

Adoption Tees Valley

Bi-Annual Report 2021-2022

1.4.21-30.9.21



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Glossary

ADM- agency decision maker

PO- Placement order

RAA- Regional Adoption Agency

VAA- Voluntary Adoption Agency

Adoption Tees Valley

Bi-Annual Report 2021-22

Period- 1.4.21-30.9.21

1. Introduction

This report will provide information on the work of Adoption Tees Valley for the period of 1.4.21-30.9.21. Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) is the Regional Adoption Agency for the 5 Local Authorities of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton.

The report will focus on the key matters for the first period of 2021-22. The full year progress in all areas of the Adoption Agency was last reported in the Annual Report for 2020-21, and will be reported on again, in the full year Annual Report for this current year- 2021-22.

2. National Context of Adoption

The National Adoption Strategy, Achieving Excellence Everywhere, was published in July 2021. This set out the government agenda for continued priority areas for adoption development and highlighted the support that will be provided to the RAA Leaders Group to drive progress.

Key priorities for the government set out in the strategy are:

- Recovery from covid, and learning from practice during the pandemic
- Recruiting adopters for priority children- those who wait the longest
- Finding families for children, not children for families
- A seamless approval process for all adoptive families
- Including the voice of adopted children in shaping services
- Matching children with adopters
- More use of early permanence
- Post adoption support- ensuring families have access to early mainstream help and support and more specialist support at the time they need it, across social care, education and health.

ATV has been engaged and involved in the national agenda- through contribution at leadership level to the RAA priority workstreams, and through development planning, which is reflective of the national and regional priorities, as set out.

This Bi-Annual report will also show the outcome of the Review of ATV, undertaken on behalf of, and involving the Board of ATV, and which resulted in setting strategic priorities for Adoption Tees Valley, in the context of the National Adoption Strategy.

3. Flexibilities

ATV has not used any of the former flexibilities permitted under the Adoption and Coronavirus (Amendment) Regulations (2020), however has used the flexibilities permitted until 30.9.21 on 6 occasions.

These relate to the agency determining that adopters may enter stage 2 of the assessment, without the Adult Health report having been received within the timeframe of stage 1. Adopters were made aware that they would not have the right to access the IRM if the agency went on to end the assessment, based on information arising from the adult health checks and Medical Advisor advice to the agency.

All adoptive parents who were required to do so by regulation had adoption medicals, which were considered by the Agency Medical Advisor, prior to consideration by the Adoption Panel, and approval.

4. Adoption Activity and Performance Information

ATV manages and monitors adoption activity and performance, to review how the service is doing for children and families on key performance indicators, against previous regional performance, and against the national adoption picture.

The scorecard which has been recently updated, provides detailed information in relation to each of the 5 LA's performance in adoption activity, in addition to the overall ATV performance, combining all 5 LA's.

In looking at performance, it's important to have some understanding of factors that underpin overall adoption performance, and the timescale in relation to each individual child. What is crucial for children is that the adoptive family who will go on to adopt them, is well prepared and supported to take the child. It's also very important that all other potential birth family and kinship options have been thoroughly explored. Where permanence can be provided within the family, or kinship network, this is almost always the selected option for the child. When children are older, or require adoption alongside their brothers or sisters, or when they have additional needs, its essential to prepare children well for moving into their new family.

What influences performance?

Timescales for children in being adopted are influenced by:

- Care planning and timely decision making in the LA
- Preparation of children for adoption

- Availability of adopters who are suitable to take the child, and can meet their care plan

Fig.1

ATV Performance data, 1.4.21-30.9.21, compared with the same period in 2020-21, and full year 2020-21.

Children

	ATV 1.4.20- 30.9.20	ATV 2020- 21	ATV 1.4- 30.9.2021	Direction c/w ATV end of Q2 2020
Adoption Orders	39	89	46	↑ Inc 18%
Placements	37	82	56	↑ Inc 51%
PO's	21	76	41	↑ Inc 100%
ADM BID's	39	99	39	Same level
Early Permanence	X	17	5	Measure not the same at Q2 2020
A10 (Entering care to moving in with adopters) - days	X	410	420	A10 not measured in 2020
A2 (PO to match)	239	238	204	↓ Dec 14%
Rate of leaving care by AO	15%	12%	11%	↓ Dec 4 %

From ATV Q2 Scorecard, taken from ASGLB returns.

X indicates data not available, or not meaningful in this report

Adopters

	ATV 1.4.20- 30.9.20	ATV 2020-21	ATV 1.4- 30.9.2021	Direction c/w ATV end of Q2 2020
Approvals	26	62	24	↓ Dec 7%
Numbers in assessment- end of period	41	40	34	↓ Dec 17%
Stage 1 starts	27	63	23	↓ Dec

	ATV 1.4.20- 30.9.20	ATV 2020-21	ATV 1.4- 30.9.2021	Direction c/w ATV end of Q2 2020
				15%
Stage 2 starts	24	62	21	↓ Dec 12%
Fastrack	x	12	4	X
Waiting to be matched at end of period	15	36	21	↑ Inc 64%
Waited more than 3 months to be matched	36%	54%	66%	↑ Inc
Approval to match timescale (Previous 12 months) Days	X	129	165	↑ Inc (Below England target and England average)
Approval timescale days		217	226	↑ Inc
Stage 1 (Previous 12 months) days	X	93	97	↑ Inc
Stage 2 (Previous 12 months) Days	X	127	134	↑ Inc

From ATV Q4 Scorecard, taken from ASGLB returns, England Data from ASGLB Q4 2020-21

X indicates data not available, or not meaningful in this report

4.1 Analysis of Performance Information

The numbers of children adopted, and the numbers of children placed for adoption has risen significantly compared with the same period last year, and when taken in comparison with previous years of adoption activity since ATV started. A notable feature of Adoption orders granted, by Local Authority, is the rise in the rate of AO in Middlesbrough, and a reduction in Redcar and Cleveland. Detailed Local Authority data is provided on P

ATV data is against a national picture of declining numbers of adoption orders granted, across England.

The question is why this regional picture is showing more adoptions and more placements for adoption, while nationally there is a different picture.

In this region, ATV have worked closely with the 5 LAs to continue adoption activity through the pandemic, in a safe, but active way. The Teesside Courts have worked in a planned and organised way, and with ATV, to manage adoption hearings, ensuring that adoption orders are granted, and children are formally adopted into their new families. This picture is not universal across England, and local timeliness of progressing adoption hearings may account for the high number of orders granted in this year to date.

(Published information in the period beyond this report is indicating that adoption order numbers are rising across England in Quarter 3).

The Local Authorities of Tees Valley have continued to experience higher numbers of looked after children, and this will have an impact on adoption numbers overall. ATV and partner local authorities have continued to work closely together to ensure that family finding is timely, and adoptive families are found for children who have an adoption plan. Deeper investigation into adoption activity shows that almost all of the adopters approved for ATV go on to adopt Tees Valley children, and that where ATV does not have a suitable family internally, our developed local sufficiency relationships with regional Voluntary Adoption Agencies are being well used to place children within the North East region, and more quickly. From information analysed for the purposes of the ATV Review (see later section) it's clear that ATV are placing more older children and more siblings together, and so are being effective in enabling a greater number of children to be placed for adoption, who may otherwise have remained in long term foster care.

Placement Orders granted have also risen significantly, compared with the same period last year, although in 2020 the Courts were experiencing the early months of the pandemic, and POs were delayed at that time. However, adoption activity is continuing to be high, and this is evident in 4 of the 5 LA's, in this first period of the year. (See later section for more detailed breakdown by Local Authority). Agency Decisions that adoption is the Local Authority plan (ADM) have remained the same, indicating that at the end of Q2 adoption activity was plateauing. However, activity since the end of Q2 has identified that there are again a high number of children being progressed with a permanence plan of adoption in Tees Valley. Activity across the year will be reported on in the full annual report.

Early permanence (EP) placements have reduced in this period, compared with overall numbers in the previous year. In 2020-21 the agency provided a high focus on EP. There has now been experience of a small number of

children who have returned to birth family following placement with prospective adopters, approved as temporary foster carers, and the agency is experiencing a reduction in carers who wish to undertake EP at this point. Further national and regional strategic work is underway, to develop and enhance early permanence as an option for children- see later section.

The overall timeliness for children from entering care to moving in with adopters has risen slightly in this period, although we know this data is skewed by a very small number of children who have had a lengthy wait but are now adopted. Timescales for PO to match have reduced in this period, which is encouraging, and has been an area of operational focus. National data published by ASGLB shows ATV to be reducing the time between PO and match, with an average of 149 days for children who have been matched in the last 12 months, compared with 193 days as an all England average.

ATV has seen a reduction in the numbers of adopters approved overall in this period compared with previous year. There have been 24 approvals in the period, compared with 26 last year. Numbers in the assessment process have also dropped with 34 not yet approved at the end of September 2021, compared with 41 at the same time in the previous year.

There have been a number of assessments which have not progressed to approval, and analysis shows that during the pandemic, while a higher number of people approached to be considered to be adopters, the withdrawal rate was higher, with some applicants being not ready or suitable to adopt. This factor has been seen more widely across RAA's nationally, and also locally across Fostering Services.

Timescales for assessment have increased on average. Timescales for Adopter Medicals have impacted on the timeliness of approvals.

The service is addressing challenges, through strategic links with health, and the Safeguarding GP's. However, delays do remain, and some GP surgeries continue to prove difficult to resolve these issues with.

Key successes:

- High numbers of children adopted
- High numbers of children placed for permanence via adoption
- Timeliness of placing children for adoption is improving overall
- Numbers of children waiting at any point in time who do not have a link is low. Children move on, and families are found

Challenges:

- Sufficiency of internal adopters continues to be a challenge, during this period.

- Early permanence placement sufficiency is, and will continue to be a challenge for the next 12 month period
- The children most likely to wait longest are those who are in a sibling group, and where one child is over the age of 5.

5. Review of Adoption Tees Valley

Adoption Tees Valley achieved the 3 year point within this period, having commenced as the RAA in May 2018.

In line with the original business case, a review of ATV has been undertaken, led by a senior manager, independent of ATV, and who was located within Stockton BC (SBC) Transformation Team. The period of activity reviewed was 1.4.2018- 31.3.2021

The ATV review has been supported by the ATV Service Manager, and by data analysis provided through SBC.

Surveys were undertaken with adoptive parents, staff in the team, and Adoption lead officers in each of the 5 Local Authorities.

A Focus group was held with ATV Board, independently facilitated by a consultant with experience of regionalisation of adoption.

The terms of reference for the review were agreed by the ATV Board and centred around the original objectives set out in the full business case presented to the 5 Councils for agreement.

Objectives reviewed:

- Objective 1 is to “deliver better outcomes for children”
- Objective 2 is “deliver improved value for money”
- Objective 3 is “establish a strong and sustainable service”
- Objective 4 is “ease of implementation for the new partnership”

5.1 Key Findings

- More children have been adopted from care over the period since regionalisation, than in the 3 years prior to regionalisation. Up 20% since the RAA has been in place.
- More children in harder to place categories have been adopted from care, including a significant rise in siblings placed together, and children aged 5+. A broader range of children have been adopted.
- Overall timescales have not decreased, in placing children for adoption, as measured by the time from entering care to being placed for adoption (A1). Significant variation occurs across different Local Authorities, and improvements have been seen in Stockton,

Hartlepool, and Darlington over the 3 year period, while there has been an increase in timescales for Redcar and Cleveland, and Middlesbrough. The report considered the details of all adoptions, and noted many children are achieving adoption well within nationally expected timescales and being placed in a timely way following the Placement Order.

- The new scorecard indicator, which adjusts for children who have gone on to be adopted by their foster carer (A10) shows an overall decrease in timescales over the period, although an increase in timescale for Redcar and Cleveland, and Middlesbrough. The ATV timescale for this indicator is below national average.
- Placement Order to matching timescales have increased as a whole with only Middlesbrough showing improvement as time has progressed.
- ATV has increased the number of adopters approved and available for Tees Valley children.
- The matching timescale for adopters following approval is well below national average, showing ATV adopters are being used quickly, for the children requiring placement. This means ATV is recruiting the right adopters for the children it needs to place.
- A sufficiency strategy with regional VAA's supports placement activity for children, especially harder to place children.
- More adoptions have been achieved on the same staffing resources as set out in the original plan.
- The interagency expenditure has increased year on year, with children being placed with VAA adopters.
- Comparatively, ATV provides good value for money when compared with other RAA's. The unit cost of adoption is around £4000 less per adoption than the average RAA costs, on those agencies where information is published.
- ATV spends proportionately more on interagency placements per unit cost of adoption, than average RAA costs.
- The RAA has staffed an adoption support service and is drawing significantly more from the Adoption Support Fund than was previously the case. The proportion of draw down from ASF by ATV has increased, compared with the national picture, indicating that ATV is operating a best value approach in respect of access to external funding.
- Adoptive parents are overall satisfied and talk positively about the service they receive from ATV. Areas for improvement are life story work, letterbox support, and waiting times for adoption support assessments. The welcome, preparation and assessment were very positively commented upon.
- Staff are positive about the service, and the culture. They have the opportunity to develop positive practice. However, work pressures were noted.

5.2 Recommendations from the review:

- **Continue to review practice which underpins the PO to match timescale.**

This is underway.

Adoption Champions have been identified within each LA to promote adoption, and care planning.

The service is working with partner LA's to strengthen working together, train staff, and strengthen practice around early planning for permanence.

Strategic work on information Sharing protocols have been completed, and ATV is now working closely with all LA's and VAA's on early permanence and finding the right match, pre PO, which will be progressed once Court Authority to place for adoption is achieved. Early permanence continues to be an area for development, and national funding has been secured for an EP co-ordinator in this region.

- **Children's diversity should be an area for continued development, and more welcome to minority ethnic adopters.**

A senior social worker in ATV has been allocated to lead on this area of development, to seek to secure more adopters in minority ethnic groups.

- **Work with adopted children should be developed further so their views and experiences can shape future service planning**

Children and young people have been working on a film to share their views about education. A young people's worker is a new investment in ATV, to provide dedicated time to develop participation, and inclusion for children and young people.

- **Areas for strengthening support have been identified in the review**

More resource for letterbox arrangements have been put in place, and a senior social worker has been allocated to lead and oversee this area. Life story work has been re-designated back to the responsibility of the children's social workers and is now being undertaken in LA's. Young, adopted people influenced this practice with their voice on life story work.

- **Review percentage contributions from LA's**

Net contributions from each partner local Authority have been reviewed taking account of adoption activity in the 3 year period. Adjusted contributions have now been put in place and agreed with Directors of Finance.

- **Review factors impacting on Interagency costs**

A business case for investment has been presented to the ATV board, and Directors of Finance, for further investment, targeted at reducing interagency costs, and securing more internal adopters.

- **The Board considered recommendations on governance.**

A strategic plan, with strategic priorities has been set by the Board, taking into account the National Adoption Strategy.

Greater focus on the objectives, aligned to the Strategic Priorities have been undertaken, and a set of measures agreed, which will be measured and reported on in the new and updated balanced scorecard.

The Board considered ongoing discussion on “strong and Sustainable” services, and what this means, for key stakeholders, including Elected members.

An options appraisal is to be developed to consider how ATV creates closer working relationships with key stakeholders.

A review of the interrelationship between Board and Adoption Lead Officers has been started.

A review of what further financial information is required, to provide good governance and oversight of the RAA, has been considered.

Following Review and further discussions at Board, arising from the Board Focus group, strategic priorities were set as set out in figure 2.

Figure2.

Strategic Priorities of the Board 2021-23

Overarching principles governing the strategic direction of Adoption Tees Valley

- To be ambitious that more children can achieve secure attachment to adoptive parents, and a good understanding of their early lives, to provide the best foundation for mental wellbeing, and lifelong connections with family.
- To have an excellent integrated adoption service between Local Authorities and ATV, ensuring a shared understanding of adoption practice, and timely planning for permanence for children
- To listen to the experiences and views of adoptive parents, and children/young people, to have a service informed and improved by the lived experience of those we work with.
- To provide a service that is creates value for money by targeting best use of financial resources, to create maximum impact for children and families.

Priority 1

Timely Permanence for Children with an Adoption Plan

- To reduce the time that children wait before moving in with their adoptive family
- To have sufficiency of adoptive families suitable for the children who require adoption in Tees Valley

- To aim for an identified family prior to PO, and to reduce Matching timescales, through timely care planning, integrated working and timely decision making.

Priority 2

Early Permanence for More Children

- More use of Fostering for Adoption and Concurrent Planning, through early care planning and assessment, and involving birth family
- More training and support for prospective adoptive parents who offer EP
- Through the above, enabling earlier secure attachment to permanent families, and reducing moves in care

Priority 3

Adoption Support Throughout the Child and Family's life journey

- Good preparation of children for adoption
- Commencement of life story work from the start of care planning for permanence
- The right supports identified before matching, enabling the right adoption support plan for every child and family
- Smart commissioning, and collaborating for the right adoption support services for children and families, before and beyond adoption order
- Timely adoption support assessment and access to the right adoption supports across multi-agency partners

6. Recruitment, Assessment, Preparation and Approval of Adopters

The agency has continued to actively promote the need for adoptive parents, through social media and dedicated marketing campaigns.

ATV worked with the national adopter campaign in National Adoption Week, which fell just outside of this time period.

A summer campaign for more adopters was implemented, focussing on children waiting.

The performance information in section XXX above highlights a downturn in numbers of adopters in assessment during this period, and evaluation is that this is a similar trend seen across other RAA's, with the pandemic being seen to be coming to an end.

In this period 3 Preparation Groups were held, which involved 21 families.

These included:

17 heterosexual couples

2 single applicants

2 same sex couples

1 couple of ethnic minority heritage, and 1 single ethnic minority applicant.

Additionally, there have been 4 Family and Friends preparation sessions, with 22 members of prospective adopters' network attending these.

There were 24 adoptive families approved in this period.

- 4 families were approved to take siblings, with the remaining families being approved for 1 child
- 16 heterosexual couples
- 4 same sex couples
- 4 single applicants
- 2 families were approved with consideration for early permanence
- 3 were foster carers for the child, going on to adopt
- 3 were second time adopters
- 1 was a connected carer of the child's family, going on to adopt
- In this period all applicants approved were of white British ethnicity.

7. Adoption Panel

The Panel Chair has provided a report which has been presented to the ATV Board as required under NMS 25.

Number of panel meetings held	28				
Chair	Jenny Parkin	Sue Holton	Liz Talbot	Jenny Fagan	
	11	8	6	3	
Cases per panel					
1 case	2	2 cases	10	3 cases	14
4 cases – 1					
Matches					
Total number of Matching Cases	48				
Total number of Children matched	55				
Total cases where match recommended	48				
Number of cases where match not recommended	0				
Number Internal Matches (cases)	38	Number External Matches (cases)			10
Internal Matches (Children)	43	External matches (Children)			12

Total Children where Early Permanence placement prior to match	9		
Relinquished Children	0		
Matching Timescales (Children) -Placement Order to Matching Panel			
Up to 4 Months	4-6 Months	6-12 Months	12 Months +
38	6	10	1
Approvals			
Total Number Households Approved	22		
First Time Approvals			
Fast Track – second + time adopters	5		
Fast track – Foster Carers	2		
Approvals where early permanence Recommended	2		
Cases where approval not recommended	0		
Reviews of Approval Presented	0		
Recommendations for Withdrawal of Approvals (no longer suitable) presented	1		
Disruptions Presented			
Numbers of Disruptions of child's placement presented, pre- Adoption Order	0		

Timescales- Cases presented to Panel	
Number of First time Approvals concluded ROI to ADM in 6 months	7
Number of First time Approvals concluded ROI to ADM in 6-7 months	3
Number of First time Approvals concluded ROI to ADM in over 7 months	5
Number of Fast Track Approvals concluded ROI to ADM in 4 months	0
Number of Fast track Approvals concluded ROI to ADM in 4-5 months	0
Number of Fast Track Approvals concluded ROI to ADM in over 5 months	7
% Regular Approvals In timescale	46%
% Fast Track Approvals in Timescale	0%

Covid 19 Specific Matters

Amended Regulations have been in place permitting flexibilities in the Adoption Regulations, including Panel business. This information is presented, to cover specifically information on use of Covid flexibilities

Number of cases where reduced quoracy flexibilities were used	0
Number of cases where ADM made without presentation to Panel	0
Number of Virtual Panels	28
Number of panels where no Medical Advisor Present at panel	9- all were additional panels
Panel Chairs further comments on panel business through Covid	
Comments on challenges and strengths/areas of good practice	
<p>Virtual panels have continued through the period successfully. No concerns received from members of the central list.</p> <p>There are still a few technical glitches, but these are manageable and don't disrupt the flow.</p>	

Panel Chairs' comments on Central List Issues
<p>The panel members wanted to express their thanks to Sue Holton for her skilled chairing and continued commitment to ATV for the first three years of the ATV Central list. She will be greatly missed.</p> <p>Likewise, a number of other central list members left during the period and the members wished to express their thanks to them also, particularly to Liz Talbot, a vice chair.</p> <p>However, a number of new members joined during the year, bringing greater diversity to the central list. This is very positive.</p> <p>Lastly, a very big welcome to thew independent panel chair, Karen Simmons.</p>

8. Children Referred, Matched and Placed

8.1 Early Notifications to ATV

	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			21% decrease

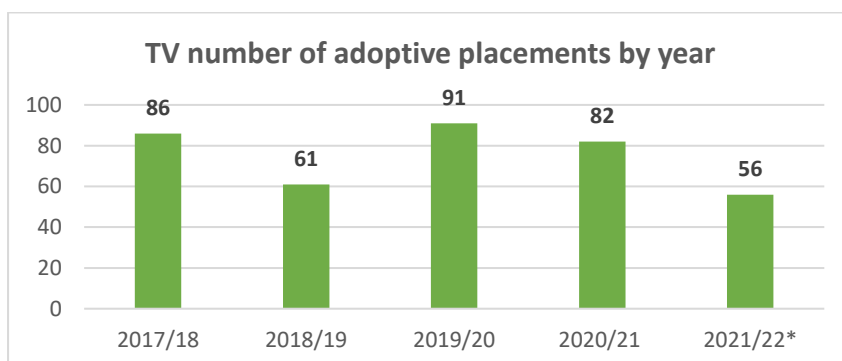
Referrals by Local Authority, in the period

Year	DBC	HBC	MBC	R&CBC	SBC	TV
2021-22	9	3	28	17	20	77

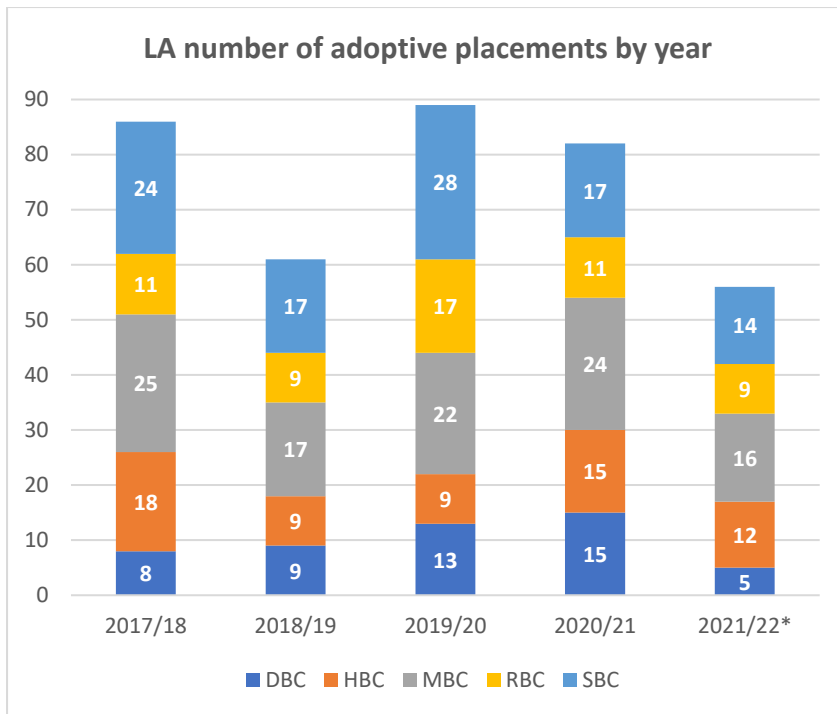
8.2 Placements

	2019-20 Full Year	2020-21: April-September	2020-21 Full Year	2021-22 April-September
ATV children placed with ATV adopters	60	27	52	44
ATV Children placed with external adopters	31	18	30	12
External children placed with ATV adopters	2	1	2	0
Total ATV children placed	91	45	82	56
Total placements	93	46	84	56

8.3 Placements by Local Authority



Last column is Q1&2



Placement activity has risen in the first half of this year, compared with the same period last year. In the year 2020-21 adoption had faced a period of temporary suspension of placing children, during Q1, when the pandemic first started. Adoption activity was reactivated quickly, and all children with an adoption plan were progressed, with family finding and placement activity being active throughout the final 3 quarters of 2020-21.

The data for this period- Q1 and Q2 2021-22 shows a significant rise in placement activity, although Placement Orders have remained the same, and ADM decisions that adoption is the Local Authority plan have slowed.

Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland, Middlesbrough and Stockton all show higher rates of placement activity than in the previous year. In this period Darlington have lower rates of placement activity.

Middlesbrough's care planning for adoption has been a focus for improvement as part of the LA Improvement plan, and the outcomes are beginning to be evident in increased numbers of children coming to be adopted, in a timely way.

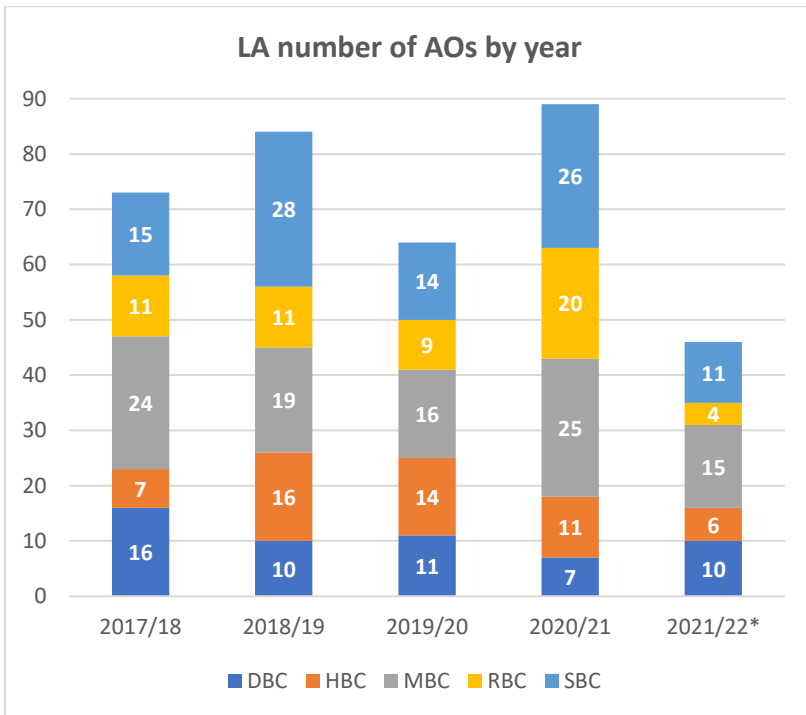
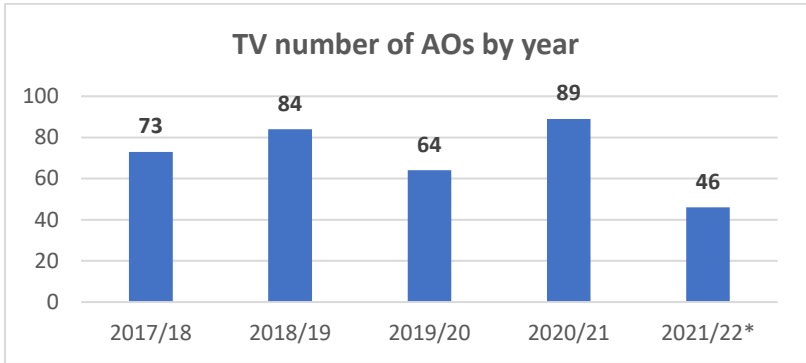
The data shows a higher rate of placement with ATV approved adopters.

44 children have been placed with internally approved adopters, compared with 27 in the same period in the previous year.

12 children have been placed with external adopters, compared with 18 in the same period last year.

This is positive in terms of pressure on the interagency external placement budget.

8.4 Adoption Orders Granted by Local Authority



Adoption Orders remain at a similar level of activity as the previous year, with Middlesbrough BC and Darlington BC having a notably higher rate of orders granted than the previous year.

8.5 Characteristics of children Adopted 2020-21, and Children Waiting with PO as of 30.9.21

	Age under 5	Age over 5	Female	Male	Ethnic Minority Heritage	Disabled	Part of Sib group	Harder to place
Adopted previous 12 months	75	18	46	47	16	2	29	45
Waiting with PO, 30.9.21	27	2	15	14	7	0	8	14
Waiting over 18 months since entering care	8	1	4	5	3	0	3	4

9. Disruptions

There has been one placement disruption in the period under review.

There has been a disruption meeting, chaired by an independent chair, with senior experience, of care planning and adoption. The learning from the disruption is on schedule to be reviewed by the relevant local Authority, Adoption Service, and by the Adoption panel.

10. Life Story Books

The completion of life story books for children with an adoption plan, in accordance with the Statutory Guidance on Adoption, has been challenging to achieve. As detailed in the Annual report, 2020-21, it has been agreed that this work should properly be undertaken by the child's social worker, in the Local Authority, as part of care planning, and direct preparation of children and work with birth families, and others important to the child.

This transfer of responsibility has been managed in a collaborative and phased way, supported by provision of guidance to children's social workers, and through working together between ATV and the 5 LA's.

Additional Temporary Adoption Support Workers have been employed to support completion of books with a long waiting time, and to support transitional arrangements. At the time of writing, and outside of the period under review, all life story books are now allocated a worker, and the procedure has been embedded within ATV and LA's to determine that responsibility is with children's social workers for this work.

The best worker for this has been supported through the Young People's Group, who have considered this issue as part of their Junior research have said that the Life Story Book should be completed by the worker who knows them, as a child, and who was responsible for their plan, and work with family and foster carers.

11. Adoption Support

The service has continued with delivery of adoption support services which include:

- Post adoption support plan for all children and families from the time of placement
- Access to the Adopter Hub for all families coming through the process, to provide online support, access to information and webinars.
- Tier 1, universal support opportunities
- Loud and Clear music project, run by the Sage, Gateshead
- Tier 2, Therapeutic Parenting Training
- Specialist adoption support assessments, undertaken by the adoption support team
- Education support
- Access to therapeutic support, by one of the preferred Therapy providers, as determined by the adoption support assessment
- Children's group has been reconvened, focussing on life story and experiences of adopted children in school

11.1 Adoption Support Referrals and Assessments

	Full Year 2020-21	1.3.21-30.9.21
Number of adoption support referrals	83	49
Access to Files requests/completed	36	23
Birth Parent Support Referrals (Q3 &4 2020-21)	23	24
Adoption Support Assessments completed	55	46
Successful application to ASF	166	125

Unsuccessful application to ASF	0	0
Value of applications to ASF	£637,551 + £70,965 Covid	£434,553
Education Support Cases during year	59	41
Number of Post Box Contract Agreements	279	Not available

There have been 49 referrals for adoption support assessments in this period, and 46 assessments were completed.

125 applications were made to the ASF, totalling £434,553

The reason more applications than assessments, is because group funding requires applications for each of the participants.

The rate of adoption support referrals, and assessments has increased again, following a significant reduction over the previous full year. Waiting lists for adoption support assessments remain too long, and the service is proactively addressing this issue.

Applications and awards from the ASF have been at their highest rate since ATV commenced in this quarter, indicating that funded adoption support services are at their highest, and more families are accessing adoption support.

11.2 Therapeutic Parenting Groups delivered

Therapeutic parenting programmes form part of the ATV Tier 2, targeted support which is provided to families, who have children with additional needs, and presenting behaviours.

2 NVR (non-Violent Resistance) groups were run in April 2021, and September 2021. These were attended by a total of 14 families who received a programme of supportive group therapeutic parenting training, to help with parenting children who are violent to their parents.

A Nurturing Attachments programme was offered in September 2021, with 7 families attending.

A Future Stars Sensory Attachment programme was delivered in July 2021 which involved 3 families and their children.

11.3 Education Support

The Education Support Worker has worked with 41 children and families in this period. This service is now becoming embedded within the overall ATV offer and is being effective and utilised.

11.4 Access to Adoption Records, and Birth Parent Support

These services are commissioned by Adoption Tees Valley from Adoption Matters, who have the contract. Access to Records is a service provision, and demand is led by the personal circumstances of adult adoptees.

Information about independent birth parent support is provided by Local Authorities, to birth parents, during care planning and referral options are made available to them once adoption becomes the LA plan.

ATV have promoted this service within Local Authorities; however, it is felt that better outcome would be indicated through higher numbers of birth parents accessing this service.

A further period of promotion of this service is underway with local authorities including with IRO's.

11.5 Adopter Hub

The service has commissioned the Adopter Hub from PACT, Parents and Children Together, which is a large Voluntary Adoption Agency.

This was originally commissioned through covid funding however has been continued, as it offers a significant additional online resource, and tool for prospective adopters going through assessment, matching and placement.

The service has commissioned 200 licenses, and all are in use.

The service will operate moving forwards with a time limit to the period when licenses will be funded by ATV in order to be sustainable. Adopters will be offered the opportunity to privately fund this, once their period ends, should they so wish.

12. Young People's Voice and Views

Young people in ATV have been supported to come together via research undertaken within ATV, into life story work. Young people have worked together with researcher Helen Woolley, a PhD student, to help design and develop a research methodology, which explores life stories for children.

The young people's group has been called the Junior Researchers and has proved to be the foundation for young people's group work, and involvement in ATV.

The young people have been supported to make a film, through collaboration with Virtual Schools, and a digital Film Company, called Digital

Voice. The completed production is outside of the timescale of this Bi Annual Report, however the work, and beginnings of the young people's inclusion in development of the service at ATV commenced within the period under review.

There has now been investment in a dedicated resource to work directly with young people, as part of ensuring their voice and views influence the development of ATV. A part time adoption support worker will work directly with young people, on matters that are important to them, and areas where we can improve the long term supports to benefit all adopted young people directly.

A fuller outline of young people's involvement will be provided within the 2021-22 Annual Report.

13. Quality Assurance

13.1 Case Practice Audits

The service has completed case practice audits with workers, to embed a shared approach to case review, quality of practice and evidence on the record of outcomes, and timeliness.

An overview report has been presented to the ATV board, although this is outside of this review period.

Referrals were found to be working well in most cases, and the Permanence Champion role was evident and having an impact on follow through and timeliness. The audit picked up one case of a very late referral to ATV, which led to delay in commencing family finding.

Managing decision making about progressing with foster carer assessments, where FC's wish to adopt the child in their care is an area for greater clarity. ATV will be undertaking training within LA's over the next few months, and a focus will be given to the early stages of decision making and progressing with referrals to assess foster carers, as adoptive parents. Not all records were on file for children progressing through the adoption journey.

Management oversight on cases was not always evident on records. This has been considered by ATV. Managers regularly supervise cases, but do not always add this to individual records, which will be addressed.

ATV adopter assessments showed lengthy delays to stage 1, but stage 2 was almost always within timescale.

An action plan has been put in place and a further "Audit Fortnight" is underway, to review cases. These are focussed on one Local Authority, in preparation for an Ofsted Monitoring Visit.

The following mechanisms have been implemented for managing and monitoring the work of the agency, and the quality of work.

- The Review of ATV has been a wide reaching review, to assess progress of the RAA against the agreed objectives that were set out at the implementation of the RAA. Outcomes, findings and areas for further development have been highlighted in this report.
- Tracking systems are in place to enable regular monitoring of children and adopter journeys; timeliness, and outcomes.
- 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) is held with the senior adoption lead for each LA, quarterly following ASGLB and ATV Scorecard data returns. All children for each LA have been tracked and monitored, and agreement about direction, or decisions signposted where applicable.
- Permanence Champions (Senior Social Workers, or Assistant Team managers) allocated to each Local Authority ensure that children's referrals are progressed and tracked in a timely way. This means that ATV can family find for children at the right time, and with the right information about that child's plan.
- 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) has been reviewed and developed to better reflect nationally submitted data, via ASGLB returns from Local Authorities and Adoption Tees Valley. The BSC is generated quarterly detailing key performance data for ATV and the 5 partner Local Authorities, user feedback/satisfaction measures; complaints, compliments; finance. This has been presented to the Board, which has a role in questioning, challenge and being satisfied of 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. Quality of PARS is felt to be high, with some recommendations about consistency of practice across PAR's. Quality of CPR's is generally improved, although some remain poor. Minutes now detail feedback on quality of CPR in order that ADMs in Local Authorities are appraised of panel comments around quality of the CPR. Panel has commented on improvements to the Adoption Support Plan, and APR.

- The Adoption Panel Chairs 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.
- 21 Case practice audits were undertaken, across a sample of case records, with managers independent of that case, and the worker. A thematic report has been provided to the ATV Board.
- Most staff, and all managers have had an annual appraisal.
- All Central List members and Panel Chairs have had 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, which includes Disruptions; Roles and Operational processes for ATV; early Permanence.
- 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 as part of the review, via an independent 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.

14. 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.

	Baseline Running Costs (based on former costs of the Adoption Services in the year preceding the RAA)	Percentage Interagency fee contributions (based on average annual adoption numbers 2014/15 to 2016/17)
Darlington	16.2%	20.2%
Hartlepool	13.5 %	14.0%
Middlesbrough	31.8%	27.2%
Redcar and Cleveland	16.7.%	14.0%
Stockton	21 %	24.6%
	100%	100.0%

Funding ratios have been reviewed as part of the overall service review, and have been presented to Directors of Finance, who have now agreed the revised funding split. This will be fully detailed within the full Annual Report.

14.1 2021-22 Financial Q2 (Half Year) Position

Expenditure Heading	Budget 2021/22	Actual Outturn	Variance period end
Employees	1,331,000	1,400,000	69,000
Running Costs	287,000	263,000	-24,000
Support Service Costs	113,000	114,000	1,000
Interagency Fees	500,000	725,000	225,000
Income	(2,231,000)	(2,501,000)	(270,000)
Total	0	(1,000)	(1,000)

14.2 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 forecast overspend is £225,000.

The outcome of the ATV Service Review has addressed increase in adoption activity since the RAA commenced, and invest to save, to reduce external spend on IA fees.

This will be reported in full annual report.

For the financial year 2021-22 the additional contributions are as follows:

	Budgeted Contribution to Interagency Fees £	Forecast 2021-22 £	Additional Contribution 2021/22
ATV Interagency 2020/21	500,000	725,000	225,000
Darlington - 20.2%	101,000	146,450	83,000
Hartlepool - 14%	70,000	101,500	57,000
Middlesbrough - 27.2%	136,000	197,200	111,000
Redcar & Cleveland - 14%	70,000	101,500	57,000
Stockton -24.6%	123,000	178,350	101,000

15. Development Plans ATV

The Annual Report 2020-21 identified the development areas, below. Progress with these is set out.

Area for Development	Progress	Next steps
Strengthening voice and involvement of adopted children in ATV	Young people have become involved, including in views on life story work, and on the experience of adopted children in education. They have made a film, now widely shared for education and awareness.	Appointment to a dedicated YP worker, to support inclusion and involvement
Strengthening preparation and assessment of adopters, to support more adopters taking more children with additional needs	This work is underway and will continue. Evidence of impact is the higher numbers of in house placements, for priority children, and fewer external placements.	Strengthening assessment to support pathway will continue
Strengthening sufficiency of adopters, through increased marketing	Approval numbers are fewer this period, however this is seen in wider agencies, and is as a result of the pandemic. 50 % of children have been placed regionally where they cannot be placed with in house adopters and waiting times have reduced.	Invest to save business case for more assessment capacity to recruit internal adopters
Taking early permanence strategy to the next stage – phase 2	ATV is working with the national RAA and multi-agency workstream to align all work with national developments. ATV is renewing regional training to IRO's and all LAs via workforce development. ATV now leads a strategic working group with Fostering Service managers to strengthen cross agency work on EP.	Support regional EP co-ordinator role and continue to progress EP development with regional partners.
Strengthen partnership working, including with early help, to strengthen support to adopters when they need it.	Work ongoing. Independent adoption support audit planned to evaluate ATV/Regional approach to adoption support.	Adoption Support audit. Revised work with Early help partners.
Continuing to address life story book model.	Life story books and work now returned to be the responsibility of the child's social workers. All LS books allocated at the time of writing.	Support CSW's where needed to complete LS books.
Continuing to address timescales for adoption support assessments	Timescales for starting the assessment remain long. The service has a relatively small resource for adoption support. This	The adoption support audit will assist with

	has been reconsidered within the review.	reviewing service delivery and offer.
Taking forward Panel improvements to maintain a streamlined approach to panel, and quality CPR's	Panel manager and Advisor post has been created, which will have a lead role in managing panel business and quality assurance of ATV and LA reports	Recruit to Panel Manager post

Vicky Davidson Boyd

Service Manager

Adoption Tees Valley 25.2.22