is complemented by ATV who can offer support to birth parents, in setting up Keep In Touch arrangements, and with ongoing Keep In Touch.

There were 96 new birth parents referred to the service within this period.

At the yearend, 74 birth parents were "active" to the service, i.e. actively engaged with receiving a service from Arc Adoption NE in respect of support around their child's adoption.

Access to Adoption Records

Arc Adoption provides the statutory service to adult adoptees and their birth relatives in respect of accessing birth records around adoption. The service requires sensitive and experienced counselling, redaction of records as required, and provision of a report for the adult adoptees. The service interfaces with each of the 5 Local Authorities in the partnership, who continue to hold children's adoption records.

44 individuals accessed their birth records in this period.

Overall, Arc Adoption NE have worked closely with ATV to take on the existing cases, and new referrals, ensuring a smooth transfer of responsibility for this sensitive area of the work. ATV and Arc meet quarterly to review the contract and ensure any anomalies are given due focus.

8. Voice and Influence of Young People, and Adoptive Parents

The Voice and influence Group and has a clear focus on enabling children and young people to have a voice and influence ATV practice and that beyond. As previously mentioned in the Executive Summary the group have premiered their short film, This is Our Story and opened the annual Adoption England conference with the film.

8.1 Young People's Group

In ATV we are proud that we now have an established group for adopted young people and have directed its development with the feedback received from young people and their parents. We have brought together adopted children from age 7-16 to meet monthly, with the aim of promoting a positive identity for young people around adoption and enabling them to build friendships and confidence through the group.

Young people fed back last year that they would like more opportunity for activities and a more "young person" focused setting. Previously the group ran in the ATV Centre, however, now runs in a local youth club, with dedicated access only to ATV for that evening session. This means that ATV can offer the opportunity for young people with a wide range of needs and preferences to meet and use the facilities and activities on offer, while building friendships and relationships. Activities such as table football, crafts, and games consoles are taken up by the young people. The young people wanted to have a tuck shop available which is now running, and there is also a sensory room for young people who need a calmer environment.

Feedback is positive from children and parents, with many parents also taking the opportunity to meet with other adopters and build their own networks too.

Feedback through the Adopter Survey indicated that there is a gap for children aged 5-7 as children pre-school can access the Play and Stay Group and aged over 7 can access the Youth Group. ATV have plans in place to run a summer activity group in 2025 which will be offered to children aged 7+ with further plans to develop for all age groups.

8.2 Voice and Influence

The ATV Voice and Influence group has been running now for around 2 years. 4 young people are active members. ATV reached out to all families in regular contact, however, this small group are the pioneers of Voice and Influence in

ATV. The group have named themselves AdoptBats, and they meet monthly with 2 staff from ATV.

Feedback from the conference...

The video and workshop was the highlight of the conference and the part of it that had impacted her the most.

It was a great session, and the young people were fab!

I thought that it was very powerful!



8.3 ATV Adopter Forum runs monthly and is a small group of adoptive parents who meet with managers from ATV to review agency practice with adopters' views in mind. The group is currently under development to encourage more adopter engagement. The plan for doing so is to make the forum more accessible to more parents. Plans are in place to trail existing forums where parents meet such as the ATV Stay and Play group and the Youth Club group.

9. Panel

The Adoption panel sits weekly and is now held once per month as a face to face panel, with all other panels being virtual. Due to pressure on panel, it has been operation practice to schedule 5 panels per month.

There have been 52 panel meetings in the year.

There are 2 Independent Chairs of Panel, and 2 vice chairs of panel, 3 of whom are social workers, with significant senior management experience in adoption work, and one who is an adoptive parent with significant panel experience. There are 32 central list members, and 5 Medical Advisors. Diversity of adoption panel members has increased over the last year in respect of more males, and a member with lived experience of being adopted. Despite significant efforts it has not been possible to recruit a more ethnically diverse panel to date.

Panel is managed and led by a manager within ATV, who also acts as the Agency Advisor to Panel.

The panel manager has developed a stronger quality assurance (QA) mechanism, with QA feedback from all people who are involved in panel helping to improve quality, consistency and the experience of adopters and others attending. There is a quarterly quality assurance report which is provided to Local Authority senior managers to provide feedback on the quality of reports presented.

Central list members have a programme of training and engagement, with quarterly newsletters providing feedback on the outcomes of panel, and updates on relevant agency or legislative matters.

Panel members have undertaken training within this year on:

- Cultural Humilities
- Trauma Timeline, and trauma informed practice
- Early permanence
- Culture change in adoption

A full report on panel business and quality of practice is provided to the ATV Board on a 6 monthly basis.

10. Quality Assurance

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

Quality assurance is carried out through a variety of mechanisms. Key means of assuring quality are outlined below, and the service plan 2023-25 is underpinned by a cross cutting platform of continuous improvement and quality assurance. The ATV Board has a role in being assured of quality of the service delivery, and a risk register is in place around key areas of risk for delivery, and/or quality concerns. At a recent Board Away day it was decided that we will work together to review the vision for ATV moving forward.

Service Plan

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

Practice Models

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

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

The **UEA Moving on to Adoption** is adopted in practice in many cases and is adapted dependent on the needs of the child, and family. Learning from our disruptions indicates we have more work to do within the wider system to understand the core principles of this model and implementation in practice. Moves due to foster carer circumstances remain a stubborn issue in this region. As detailed above, the service has adopted the **Trauma Timeline**, and is promoting trauma informed practice, within the RAA's own work, and across partner agencies.

Aspects of **Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and Practice (DDP)** (Dan Hughes) are supported through the service delivery, including PACE parenting. 8 staff have now received level 1 training in DDP and it is planned for more to undertake this.

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

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

Performance Monitoring

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

Panel

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

Surveys and Feedback

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

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

Policies Review 2024

ATV policies have been reviewed to ensure that they reflect current and most up to date practice and expectations.

Policies will be available on the ATV website.

Supervision

All staff receive monthly supervision in ATV, which includes reflective practice. All staff have an annual appraisal which sets out their further personal development plan for the year ahead, aligned to their own career and role, and service planning.

Workforce Development

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

Examples within this year are:

- Culture Change in Adoption
- DDP training – level 1
- DDP training level 2
- Matching Standards Training
- EP Practice Standards

3 managers have undertaken level 5 management qualification. This will strengthen the management capacity in ATV and support overall succession planning.

Audit

Audits have been regularly carried out with staff involved in individual cases. The audit process has been LA specific in this year, due to a number of partner LA's undergoing full ILACS inspections by Ofsted.

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

Ofsted

One of the partner LA's, Hartlepool, has been inspected by Ofsted, which includes inspection of the RAA- Adoption Tees Valley, through the lens of the Local Authority. Hartlepool received an Outstanding grading, and ATV was positively recognised within the report.

11. Finance

11.1 2024/25 Financial Year End Position

The year end position for the Adoption Tees Valley budget is presented below:

Expenditure	Budget 2024/25	Outturn 2024/25	Variance 2024/25
Employees	1,855,000	1,718,000	(137,000)
Running Costs	264,000	381,000	117,000
Support Service Costs	113,000	118,000	5,000
Interagency Fees	500,000	721,000	221,000
Total	2,732,000	2,955,000	(223,000)

11.2 Interagency Fees

Interagency fees exceeded the budget figure by £220,694. Additional contributions from each Local Authority are as follows:

Interagency Contributions (to be invoiced based on actuals after year end)	Percentage split	Budget	24/25 Actual	24/25 Additional
Darlington	15.95%	£79,741	£114,938	£35,197
Hartlepool	14.22%	£71,121	£102,513	£31,392
Middlesbrough	27.16%	£135,776	£195,706	£59,930
Redcar & Cleveland	15.95%	£79,741	£114,938	£35,197
Stockton	26.72%	£133,621	£192,599	£58,978
	100.00%	£500,000	£720,694	£220,694

11.2 Contributions for 2025/28

The ATV Board has commenced a review of the financial contribution percentage from partner local Authorities, to ensure that there is an equitable and fair allocation of costs, commencing 2025-28.

Darlington		16.6%
Hartlepool		13.2%

Middlesbrough		29.8%
Redcar & Cleveland		19.7%
Stockton		20.7%

12. Priorities for Forward Planning

The annual report and review provide the data evidence, linked to the wider national adoption strategy, for setting priorities for ATV for the forthcoming year. As detailed in the Executive Summary, ATV Board have established a Vision for ATV for the next 3 years, based on national adoption developments, and learning from practice through independently chaired disruption meetings. What is clear is that children's long-term outcomes, and the wellbeing of adoptive and birth families is a high priority for ATV, and its partner agencies. The priorities for the forthcoming year are:

1. Recruiting more adoptive parents locally, who can take the children we need to find families for.

We will strengthen marketing, and the first contact enquiry process, to reduce delays, and strengthen a consistent approach from a small dedicated and experienced team.

We will promote the offer of the settling in allowance for ATV adopters who can take siblings.

We will continue to review the core "offer" for adopters for more complex children with our partner LA's and Board.

We will work together with partner LAs to ensure that there is an adoption experienced, ATV led consideration of local adopters, for children, when planning for permanence.

2. Children's voices will be heard, and young people will have an influence in how adoption services and wider services consider the needs of adopted people.

We will ensure that the Adoptbats films is used for wider stakeholder awareness raising.

We will hold an event for Board and stakeholders, with Adoptbats, to share young people's views on what needs to change.

We will ask Adoptbats to help achieve the engagement and views of more adopted young people, to make sure we are listening to, and involving adopted children in having their say.

3. Early Permanence Planning will continue to be a priority

We will review the balance of key messaging around what early permanence is for adoptive parents in the early stages of their journey with ATV.

We will work with all 5 LA's to ensure EP is considered at every opportunity.

We will involve ADM's in the LA where there is a difference of view between ATV and the LA around an EP plan for the child.

We will contribute to an LFJB plan for early permanence and be part of a wider Adoption Sub Committee on Adoption.

4. Culture change in adoption practice will be promoted through ATV and partner agency practice and development

We will hold a team event on Culture Change in Adoption.

We will promote learning and awareness through workforce development in partner LA's and wider stakeholders.

The ATV Board will provide leadership on Culture Change through their role in ATV and in partner agencies, and through a shared vision statement.

Maintaining relationships is a key priority for ATV. Processes will be developed to manage the direct keeping in touch arrangements.

5. Access to Adoption Support – the right help at the right time.

We will work with the pan regional MDASS service, and with the pan regional commissioning project, to seek to implement new and better ways of allocating the right assessment and support to families.

We will implement the new data reporting measures in the AS system, to ensure we can deliver the new national AS data reports.

We will continue with our 3 tier adoption support system, encouraging take up and access to all tiers, by children and parents.

We will continue to work pan regionally in line with Adoption England's innovation projects.

6. Retaining a high-quality staffing team

We will work to ensure that staff have access to high quality training and supervision that gives high job satisfaction and maintains skills and motivation.

We will create opportunities for progression and development wherever possible.

We will creatively use the skills and experience of ATV staff to help ATV development, and to develop the workforce in wider partner agencies.

Louise Addison

July 2025